

Ephesians 1:3-14
Sealed with the Spirit
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We are again this Sunday looking at the first fourteen verses of Ephesians chapter one. As we have noted in our previous sermons on these verses, Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with an extended psalm of praise in which Paul blesses the God who has blessed us, His people, with the blessings of salvation. In this psalm of praise, Paul focuses on the triune nature of the living and true God. The inspired Apostle praises each member of the Godhead for the particular role He plays in our salvation.

This Lord's Day we are going to look specifically at the name and work of the Holy Spirit. We will begin by looking at the Spirit's name here in our text. He is here called the Holy Spirit of promise. We will begin by considering why the third member of the Godhead is called the Holy Spirit when all of God is holy and all of God is spirit in the sense of being totally non-physical. Then we will look at why Paul here refers to the third member of the Godhead as the Holy Spirit of promise.

The third member of the Godhead is called the Spirit because He is the member of the Godhead through whom God exercises His power. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word translated "spirit" means in its most literal sense breath or wind. The imagery is that of God blowing forth His breath as a life-giving and transforming force. We see this imagery in God's creation of Adam. God formed Adam's body from the dust of the earth,

and then God breathed the breathe of life into Adam and he became a living soul. That literal event demonstrates the imagery which expresses the work of the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds forth and effects the divine work in power.

We see this same imagery in book of Ezekiel in the vision of the valley of the dry bones. Israel is there pictured as an army which has not only been slaughtered but whose bodies have decayed and been reduced to dried bones. The wind of God, representing God the Spirit, blows upon the dried bones. The bones join together bone to bone. Then flesh covers them. Then they are given life and are resurrected. The power of God came upon them in the imagery of wind.

The same imagery is used in John chapter three in Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus. There Jesus compared the Holy Spirit to the wind which blows where it wills. Jesus was teaching the sovereignty of the Spirit and our inability to control Him or to manipulate Him.

In John chapter 20, the resurrected Jesus breathed upon the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." That was a symbolic way of promising the coming of the Spirit, who would come upon the disciples a short time later on the Day of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit did come upon the disciples in new covenant fullness, there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Thus the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who proceeds from the Father and the Son like a mighty wind breathed upon the world to execute the will of God and to effect the work of God in divine power. As a part of that work, the Holy Spirit works holiness in the hearts of God's people. That is why He is called the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of holiness. All of God is holy, but the Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who works holiness through faith unto salvation in the hearts of God's people.

In our text, the Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of promise. This is because He was repeatedly promised to the people of God as a blessing to come in the age of the new covenant. The Holy Spirit was present and working in the days of the old covenant, but He came on the Pentecost of Acts chapter two with new power. This was possible because of the historical accomplishment of the work of salvation in the fullness of time through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This new covenant coming of the Holy Spirit was promised in the Old Testament prophets. Jesus also promised the coming of the Holy Spirit in new covenant fullness during His earthly ministry. Just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus promised His disciples

Acts 1:8

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; ...

Let's now turn from the Holy Spirit's name to His work. When the promised Holy Spirit applies to us the redemptive work of Jesus in new covenant fullness, He does many things. He baptizes us into a covenant union with Jesus. He indwells us. He regenerates our heart. He opens our eyes to God's truth. He gives us spiritual life. The Holy Spirit does all these things, but the work of the Holy Spirit which is specifically mentioned in Ephesians chapter one is the Spirit's work as a seal and as an earnest. We will look at both of these beginning with the Spirit's work as a seal.

Our passage says that the Holy Spirit seals us. The imagery of sealing is that of a ruler's stamping an image upon soft metal or wax as the official representation of his authority. When a ruler puts his seal upon an object, he has done two things. He has transformed the object and he has sent a message regarding the object. First, the sealing transforms the object. The object now has an image on it which in some way represents the ruler. Second, the seal on the object sends a message about the object. The message was often that of authenticity, validity and genuineness. For example, a king might write a letter and then put his seal on it to prove the letter is really from him. The seal also could be a mark of ownership, like the brand ranchers used to burn into the hides of their cattle. The seal could also be a guarantee of protection and preservation. For example, the chief priests and Pharisees sealed the tomb of Christ to secure it against anyone's opening the tomb and stealing the body of Christ.

So literal sealing both transformed the sealed object and sent a message regarding the sealed object. The Holy Spirit does both of these to us in His saving work. He transforms us and He sends a message regarding us.

First, the Holy Spirit transforms us. Just as a seal impresses an image upon a substance, the Holy Spirit in our regeneration impresses an image upon our hearts. In the application of redemption, the Holy Spirit renews the image of God within us and transforms us into the image of Christ.

When Adam fell into sin, the image of God within us was lost in one sense but not in another. After the fall, humanity was still in the image of God in terms of the gifts and abilities which are creaturely reflections of certain divine attributes. Being in the image of God in that sense is what makes humanity human, what distinguishes humanity from the animals. The image of God was not lost in the fall in that sense, and fallen humanity remained distinctively human. Yet humanity did lose through Adam's fall into sin the ability to use these gifts and abilities properly in holiness and righteousness for God's glory. That is sometimes called the moral or functional aspect of the image of God within us. The image of God in that sense was lost in Adam's fall into sin. The Holy Spirit restores the image of God in that sense at regeneration by delivering us from the dominating power of sin. Further, the Holy Spirit progressively transforms us into the image of Christ, who bore the image of God in His humanity in perfect holiness. Through the on-going work of sanctification, the Spirit works in our hearts to make us progressively more holy over time.

