

Every Spiritual Blessing

Part III: The Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Father
Predestined
it

Son
Paid for it

¹ **Markus Barth** translates it, “All things are to be comprehended under one head, the Messiah, Those in heaven and upon earth—under him!”

- ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,² to the praise of his glory.

(Eph 1:1-14)

Sealed for the Gods

IN HIS FIRST BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES OF THE NEPHILIM, [Brian Godawa](#) imagines an ancient world few today remember or understand. The paganism, the ceremonies, the worship of gods, the things that they did to appease them ... it all seems so foreign to us today. He writes,

The *isib* (libations and purifications) priest poured out some libations and checked the idol's braces and security. It had already withstood the latest rumbling of earth, but he wanted to be sure it would be able to withstand a more rigorous quake. Like all in the service of the gods, the *isib* had an elongated skull, was shorn of all hair and carried tattoos

² Literally, "until we acquire possession of it" is "for the redemption of the possession." "Redemption" is literally in this verse and is the same word found in vs. 7. I have no idea why the ESV did not want to translate the word.

and piercings of the deity on his body beneath his multicolored linen robes.³

In this historical fiction novel, Godawa wants us to understand the spread of paganism and the overwhelming wickedness that was associated with it in the days that brought about the Flood. For it was an unlawful union of the heavenly and earthly realms.

As they walked down the plank of the ship to the dock the first thing they noticed was that everyone was shaved hairless and had elongated skulls with skin tattoos. Noah knew that this kind of physical alteration was reserved for temple and palace servants of the gods, but not the average citizenry. Yet as they walked the dock, it appeared that every inhabitant of the city was now participating in the sacred identity with Anu. How could this have all happened within a few months? It did not seem possible.⁴

Our passage today describes **the only lawful and holy union of a heavenly being with earthly creatures**, the dia-

³ **Brian Godawa**, *Noah Primeval*, Chronicles of the Nephilim Book 1 (Los Angeles: Embedded Pictures Publishing, 2012), 194.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

metrical opposite of pagan priests and acolytes and naïve citizenry who, knowingly or not, become participants with demons through the sealing sacramental spiritual acts of their bodies and flesh. The text describes how this union occurs in time and space. It makes up one of the most important couple of (English) sentences in the entire Bible, coming at the end of the perhaps the most important sentence ever penned in any language.

Every Spiritual Blessing (Cont.)

First, let's recap where we've been. This is the **third of three sermons** on the longest sentence ever written in the Greek language. They are a series because they deal with **five spiritual blessings** which the Apostle calls, "**every spiritual blessing in heavenly places**" (**Eph 1:3**). We are doing it in three sermons because the passage can be divided into **three natural parts**, each one pertaining to one of the **Three Persons of the Trinity**.

The first spiritual blessing corresponds to **the Father**. It is the blessing of being **predestined** in love before the foundation of the world. This predestining love was for **two purposes**. First, that we should be **adopted as sons** (**5**). Second,

that we should be holy and blameless before him (4). We can call the first that which happens when we are **justified**. The second is what happens when we are **sanctified**. The point is, from start to finish, it is the predestinating plan of God to both start and finish his work in us, a work which he began before the foundation of the world. This is his glorious grace (6).

The **second through fourth blessings** correspond to **the Son**. It is “**in Christ**” that this adoption as sons comes. It is “**before him**” that we are holy and blameless. So, in an unfathomable **covenant** agreement made when there were only three Persons in all the universe, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit agreed in mutual love for one another to undertake those activities that each was to perform in order to bring the plan to pass.

The **Son's task** was to first, “**redeem**” a people out of slavery through his blood by dying on a cross as a sacrifice for sin (7-8). This redemption would bring about the **forgiveness** of our trespasses that each and any of us commit against the Holy God by forsaking his law and abandoning the knowledge of God that we have in our hearts by nature, setting off to do our own rebellious activities.

Second, it is through the Son and only the Son that **the mystery of God's will** would be understood by anyone (9). For in the Son we see the meaning of beauty, holiness, kingship, authority, suffering, conquest, justice, goodness, love, mercy, indeed all the things that pertain to his Kingdom which comes from above. Any and all questions about the **meaning of life** and reality are explained only in the Son of God and Son of Man; he reveals the mystery once unknown to a world dying to hear, because in him, all things in heaven and on earth are summed up (10) and made right.

