



## THE SEAL

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 1:13-14

Fifth Message

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During a staff meeting last week, I discovered an interesting paradox about myself. The deepest longing of my soul, my desire to be intimate with people, is also my greatest fear. We are committed to building relationships in our church. If we do well in this area, we feel, many other things will follow. To help build our relationships as a staff, we occasionally take a day and go on retreat together. On these occasions we try to avoid any other agenda items and concentrate solely on communicating with one another. Last week, we took one of those days, and Gary Vandret brought along a personality profile test, built around 24 questions relating to how each one of us perceived himself or herself in our peer group. We all felt a little nervous, and there was some self-conscious giggling going on as we read the probing questions. I was forced to ask myself whether I really wanted people to know me. When I was about halfway through answering the questions, Joel Werk stood up and walked behind me, and I found myself covering up my answers lest he see them. Here I was, committed to intimacy, yet I was acting like Adam, who hid among the trees in the Garden of Eden when God called to him. Adam and Eve were created to be intimate with each other, yet, because they had made an illicit reach for knowledge, and their action had clothed them with shame, now there was tension in their relationship so they hid themselves from God. The trees which God gave to them were designed for their good, but now they were hiding among these good things so that they could not hear the voice of God.

Isn't this what many of us do in life? We hide ourselves behind a screen of good things so that we cannot hear the voice of God. But God is persistent. He will not allow us to remain hidden. Gary, too, was persistent. He kept asking searching questions until at last I said, "All right. I'll tell you how I feel when I'm among this group." I shared that I probably don't communicate as well, or confront as well, among them as I do in other groups because I'm fearful, or I'm ashamed of being put down. But I needn't have feared. The day turned out to be a rich time of sharing that was very edifying for all of us.

One thing we can be sure of as Christians is this: If we are hiding among the trees, God will not leave us there. He will not let us keep him at a safe distance because he is committed to intimacy with us. He tenderly speaks to us to woo us out of hiding, and then he hides his face from our sins through the blood of Christ. It is when we feel open and exposed that he reveals himself to us.

In our opening studies in the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians we have been looking at the blessings of God that are ours in Christ Jesus. So far we have seen three things: the Father chose us; the Son redeemed us; and the apostles teach us. Most Christians, I find, never go on to the fourth blessing, which we will discover in our text today. They are content with head knowledge, with the facts of the gospel, and that's as far as they go.

We find this fourth blessing in the words of the apostle from the 13th verse of this opening chapter: it is being sealed with the

Holy Spirit. God will not rest until the whole program that he has inaugurated from eternity takes root in your soul, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Let us begin by reading our text, Ephesians 1:13-14:

**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**

There are two prerequisites to, as Paul describes it, being "sealed" by the Holy Spirit. Let's look at the first one, found in verse 13.

### I. Prerequisites to the Seal (1:13a)

**In Him, you also, after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

#### (a) A Hearing of the Word

First, Christians have heard the word of truth. God worked in history, orchestrating things so that a messenger came to you at just the right time in your life, a time when you were open to hearing what God had to say to you. This messenger then spoke the word, and when you heard it, it rang true to you. It was "the word of truth." There was a reality about it that satisfied your mind.

#### (b) A Believing With The Heart

But this word of truth was far more than mere doctrine; it also was announced as good news. Hear how the prophet Isaiah describes this good news in the beautiful chorus,

How lovely on the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who announces peace  
And brings good news of happiness,  
Who announces salvation,  
And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

The good news, of course, is that our oppressor, the tyrant who had been controlling us, has been defeated. A brand new administration, offering a new world order, is now in place. Our God is King! Once the divine light had broken into your mind your heart began to burn and you believed. Though God chose you, yet he did not violate your will. He sent the messenger, and the message was so powerful it enlightened your mind and burned in your heart and you believed.

Now, as a consequence of your hearing and believing, you received the fourth blessing: You were sealed by the Holy Spirit. What do these words, "sealed by the Holy Spirit" mean? First, they are the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise.

### II. The Fulfillment of a Past Promise (1:13b)

**...you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

In the OT, we find that the Holy Spirit was active in both creation and redemption. In creation (Gen. 1:2), he is portrayed as a hovering eagle, brooding over the waters, awaiting the creative word of God. In redemption, we find him working among God's people. But in the OT, the Spirit played a more limited role than he does in the church age. Then the Spirit was given only to selected leaders, to prophets, priests and kings who mediated God's will to the people; and he was given at times in a limited capacity to certain individuals to perform certain tasks. The Spirit came upon Samson, for instance, in order to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. But the Spirit didn't necessarily change the character of the individual to whom he was given to carry out a task. Disobedience could result in the departure of the Spirit, as was the case with Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). David keenly understood this. This is why he prayed in Psalm 51, "Do not take your Spirit from me."