The Holy Spirit transforms us, and He also sends a message regarding us. After we believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit speaks to us and begins telling us that we do indeed now have a faith relationship with Jesus. An ancient king put his seal upon something to validate its genuineness, to attest his ownership of it or to guarantee his protection of it. When the Holy Spirit seals us, He is assuring us that our salvation is genuine, that God owns us as His own, and that God will protect us. We are truly the people of God, God owns us, and God will not allow anyone to snatch us out of His hand.

Our passage for today is referring primarily to sealing as this message of assurance because our passage for today refers to a sealing which occurs after we believe. Verse 13 in our text says, "having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." After we believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit speaks to us and begins telling us that we do indeed now have a faith relationship with Jesus. He seals us in the subjective sense of giving us a personal assurance that we are indeed saved.

Romans 8:16

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ...

There is a divine testimony deep within the subconsciousness of our hearts which tells us that we are God's children. I am not talking about an audible voice but about a deep inner testimony of God's love which protects us from utter despair and which will never allow the light of hope, however faint, to be extinguished. Many believers have struggled with doubts at one

time or another. Not all believers have full assurance that they are indeed saved. Yet all believers do have this deep inner testimony of the Spirit through which the Spirit always supports them, even in their darkest and most difficult experiences, and through which the Spirit can over time give them an increasingly full assurance of salvation.

There is also an indirect testimony of the Spirit through His transforming work. As we progressively experience the life changing effects of the renewed image within us, we also progressively experience the subjective seal of a growing assurance that we are indeed saved. As we progressively experience the transformation of our inner character and our outer life, we have growing reason to be assured that the Spirit is indeed applying the redemptive work of Jesus to us and that we are indeed in a faith relationship with Jesus.

This indirect testimony of the Spirit is sometimes described as the mystical syllogism and the practical syllogism. The mystical syllogism is based on the indirect testimony of inward graces, and the practical syllogism is based on the indirect testimony of outward works. Here is the mystical syllogism:

Major Premise: The Scriptures teach that the fruits of saving faith include love for God, sorrow over sin, a hunger and thirst after righteousness, a desire to please God through obedience, and the fruit of the Spirit in my relationships with others.

Minor Premise: In my daily life, to a greater or lesser degree, I love God, I sorrow over my sin, I hunger and thirst for righteousness, I desire to please God, I bear the fruit of the Spirit in my relationships with others.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit is testifying to me through inward graces that God has saved me from my sin.

Here is the practical syllogism:

Major Premise: The Scriptures teach that the fruits of saving faith include deliverance from sinful living, enablement for righteous living, and good works.

Minor Premise: In my daily life, to a greater or lesser degree, I am delivered from sinful living, enabled for righteous living, and doing good works.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit is testifying to me through outward works that God has saved me from my sin.

Now remember that these inward graces and outward good works are not the basis for our salvation nor the ground of our salvation. We are saved because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, not because of anything we have done. These inward graces and outward good works are results of our salvation and thus evidences that we have been saved and are being saved.

In summary, the Spirit testifies directly in the inner depths of our being that we are children of God. The Spirit also testifies indirectly to our salvation through inward graces and outward works. This testimony to the reality of our faith relationship with Jesus and to the reality of our salvation is in our passage for today referred to as the sealing of the Spirit.

We have examined the designation "Holy Spirit of promise" and we have examined the imagery of sealing. Our last point is the Spirit as our earnest or guarantee. The earnest is another concept related to assurance. The seal is a type of guarantee related to kingly authority, and the earnest is a type of guarantee found in the world of finance.

Anyone who has bought a house is probably familiar with the word "earnest" as Paul is here using it. In order to make a serious bid on buying a house, we usually have to give the seller some earnest money. This token payment guarantees that we are serious about buying the house, and it validates the contract and makes it binding. It is a down payment on the house which is the buyer's guarantee to the seller that he will pay the full price at closure.

This concept is used in our passage for today in reference to the full payment of our spiritual inheritance as the children of God, in reference to the coming full and perfect application of redemption to our lives. This future full application will involve our being freed from the very presence of sin. We will then no longer have any remaining trace of a tendency to rebel against God and His law. We will then also be freed from the curse

which came upon creation in judgment upon Adam's sin. There will no longer be any sickness or suffering or death.

Furthermore, our bodies will be resurrected and glorified, raised to a new level of existence, after the example and pattern of our Lord's resurrection from the dead on the third day. And we will inherit the paradise of a new earth for eternity. That is the full inheritance of our salvation.

That full inheritance is in the future, but God gives us an earnest payment in the here and now. The spiritual regeneration of the new birth is the beginning of that coming new creation. God has begun the new creation in our regenerated hearts.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The saving work of the Spirit which we experience now is the work of heaven begun in our hearts, the glory of heaven in bud and seed. It is a down payment on and guarantee of the coming full inheritance in the spirit of Philippians 1:6:

6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

The Spirit's illuminating work is an earnest payment of the coming everlasting light. The Spirit's sanctifying work is an earnest payment of the coming perfect holiness. The Spirit's

comforting work is an earnest payment of the coming everlasting joys. God's day star is shining in our hearts as a pledge and foretaste of the dawn that is coming. We should both glory in the light we now have and anticipate the light that is to come.

Let me challenge you to live consistently with what you are. You are sealed by the Spirit. You possess the down payment of a coming full salvation. Live in the light of your destiny. Don't be drawn to the sinful lures of this world. This world is passing away, and the ways of the wicked will perish. There is no future in worldliness. Do not be like Lot's wife who could not resist the lures of Sodom even as it was perishing. Live as citizens of the new Jerusalem with a foretaste of the new creation in your hearts. Live in the saving power of Jesus which is yours as you look to him daily in faith.