Third, it is through the Son that we **obtain an inheritance** (11): the holy kingdom, the city on the hill, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven with its golden streets and pearly gates, its water of life and healing fruit. So that we will not forget or misunderstand, we are told again that this is what was predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the council of his will. And God did this so that we might be **to the praise of his glory** (12), so that we might understand that all things are done by him and for him and through him and to him, so that we might know the meaning of life itself—to worship and enjoy God forever.

This takes us then to **the fifth blessing** which comes through the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. From the Father, to the Son, through the **Holy Spirit**. We will be looking at **vv. 12-14**, though technically speaking it is only 13-14 that deal with the Spirit. I do this because these three verses form a small chiastic unit that helps to bring this one majestic sentence to its only possible conclusion.

What is that conclusion? It is **the glory of God**—again. **Vs. 12** ends, “... to the praise of his glory.” **Vs. 14** ends, “to the praise of his glory.” Technically speaking, the ESV puts the praise of his glory at the end of vs. 12 but in the Greek it is more in the middle. This is done in Greek for emphasis, and in English to make it read better. So you actually get a little more complicated of a structure than what we will talk about in the sermon:

- A. For our being to **the praise of his glory**
- B. Even those who did first **hope** in the Christ
 - C. **In whom** you also having **heard** the word of the truth
 - D. **The good news of your salvation**
 - C1. **In whom** also having **believed**
 - B1. You were **sealed** with the holy Spirit of the promise
 - C2. Which is an earnest of our inheritance
 - B2. To the **redemption** of the acquired possession
 - A1. **To the praise of his glory**

For the sake of simplicity, I will make the structure simple. Then we will look at the part I will leave off. This will give us **two halves** for the rest of our time. The first deals with “**how**” and the second deals with the “**who**” of this last spiritual blessing.

Fifth Spiritual Blessing: Salvation through the Spirit

How the Spirit Saves

Here’s the structure:

- A. For our being to **the praise of his glory**
- B. **In whom** you also having **heard** the word of the truth
 - C. **The good news of your salvation**
 - B1. **In whom** also having **believed** ...
 - A1. **To the praise of his glory**

Let’s begin in the center. This tiny section of the sentence revolves around “**the good news of your salvation**” (13). “**Salvation**” is what has just been described as being predestined by the Father and then worked out legally through the Son. It is the one word that probably sums up best “**every spiritual blessing.**” It encompasses everything else. Saved

from sin. Saved from slavery. Saved from the devil. Saved from eternal death.

Since this is really the focus of the Son's work, I want to focus more on **the means** by which salvation comes here. Some people wrongly think that God saves in eternity past. They confuse predestination with justification, teaching an eternal justification. This is patently anti-biblical and very dangerous. Predestination is not justification. It secures justification. It necessitates that justification will occur. But it is not justification. Thus, the Apostle talks about "**the Gospel**." The word used is *euaggelion* (**evangel**). It is where the term "Evangelical" comes from. An Evangelical is supposed to be a person who believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, polls continue to show that rather than believe the gospel, the vast majority of Evangelicals do not even know what it is. When surveys are conducted, the vast majority of them will answer that the Gospel is something like, "**Love your neighbor as yourself**" (or anything with some kind of **command** for me to love in it). When you tell them that this isn't the gospel, many of them think you are must therefore be saying that this Golden Rule is therefore bad or something. It isn't bad at all. In fact, it is part of that

predestining work of the Father to make us holy and blameless. But it isn't the Gospel.

When the command is for me to love someone, this is a **work**. It is something *I do*. Works have their place in the Christian life, but absolutely not as the Gospel. *Unless* they are the works of God. “Behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder!” (Isa 29:14). That is Gospel!

Gospel is *good* news. That is why many translations just here render it “the good news of your salvation.” Gospel is **free**. Let the one who is thirsty come and take the water of life freely (Rev 22:17). The Gospel is love, just not my love. Rather, it is God's love. “God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were his enemies, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). The Gospel is a **message**, something that comes from outside of yourself. “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice, lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” (Isa 40:9).