But throughout the OT, we hear many voices longing for a day when the Spirit would be given in broader scope and measure.

#### **(a) The Longing Of Moses: The Spirit Given To All**

Moses, who had the Holy Spirit, had this to say when the Spirit came upon two other men in the camp, Eldad and Medad, who began prophesying. We pick up the story in the book of Numbers: "Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, answered and said, 'Moses, my lord, restrain them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!'" (Num. 11:28-29).

#### **(b) The Dream of the Prophets: The Spirit Given To All Without Measure**

A glance at the writings of the prophets reveals that this prayer of Moses was their desire too. Jeremiah foresaw that the longing of Moses would come to fruition one day: "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them..." (Jer. 31:34).

The prophet Joel's words intensified the vision. Listen to his familiar prophecy:

"And it will come about after this  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
(no sexual distinctions)  
Your old men will dream dreams,  
(no age distinctions)  
Your young men will see visions.  
And even on the male and female servants  
(no social distinctions)  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28-29)

There are two concepts here: The Spirit would be given a) without measure, and b) without distinction. Everyone who believes, men and women, grownups and children alike, even male and female servants, would one day be given the full measure of the Spirit.

But other prophets took this one step further: The blessing would go out beyond Israel to all the nations.

#### **(c) The Blessing of Abraham: The Gift of the Spirit to all Nations**

God promised the patriarch, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

What was promised to Abraham, longed for by Moses, and envisioned by the prophets was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

The Jews were filled with the Spirit without measure, as were the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, even the Gentiles. This is why Paul would write to the Galatians, "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14).

This then is the promised Holy Spirit. My prayer is that when you give testimony, you will have a sense of awe that God kept his promise. You and I are living in an age of unprecedented privilege. We were born at the right time, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of everything that Moses longed for.

So the first thing we learn about this notion of being sealed with the Holy Spirit is that it is the fulfillment of a past promise.

There is a second thing.

### **III. A Present Delight To the Soul (1:13b)**

#### **...you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

"Sealed" is the verb that Paul uses to describe the ministry of the Spirit in our lives. All who believe in Christ are sealed by the Spirit. In the OT, the noun form of this verb was often used of the signet ring of the king (Jer. 22:24), which was used to seal important documents. This seal had a three-fold purpose: 1) to guarantee the authenticity of the documents, 2) to name their rightful owner, and 3) to protect them from being tampered with or harmed (in fact, tampering with them was a capital offense). This then, in effect, is what is in view here in Ephesians when it says that Christians are "sealed" with the Spirit.

Let us look at these three things individually — authenticity, ownership, and protection.

#### **(a) Authenticity: Brings Assurance To the Soul**

When Paul was asked to produce a document authenticating his apostleship to the Corinthians, here is what he said in reply: "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:2-3). In 1 Corinthians, he wrote, "You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:2).

How do you know you are a Christian? Is it because you have an official document, perhaps a baptismal certificate or a letter of church membership? In the new covenant, however, no external ritual, whether circumcision, baptism, church membership or anything else can guarantee authenticity. Here is what actually happened to you. When you became a Christian, the Holy God took his signet ring and pressed it against your soul, leaving his image indelibly stamped upon it by the Holy Spirit. This is why your spirit can now cry out "Abba, Father." This sealing by the Holy Spirit brings authenticity and assurance that you are a believer, transcending anything that is merely external in nature.

Here is the second mark.

#### **(b) Ownership: Brings A Sense Of Value To the Soul**

The king's seal in the OT was used not only as a mark of authenticity but ownership also. When God does this, he does it with extreme care and at much expense, resulting in great value being bestowed on the owner of the seal. This is why the high priest wore a band of gold on his head, engraved with these words: "Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36). Look at how much attention to detail God engaged in to indicate that the sons of Israel were his: "Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings...There are to be twelve stones,

one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes...And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually” (Ex. 28:11, 21, 29).

Such care and expense assures the individual of the extraordinarily high value God places upon him or her, doesn't it?

When my wife Emily and I were first courting, I bought a seal for her in the form of a ring of pearls and a little diamond. Next, I gave her my fraternity pin, an even more expensive token. Later, when we studied together in Switzerland, I wanted us to become engaged. We found a ring, but just as we were about to buy it we decided to wait a bit and think things over. We finally agreed that our parents would probably be upset if we came home engaged at 19, so I bought Emily a consolation seal, a blue enamelled watch, to show that I was committed to her. The following summer I worked for two dollars an hour painting houses and I spent all my savings on the final seal, an engagement ring. But all those seals mean nothing when they are compared to three other seals who demonstrate our commitment, our three daughters.