The way I describe it is a **two-fold announcement**. One is objective and totally apart from you. The other is subjective in as much as it can become yours, like a gift. Objectively, the Gospel is summed up most concisely in **1 Corinthians 15:1ff**. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the

gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved...” (1Co 15:1-2). What is this message? In this case it contains **four elements**.

First, “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (3). Christ’s death on the cross for our sins in the announcement. Jesus Christ died on a cross, bearing in his body the punishment due your treason against God, because he loved you. **Second**, “That he was buried” (4a). That is, Jesus Christ died. He did not swoon. He did not pass out. He did not fake his death and run off with Mary Magdalene to live in France. He died. He suffered the punishment that sin deserves as the only perfect sacrifice that could atone for it. **Third**, “that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (4b). He did not remain in the grave but was raised from the dead by his own power, by the power of his Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit. He conquered death and death no longer has victory over him. Any who therefore trust in him will not be subjected to eternal death, but they can have live in Christ forever.

All this, it says, was in **accordance with Scripture**. In other words, the OT tells all of these things, centuries before they ever happened. This was so that you might know with

certainty that they have happened. God predestined it. God foretold it. God brought it to pass that which we proclaim.

Fourth and finally, “he appeared” (5-8). He appeared to Peter. He appeared to the twelve. He appeared to five hundred people at one time. At the time this was written, you could have gone and asked them. He appeared to James. He even appeared to Paul on the Damascus road in such a profound way that it changed everything about that man’s life. These appearances after dying prove his resurrection objectively. But his appearing, then, becomes that **existential point** where this objective Gospel—a gospel that all Christians everywhere affirm—meets the subjective.

What I mean is this. **Somehow, that message** that is outside of you, a message about something that happened in another part of the world nearly 2,000 years ago to people that spoke a totally different language, had different customs, laws, and government ... somehow that message **needs to get inside of you**.

This happens by understanding that you are not saved by your works, but God’s. It happens by realizing that the way God does it is by justifying you, declaring you righteous in his sight on account of Jesus Christ. In other words, it happens when you are told simply to believe the news,

that Christ did it for you, and that he gives you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms by faith. This is the work of God.

Clearly, this subjective part is different from the objective part. For example, **Rome** believes the first, and through its proclamation of it, God saves people. However, Rome and many others deeply confuse the second element, and because of it they present a false means of salvation that you have to do something yourself in order to be made worthy of Christ's work. How hard it is for someone to enter the kingdom when they are told it is all up to them to make that first move of the will, to get the scales to balance, to placate God by their own works in order for him to love them. It's like heaping up stones for your own burial pyre! This is why the Apostle becomes so furious towards the Galatianizers. There's none of that here at Ephesus, but it is important to hear exactly what the good news is anyway.

What he says about it here is the means by which this message gets into a person. **First**, they hear the word of truth (13). Notice what they hear. *The word of truth*. Lloyd-Jones is worth listening to at length,

That does not simply mean that it is a true word. It is a true word, of course, but Paul does not mean truth indiscriminately. He means a particular truth through which, and by means of which, we all receive our salvation—“the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” It is a word that conveys a given truth which, when we see it, comes to us as the greatest good news we have ever known. It is the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the news concerning His Person, and the news concerning His work—who He is and what He has done. That, and nothing else, is the good news; and no one can become a Christian apart from this “word of truth.”

Stated negatively it means that you do not become a Christian simply by having an experience or by having a different feeling within you from what you had formerly. Many think that that is what makes us Christians. Because they are now living a new kind of life they are necessarily Christians. But that may not be so. You cannot be a Christian apart from the truth, “the gospel of your salvation.” This is fundamental.⁵

This is a word that must be heard. There is a prophecy from Isaiah (6:10; Matt 13:14) that explains what this means. “You will indeed hear but never understand, and

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose*, 233.

you will indeed see but never perceive.” Biblical hearing is not just comprehending the words, though it is that. It is not just accepting that they are true, though it is that too. It is listening, perceiving, understanding, accepting ... believing.

Hence, the **second** part of the verse, “... and believed in him.” So it is “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him.” Those are the two parts: **hearing and believing** the gospel of truth. In other words, this is how the Gospel outside of you becomes yours. You hear it and it is what you want. It is what you believe.

Sadly, **no one can make themselves believe** a thing that they do not believe. Try it. Try right now to believe that you are literally not where you are right now, that you are not hearing my voice, that you are not sitting in that chair, that you are not in this room with God’s people. I didn’t say fantasize that you aren’t. That’s different. I said *believe* that you aren’t. You can’t.

That raises the incredible question of **how a person can come to believe the good news if they don’t already believe it**. This is a point **we will come back to in Ch. 2**. But it is enough to say here that **the news is itself powerful** to change

a mind, to quicken a heart, to bring a dead person to life. The gospel *is the power of God* to salvation. It is a hammer. It is fire. It speaks life to dry bones. It hardens or melts hearts. This is its nature. This is its power. Because it is a power, a heavenly power. And that power is infused with life when it pleases God to do it in your life. Oh, hear these words people. Hear the power of God to save people merely through a proclamation that something happened to the Son of God and that the Son did this for you! Come to life through the words.

The Spirit who Saves by Sealing

This idea of a power from heaven leads naturally to the second half of what the passage says. If the first is the “how” of salvation, the second is the “**who**.” In this case, we are talking about how the message of the gospel becomes life to a person. Who does this? If the **Father plans** our salvation and the **Son provides** for it, it is the **Holy Spirit of God who applies** it to us in time and space. This is his work. And what a glory it is when we believe it.

It is the Spirit’s work that causes us to believe, that brings us to life. For he is the **Breath** of God. And the breath

is life ([Gen 1:30; 2:7](#)). Spirit and breath are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew. “[When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’](#)” ([John 20:22](#)). Then they understood.

But this particular blessing is much greater even than being given life or even second life by the Spirit. For this is not empty life full of poverty and destitution. This is a life filled with every spiritual blessing from the heavenly realm. It tells us that the blessing is that we are given the Spirit himself. God himself! In a sense, while it will next say that he guarantees our inheritance, we can say that *he is our inheritance*. When you believed in him you “[were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit](#)” ([13](#)). There are [three things](#) to look at in this part of the verse.

[First](#), he specifically mentions the Holy Spirit. [Spirit is what he is](#). God is Spirit. He is not a material being. He is unshackled by a material body. He is omnipresent, able to be everywhere. Even when he makes appearances in the Scripture, he rarely appears as something physical. A dove is about the closest you get to that, but even here is usually said to be “[like a dove](#)” ([Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; cf. Gen 1:2; Deut 32:11](#)), meaning that even that is a

metaphor for something like a hovering protecting nurturing peace-giving God. His other main images are things like **fire** or **clouds**, both ephemeral, evanescent, intangible, here and yet not here, spreading out mysteriously, even miraculously. You can't catch him. He is dangerous. He is unpredictable. He goes where he wants. He gives light and heat. He is shade and protection.

What about the Holy part? One of the Reformers makes the interesting observation that, “**The Spirit is called Holy, partly because he is holy by nature and partly because it is his task to make others holy.**”⁶ One might think of him in opposition to something like the “**unclean**” spirits found throughout the NT. He is not unclean. He is the opposite. He is holy. And he makes his people holy.

Second, he is “**promised.**” Like the gospel message itself that we saw was foretold in the Scripture, so also the Spirit. **It isn't that the idea** of the Spirit was promised. No, he was right there in the second verse of the Bible, hovering over creation (**Gen 1:2**). He was also present in the midst of his people (**Isa 63:10-11**). He sometimes came upon people in

⁶ **Erasmus Sarcerius** (1501-1559), *Annotations on Ephesians*. In Timothy F. George, “General Introduction,” in *Galatians, Ephesians: New Testament*, ed. Gerald L. Bray and Scott M. Manetsch, vol. 10, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 260.

powerful ways of anointing (Ex 28:3; Num 11:26; Deut 34:9; Jdg 5:1; 11:29; 13:25; 1Sa 11:6; Ps 51:11; etc.). He was always the agent of regeneration.