When God wants to show how highly he values you, he does not demonstrate his love by presenting you with a piece of jewelry. Instead he sends a person, himself, the Holy Spirit, who takes root in your soul and seeks to give birth to many spiritual children. This is how great is his love for you.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the king's seal prevented official documents from being tampered with or harmed.

#### **(c) Protection: Sense Of Security To the Soul**

The seal was irrevocable. In the OT story, King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked” (Esther 8:8). This is what God is saying when he stamps your soul with his signet ring: He has done something that cannot be revoked. He owns you. So when we fail, we do not have to pray the prayer that David uttered following his failure, “Do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51). Once you have been sealed, it cannot be revoked.

How comforting it is to know that our security is guaranteed in dark times of judgment and apostasy. In the OT, the seal is often used as a protective marker upon the righteous in the face of upcoming judgment, as these words from Ezekiel demonstrate: “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst” (Ezekiel 9:4). When the wrath of God comes...

“the flame of fire and anger against the unrighteous shall not touch him...

For God's mark is on the righteous for (their) salvation...

They (the wicked) shall be overtaken as by those experienced in war,

for on their forehead (is) the mark of destruction.” (Psalms of Solomon 15:6, 9)

In the NT, the word “seal” is found 21 of 31 times in the book of Revelation. That book, of course, was written not just about the final tribulation but about the forces going on behind the scenes during the entire period of “last days” before the second coming. During these tribulations and the final tribulation, when Christians will be facing suffering and apostasy, many will fear whether they will make it or not. The angel will seek out those

who have the mark of the anti-Christ, the number 666 on their foreheads. (Don't look for a literal explanation of this; what it is saying is that those who do the deeds of the anti-Christ are those who think like the anti-Christ.) But those who have the seal of the Holy Spirit will not be touched, even during the darkest tribulation. They will be protected. Concerning apostasy, Paul wrote, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness’” (2 Tim. 2:19). It is texts such as these that we hold onto in times of distress like those we are experiencing in our own day.

I was horrified to see on a television news programme last week the chaotic condition of our schools here in America. The programme reported on one young man who murdered both his teacher and the principal of the school. He shot them because he was angry that his life was falling apart, and in his rage he had no one to talk to. Just last week, an eight-year-old boy was murdered by his teenage friends in San Jose. Our own high school department was especially shocked by this tragedy because the boy who is charged with the murder accompanied our high schoolers on the Mexicali ministry last year. So our own children are being forced to deal with murder. How can we hope to make it in this day, in this place? We need the seal of the Holy Spirit. This is what will protect us, even in times of darkest apostasy.

When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, God, in effect, is making the statement “This is my authentic son, whom I own and am committed to protect for eternity.” The seal is a fulfillment of the past promise; and it gives a sense of security in the present.

Finally, this seal of the Spirit looks ahead to a future inheritance.

## **IV. The Pledge Of A Future Inheritance (1:14)**

**...who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**

### **(a) A Pledge That Delights the Soul**

The Greek term for this word “pledge” means “down payment.” God's handing over this first installment of the whole is a guarantee that there is more to come. When we give a down payment we might feel reluctant to give the rest, but God is not. He has obligated himself to give us the full inheritance. Everything he is obliged to give to Christ — his rule and reign, the new heavens and earth — he is obliged to give to us as well. And the Spirit allows us to taste of that glory to come even in the here and now. This is what eternal life means. It is the quality of life of the age to come, of which the prophets wrote, that the Holy Spirit imparts to your soul now as if you today were living in that future age. When Emily and I finally became engaged, we exchanged letters every day (I still have hundreds of them, all numbered). I flew her up here every week from San Diego, and she arranged her college schedule to make this possible. She was here so often some people thought she was attending Stanford! We did this because we wanted to participate in what lay ahead for us. This is what the Holy Spirit does for Christians.

And his ministry is a self-effacing one. He shines a floodlight on the person of Christ, and when you see this light, you are drawn not to the Holy Spirit but to Christ himself. J.I. Packer wrote, “To know that God is your Father and that He loves you, his adopted child, no less than he loves his only begotten Son, and to know that enjoyment of God's love and glory for all eternity are pledged to you, brings inward delight that is sometimes

overwhelming; and this also is the Spirit's doing" (J.I. Packer, *Keep In Step With the Spirit*).