This promise refers to something much more intimate found in new covenant prophecies like Ezekiel 36, “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:27) or Joel 2, “It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). You can hear the newness of this prophecy by comparing with the lamentation of Moses, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). Did he know his words were a mysterious oracle foreshadowing the new covenant?

What this means is incredibly significant, though terribly misunderstood in our day of encroaching paganism in Christ’s visible church. While I could talk more here about the way the Spirit’s presence makes people holy, sets them apart for services that only a select few in the OT had the privilege of participating in, and so on, we will see all of this as we go through the letter. Instead, I want to focus on this idea of the Spirit as a “[seal](#).”

This returns me to my [opening thoughts](#) with all those markings and head bindings and bizarre haircuts and tattooings and mutilation of the body that is the mark of nearly all pagan worship throughout the four corners of the ancient world. It is common, and not wrong, to read commentators describe this sealing by looking to something like an ancient signet ring and wax or a metal stamp such as the one [Edmund Clowney](#) describes.

The figure of a roaring lion stretches across the little jasper seal. In ancient Hebrew letters it bears the inscription, ‘Belonging to Shema, servant of Jeroboam.’ Recovered from the biblical site of Megiddo, the stamp seal was once the property of an official of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, 785–743 B.C. (2 Kings 14:23–29). Shema may have been proud of his lion-seal, but for him it was not a decorative gemstone. Rather, he put it to daily use. Pressed on clay or wax it marked his ownership and authority. Wine jars, stoppered with fresh clay, would bear the stamp of his seal. He could seal a deed of purchase or a marriage contract; his stamp could serve as his signature.⁷

⁷ [Edmund P. Clowney](#), “The Holy Spirit as Seal and Pledge,” ed. Robert F. Ingram, *Tabletalk Magazine*, May 1992: *The Spotless Bride of Christ* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1992), 7 [7-9]. Republished at *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-holy-spirit-as-seal-and-pledge/>.



The analogy is good in as much as it teaches you about how a royal or official would mark his property. If it bore the mark, it could be trusted as being their very word. However, in this instance I find the analogy deficient, because the object of the seal is quite impersonal: a clay pot, a letter, or something like that.

There is a [sealing](#) in the ancient world that was not put onto something impersonal. It is a seal that went directly onto a body. Osborne explains,

Slaves or followers of a patron deity often had a tattoo to indicate ownership and allegiance (as in the “mark” of the saints in Revelation 7:4 and of the beast in Revelation 13:16–17). So the Holy Spirit is our “mark,” showing that

we belong to God, who has marked or sealed us as his treasured possession (see the commentary on 1:4, 11) and both watches over and protects us.⁸

Let's think about this a little more deeply. For perhaps this is more than a mere analogy. Slavery is one thing. But this kind of a seal is much more pagan in origin than that.⁹ "In New Testament times certain religious cults followed the practice of having their devotees tattooed with the emblem of the cult, and the initiates were then said to have been sealed."¹⁰ **Herodotus**, the great Greek historian wrote in the fifth century B. C.,

Now there was (and still is) on the coast a temple of Heracles; if a servant of any man takes refuge there and is branded with

⁸ **Grant R. Osborne**, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 31.

⁹ Though the tone often feels a bit too Fundamentalist for my taste, there is a well-researched article on the internet that is difficult to argue with in terms of the origin and purpose and meaning of marking oneself historically. I agree with the basic worry about the explosion of tattooing among Christians, and fear that it is something akin to participation with demons in 1 Cor 10, though most have no idea. I would recommend anyone interested in the history of this read **Terry Watkins**, "To Tattoo or not to Tattoo: A Christian Response to the Tattoo," *European-American Evangelistic Crusades* (pre-2006), <http://www.eaec.org/bibleanswers/tattoo/intro.htm>. I found it in a google search that yielded up an article by an Orthodox priest, showing that it isn't just Fundamentalism that sees it this way. Gregory Naumenko, "Tattoos and Orthodoxy," *Orthodox Life* Vol 58:4 (July-Aug, 2007), <https://ssppoc.org/files/bulletins/2007/ssppoc-12-16-07.pdf>

¹⁰ **Francis Foulkes**, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 64.

certain sacred marks, delivering himself to the god, he may not be touched. This law continues today the same as it has always been from the first. (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.113.)¹¹

It was customary to brand the name of the god upon the priest or devotees on the heads and necks, hands, arms and even gums.¹²

Philo tells us that it wasn't just masters forcing it upon people. Many would do this to themselves. "But some men have gone to such a pitch of extravagant madness, that they have left themselves no retreat or way to repentance, but hasten onwards to the slavery and service of images made by hands, confessing it in distinct characters ... branding the characters deep on their persons with a burning iron, in order that they may remain ineffaceably, for these things are not dimmed or weakened by time" (Philo, *Laws* 1.58).¹³

¹¹ Herodotus, *Herodotus, with an English Translation by A. D. Godley*, ed. A. D. Godley (Medford, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920).

¹² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1694; J. R. Porter, *Leviticus*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary of the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1796), 158.

¹³ Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 539.

This is quite [relevant to Ephesus](#). Without question, Paul would have seen this at this city (they have found inscriptions demonstrating this),¹⁴ and I'm certain that not a few of the Christians would have borne these markings on their foreheads, with no possible way of hiding it from the world, except perhaps a pirate-like bandana,¹⁵ and that may not even have worked. What if it was the entire face? Curiously, [the Syriac word for "predestined"](#) in one of our most ancient translations of the NT (the Peshitta) can be translated

¹⁴ "According to legal inscription of this period found in Ephesus, imported slaves were to be tattooed with the words 'tax paid.' (During the later Empire, 'Stop me, I'm a runaway' was another motto that Roman masters etched on the brows of slaves)." [Adrienne Mayer](#), *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates, Rome's Deadliest Enemy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 20-21. Mayer has also done work on the extravagant tattooing of the Amazons, which as we saw in our introduction to the letter, is profoundly related to the city of Ephesus and the cult of Artemis (though she does not explicitly draw attention to the religious significance of the tattoos in this particular regard). See [Adrienne Mayer](#), *The Amazons: Lives & Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), esp. 95-116. "Ephesus," "Artemis," and "Tattoo" all appear many times throughout the work.

¹⁵ Mayer writes of slaves who didn't become Christians, "A few years before the massacre [88 B.C.], the Romans had punished the Ephesians for protecting a fugitive slave who had taken refuge in the Temple of Artemis. The Ephesians (who believed they were the descendants of one thousand runaway Greek slaves) had prevented a Roman official from entering the temple to retrieve his property, perhaps a local man enslaved for debt. In the inscribed records of cures that people sought at temples of Asclepius, archaeologists have found the names of slaves who prayed to the healing god to remove their forehead tattoos. Runaways often wore pirate-style bandanas to hide the marks of their bondage; others attempted to remove the tattoos with caustic salves." Mayer, *Poison King*, 20-21.

“**marked us out beforehand**” and was a figure of speech which referred to a tattoo.¹⁶

I believe that part of, perhaps maybe the biggest reason Paul speaks of **the sealing of the Holy Spirit** and the **predestining love** of in this way, is because he is speaking directly to one-time-pagans who literally bore these marks upon their bodies and—whether done by themselves or another, had become ashamed. But he is not saying this to shame them. He is giving them gospel in calling the Spirit their “seal.”

To see that, you have to understand the meaning of the pagan counterpart. You are probably familiar with the laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that relate to **tattooing** and **cutting your hair in strange ways** and **cutting yourself** (cf. **Lev 19:26-29**; **Deut 14:1**). What was going on here is depicted in a bizarre way in the myth of Baal when, of all things, the high god El when learning of the death of his son Baal:

**pours dirt of mourning on his head,
dust of humiliation on his cranium,**

¹⁶ **Janet M. Magiera**, *Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation: With Explanator Footnotes Marking Variant Readings, Customs and Figures of Speech* (Truth or Consequences NM: Light of the Word Ministry, 2006) 454.