And the Spirit's work is not merely to impart intellectual understanding of the facts. His ministry is meant to grant us such an experience of love in our souls that we become melted with love for Christ. In ancient Greek, as we have seen, this word for pledge meant down payment, but in modern Greek it is used of an engagement ring. The Holy Spirit is a matchmaker! This is what the Holy Spirit does for Christians. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Years ago, after I had shared Christ in a little discotheque on the island of Mykonos in Greece, I walked outside to find the full moon sitting in the night sky over the Aegean Sea. I remember feeling very strongly the presence of Jesus with me, so strongly, in fact, that I said to myself, "Why would I ever want to sin? This tastes so good." This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Something else happens when you taste this pledge of the Spirit.

### **(b) A Pledge That Leaves One Longing for More**

Do not be afraid of this love relationship with God. In Romania this past summer, we sealed our ministry with the Lord's Army with the gift of a person, Jim Foster. As we all were taking communion together one day, the children went first, and afterwards one of them began to weep. Slowly, one by one, all the children began to weep. The Holy Spirit came upon the meeting through the children who were in love with Christ and who sensed the privilege that was theirs through partaking in communion. That meeting had the effect of making us long for an even deeper relationship one with another.

When you have experiences like this, the only language that is adequate to describe your relationship with Christ is the language of the Song of Songs. Although this is a book about love in marriage, the mystics used it to speak of their relationship with Jesus because they felt it was the only language that was adequate to describe their love for him. Listen to these words, for example:

"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,  
In the secret place of the steep pathway,  
Let me see your appearance,  
Let me hear you voice;  
For your voice is sweet,  
And your appearance is lovely." (Song of Songs 2:14)

"Put me like a seal (signet) over your heart,  
Like a seal on your arm.  
For love is as strong as death,  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
The very flame of the LORD." (Song of Songs 8:6)

This kind of holy love is cultivated by the union of two things which we see in our text, the Word and the Spirit. I find that many Christians today fear intimacy, so they remain satisfied with the Word only. We evangelicals are keen students of the Bible, but our study often is not much more than dry, head knowledge. For fear of being loved we sometimes hide behind trees. What evangelicals need is more of the Spirit, in tandem with the Word. Others, eager for the experience of the Spirit, neglect the Word, but their experience is not much more than emotional froth. When I look for help in combining these two elements of the Christian life, a sound theological footing and a

deeply intimate walk with Christ, I find little help in our present-day Christian writers. I find I have to glean from writers from the past who combined a deep theological understanding with their love for Christ. I will conclude by reading from one of these writers to demonstrate the intensity of this kind of love. Elizabeth Rowe, writing in 1737, was enraptured with Christ. She wrote, in *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737),

One glance from thee, one piercing ray,  
Would kindle darkness into day,  
The veil of night is no disguise  
Nor screen from thy all-searching eyes;  
Thro' midnight shades thou find'st thy way  
As in the blazing noon of day.

But will the Lord cast me off forever? Will He be favourable no more?...

Is it a dream, or do I hear  
The voice that so delights my ear?  
Lo, he o'er hills his steps extends:  
And, bounding from the cliffs, descends:  
Now, like a roe, outstrips the wind,  
And leaves the panting hart behind.

"I have waited for thee as they that wait for the morning," and your returns are more welcome than the springing daylight after the horrors of a melancholy night, more welcome than ease to the sick, than water to the thirsty, or rest to the weary traveller. How undone was I without Thee! In vain, while you were absent, the world has tried to entertain me: all it could offer was like jests of dying men, or like recreations to the damned. On your favor alone my tranquility depends; deprived of that I should sigh for happiness in the midst of paradise, for "thy loving-kindness is better than life." And if a taste of your love be thus transporting, what ecstasies shall I know when I drink my fill of the streams of bliss that flow from your right hand forever! But

When shall this happy day of vision be?  
When shall I make a near approach to thee?  
Be lost in love and wrapt in ecstasy?  
Oh, when shall I behold thee all serene,  
Without this envious cloudy veil between?  
'Tis true, the sacred elements impart  
Thy virtual presence to my faithful heart;  
But to my senses still unreveal'd thou art.  
This, though a great, is an imperfect bliss,  
To see a shadow for the God I wish:  
My soul a more exalted pitch would fly,  
And view thee in the heights of majesty!

(From *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley*, ed. David L. Jeffrey [Eerdmans, 1987] 105-6).

My friends, God has a ring for you. I fear that many of you may be satisfied with the first three of these blessings that are yours in Christ, and you have not yet received the fourth. He is calling to you, wanting to become intimate with you, but you are hiding in the trees. Don't be afraid. He will speak tenderly to you, and he will hide his face from your sins so you need not feel ashamed. Once you become truly intimate with him you will never have to fear being open with anyone ever again.

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