for clothing, he is covered with a girded garment.
With a stone he scratches incisions on (his) skin
with a razor he cuts cheeks and chin.
He harrows his upper arms,
plows (his) chest like a garden
harrows (his) back like a (garden in a) valley.¹⁷

I've seen these huge NFL players with these horrible brands burnt and carved into their triceps. It must have hurt terribly. I don't know what they were doing. Perhaps it was gang related? But El is **lacerating himself**, "**making cuts on his face, his arms, his chest, and his back.**"¹⁸ He is marking himself, sealing himself eternally with these permanent engravings. It makes me wonder if this wasn't what Job was

¹⁷ William W. **Hallo** and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997–), 267–268. Cited in John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 79.

¹⁸ **G. F. Hasel**, "Cuttings in the Flesh," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 841. Also, "**Self-flagellation represents a ... desperate attempt to invoke Baal's presence, and it is a behavior that is well attested in the Canaanite, Hittite, and Mesopotamian cultures. The shedding of blood draws the attention of the gods ... El mourns the death of Baal by cutting himself with razors and 'plowing his chest like a garden' ... The prayers of the Hittite king Musilis II ... sought to 'make restitution by spilling blood' ... In another text the mourners of Kirta 'rend their skin' in sorrow as they sacrifice to the gods.**" **John H Walton**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 79.

doing with the pottery when he got so sick, prior to the giving of Torah by Moses. What a horrible thing to feel like you have to do. Why would they do it?

This would be done either as a sign of mourning or to seek the favor of the gods or to mark them out as true followers or to ward off spirits of the dead.¹⁹ Whether it be blood-letting or shaving the head like the dome where the stars reside, or carving themselves up, it was all deeply religious. There was no such thing as doing this for secular fun and entertainment.

You find it from time to time in the OT (**Isa 15:2; Jer 16:6; 48:37**),²⁰ but perhaps the best example is when the prophets of Baal “cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them” (**1Kg 18:28**). “*Hear us, O Mighty Baal. We are calling upon you.*” But Elijah mocked, “*Maybe he’s in the bathroom.*” This was profoundly forbidden and where ever Christianity has gone, it has (until just the last couple of decades and only

¹⁹ This last one found in Kenneth A. Matthews, “Leviticus,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 186–187.

²⁰ “Both great and small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them” (**Jer 16:6**); “For every head is shaved and every beard cut off. On all the hands are gashes, and around the waist is sackcloth” (**Jer 48:37**); “He has gone up to the temple, and to Dibon, to the high places to weep; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails. On every head is baldness; every beard is shorn” (**Isa 15:2**).

here in the West) always seen the almost immediate stoppage of such practices ... until people forget. Why?

This is where the bad news needs some good news. **Deuteronomy 14:1** explains. “You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.” It gives a reason. You are sons of God! These marks were to mark them off as sons of the gods. People do it today with images of goddesses, or even just moons and stars on their bodies or brands like you would put on cattle and so many more things. *But you are sons of God.*

Do you remember? “He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (**Eph 1:5**). “In him we have obtained an inheritance” (**11**). Sons receive inheritances. We do not mark ourselves for God. **God marks us with himself!**

He does it with the very person of God himself: The Holy Spirit. This mark is not visible like a brand or a bald spot on top of your head. Yet, **it is visible** to anyone who sees **the fruit of this Spirit** growing in your life through love. Daniel Block says about this,

Believers have an identity marker that is far more important than temporal institutional labels. They bear the brand of Christ, which means that everywhere they go they represent Him. Outsiders draw conclusions about the Savior from the way believers conduct themselves and the way they perform their professional responsibilities. To borrow from the words of the Lord Himself, those who are “branded” with His name are characterized as poor in spirit; they grieve with those who grieve; they are meek; they hunger and thirst after righteousness; they are pure in heart; they are peacemakers; they accept persecution and ridicule for righteousness’ sake.²¹

Remember, Paul has just said that having been predestined to adoption, you were *also predestined to holiness and to blamelessness* which shows itself in the fruit of the Spirit and love for God and one another.

This seal is God’s mark upon you that you belong to him. Not because you are a letter (though Paul actually personifies this kind of sealing in **2 Corinthians 3:2**), but because you are *his child*, he is your God and his Spirit is the seal (cf. **Rev 7:3-5**). It might be interesting to know that Paul

²¹ Daniel I. Block, “Bearing the Name of the Lord with Honor,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (2011): 29.

was proud of certain physical marks he bore on his body. Perhaps you have heard of [the stigmata](#)? Jesus still has them, the nail marks on his hands and feet. The spear mark that went through his side. He showed this to Thomas. The Apostle says, “[From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks \(*stigmata*\) of Jesus](#)” ([Gal 6:17](#)). What are those marks? Whippings, stoning, torture, persecution, suffering for Christ the Holy One. It might also be good to remember that the Spirit has given us two marks or signs and seals as the Reformed call them that we have together in the body of Christ: Baptism and the Supper. Clowney says, “[In baptism God seals us by giving us His name; in the Lord’s Supper we have the spiritual seal of His presence in the sacrament.](#)” Even these seals have a power beyond the outward sign: the reality of God’s presence provides the blessing. But God gives a seal that is even more than these gifts of blessing. His final seal is the gift of Himself.”²²

This seal, the sealing with the Holy Spirit, this is the mark of all marks, the anti-carving of the pagans. Not only does this seal show itself now through the Spirit who makes us holy, but it “[is the guarantee of our inheritance until we](#)

²² [Clowney](#), *ibid.*

acquire possession of it” (Eph 1:14). Martin Bucer explains, “Our inheritance is the full knowledge of God and from that full assurance, happiness and joy. But although this inheritance does not come to us completely in this life, it has at least begun, and the deposit of that perfect inheritance, the author of it from start to finish, is the Holy Spirit whose task it is to make us sure of our salvation and confirm it in us, just as a deposit guarantees purchase and confirms it.”²³ The Spirit is our deposit; God has deposited him in us as proof that he will finish what he started. He is our “confirmation that we shall receive whatever has been promised to us in the covenant.”²⁴ David Dickson adds, “The Spirit shall remain with you for your comfort and not depart from you until the covenanted redemption be fully perfected and completed.”²⁵

What a glorious way to end the sentence. Of course, it actually must end on this explicitly. So he says, “to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14). All of this work: Father, Son, and

²³ Martin Bucer (1492-1551), *Lectures on Ephesians*. St. Jerome makes the distinction, “A guarantee (*arrabōn*, “earnest”) is not the same as a token or pledge. For a guarantee is given as an affidavit and bond for a future purchase. But a pledge ... is an expression of a present reciprocal transaction. Thus when the money is returned the pledge is restored by the creditor to the one who has repaid the debt.... So from the guarantee the majestic scope of the future inheritance may be grasped.” (Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1.1.14).

²⁴ Robert Rollock (1555-1599), *Commentary on Ephesians*.

²⁵ David Dickson (1583-1663), *Exposition of Ephesians*.

Holy Spirit is the work of God for his children to the praise of his glory. Someone writes, “Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to write his letter to the Ephesians, knowing the environment they were saturated in. He was willing to embrace them, piercings and all. He was willing to look past the tattoos and see them as God saw them. Paul wanted to see the Ephesians restored to God, as everyone now had this opportunity available to them. With darkness all around him, this could not have been easy.”²⁶

And so Block asks the question, “Will those who bear the brand of Christ be salt and light in a dark world, and when others view their lives, will they glorify God in heaven, whose name they bear (Matt. 5:1–16)? Or will they be like parasites sucking glory for themselves?”²⁷ In light of all we have seen in these three sermons, go out being confident that if you are in Christ, God is able to perform such power in you, and surely he will do it. Do you believe that? Trust him for his spiritual blessings and may the Spirit accomplish all of his holy work in your, conforming you more to the image of Christ who has won such a great redemption

²⁶ Robin Liebe, *Its Time to Cross the Line: Make the Most of Your Relationship with the Holy Spirit* (Lulu, 2011), 104.

²⁷ Block, *ibid.*

for you. For this is about God's glory to accomplish all that he has designed in the Beloved and by his Holy Spirit.

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