



# 3 | EPHESIANS 1:11-17

## THE SPIRIT'S SEALING

*Christ is exalted and sovereign above all.*

### Outline

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### Sunday School Introduction

We've talked about our destiny and identity in Christ. Let's now look at how Christ actually brings us into his family by the work of the Holy Spirit's sealing—the Lord's stamp of ownership upon us.

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## 1. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN OUR SEALING (1:11-14)

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We see three guarantees in these verses that display God's ownership of us: his sovereignty, his Word, and his Spirit.

### GUARANTEED BY GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

God's sovereign plan of salvation carries on in both the Old and New Testament peoples. They are actually one people of God who have been chosen by the sheer sovereign love of God. It was the infinite heart of God that led him to control all events in a way that would bring salvation to humanity and bring glory to himself. Jonathan Edwards was greatly comforted by God's control of all things, so much that he wrote:

The doctrine has often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God.<sup>1</sup>

It is this teaching that Paul so clearly expressed in his letter to the Ephesians.

**Ephesians 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.

By the sovereign plan of God, Christians have obtained an inheritance. Here, inheritance is another word for our salvation. An inheritance is obviously something you did not earn. And our salvation is totally and completely earned by Jesus Christ. Your heaven is not earned by your works, your baptism, your faithfulness to the activities to this church, your family, or any earthly connections you have. Salvation is an inheritance. It is utterly and thoroughly *free* and given by God's sovereign mercy and love.

**God's plan for us is personal**—it is part of a larger plan that includes the entire universe of God's creation. This plan not only includes absolutely all things that ever take place in heaven, on earth, and in hell; past, present, and even future—this plan pertains to believers and unbelievers, angels and demons, all-natural processes like hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis. God controls every molecule on earth and ever molecule in the universe. Everything is his. It all belongs to him. The Mississippi runs down stream because God fastened it that way before the world began. If you stepped in a puddle this morning, God predestined that puddle to be there. The guiding principle of God's sovereignty in salvation is his love and mercy toward totally undeserving sinners.

There is also here a beautiful and interesting distinction of pronouns between verses 11 and 13. He speaks of the Jews (we have... been predestined, vs 11) and then the Gentiles, (but you...when you heard...the gospel...believed in him, vs 13). What a delight to see God's predestination of the Jews so gloriously present in the New Testament. In all of their rebellion, he chose to love them and treat them as his own dear children. Certainly, he had to send them to foreign nations in captivity for many years. When they returned, it seems they were entirely free from the pagan idols. And now that Christ has come, God's plan has worked all things according to the counsel of his own will. This plan has united Jew and Gentile in Christ. Paul is celebrating the miracle of the salvation and union in Christ which Jews and Gentiles share. This is a miracle to which he will give full exposition in 2:11–22.<sup>2</sup>

The chosen people of Israel were not chosen because of anything in them. They were not more holy, more numerous, or more distinguished than any other nation. Moses tells the people in Deuteronomy,

*Deuteronomy 7:6–7* | The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest.

*Deuteronomy 9:5–7* | It is not because of your righteousness or integrity that ... the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), xii, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 39–41.

So it is that no Gentile was ever chosen because of any righteous characteristic. All are chosen, both Jew and Gentile, out of God's tender-hearted mercies. Therefore, no one has anything to boast in except in Christ. This was Paul's emphasis whenever he spoke of the Christian's election and calling.

*1 Corinthians 1:26-31* | Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But **God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;** <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### GUARANTEED BY GOD'S WORD

*Ephesians 1:12-13a* | ...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him...

The Jews who first heard the Word and put their trust in Christ for salvation have a testimony that is to the praise of God's glory. Something that we have to understand when we look at the Scriptures is that in order to be a Christian you have to hear the word of truth and believe. This word of truth that is being spoken of is the gospel. In order to be saved, the Jews, who were the first to hope in Christ, had to respond to the good news that Jesus Christ substituted himself for their sins. Anyone who fully surrenders to the gospel that saves will be born again. We know that Romans 1:16 is true – the gospel is the power unto salvation. This gospel is what saves: the blood of Christ! You cannot be saved by anything that you can do or have done. Nothing but Christ. We must understand that even though we heard and believed it wasn't our work. Jesus makes it clear in John 6:29 that it is the work of God for us to believe the one that was sent. This idea is clear from the context when Paul writes that God chose us before the foundations of the earth (1:4). Our salvation, Israel's salvation, from beginning to end, was the work of God. The way God does this is through hearing his word, specifically the gospel of your salvation as the Holy Spirit acts to transform our hearts. Simply put, **God's Word, applied by God's Spirit brings about salvation. We are birthed into God's family by the word of God** (Jas 1:18). This is all to the praise of his glory among all peoples, Jews or Gentiles, that the Word engenders faith.

### GUARANTEED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

*Ephesians 1:13* | 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.

God himself lives inside of you. You have it better than Moses who met with God at the burning bush and at the Tent of Meeting. You have it better than all the high priests of the Old Testament that entered into the Holy of holies. We have God in us. His Spirit has sealed us, and through him we have power over sin and assurance and hunger for the Word of God and deep hope for the world that Jesus will bring in when he returns. Until then, the Scripture says we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

## What is Sealing?

This idea of sealing comes from what a King used to do to document hundreds and thousands of years ago. **The sealing indicated ownership.** The King would melt wax on a scroll of some sort of document and he would put his signet ring on it to seal it. This is what is being spoken of here. Now there are three reasons for this sealing.

With the king if someone had gotten a document with a law they didn't just go through with it unless it was really from the king that's why the seal proved this. Our seal states that God has said that we have eternal life and that comes straight from God. So it is an authentic thing. The sealing of the document shows that that document actually belonged to the king and that it was his property. The sealing of the Spirit shows that we are actually God's property. That we are not children of anyone else except for God. This seal also protected the document from being tampered with or harmed. If someone tampered with and changed something in the document, then the seal would be broken. The same is with us. Once we have been sealed, we cannot be tampered with or taken from God. It has been shown what God's intent for our lives is and it cannot be altered.

## The Holy Spirit is a Down Payment of Heaven

We are marked with God's down payment. The Holy Spirit is our seal of ownership.

**Ephesians 1:14** | ...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

The word "guarantee" has the idea of down payment. This is essentially a down payment of our heavenly inheritance which will assure us of our future in Christ. I believe this story explains it rather well. A wealthy man called his faithful assistant into his office one day and said, "I've put your name in my will, and someday you'll receive \$100,000. Since it may be a while before you get that legacy, I want to make you happy now by paying you the interest on that amount each year. Here is a check for \$1,000 as a starter." The surprised clerk was doubly grateful. The prospect of the inheritance was certainly good news, but the money he received in advance gave him complete assurance that someday the entire \$100,000 would be his.

The word "guarantee" also has the idea of an engagement ring. Not only does it mean a down payment but in the truest sense this word speaks of a ring you would give at betrothal. The Holy Spirit is the engagement ring for the believer who upon conversion is engaged to Christ and has become his bride for the future wedding feast. Now if a guy goes to a girl and says: "*Hey I love you,*" she shouldn't go crazy and make all her future plans. However, if he says, "*Hey, I love you! Will you marry me?*" and gives her a diamond ring, that's a commitment. The same commitment that God has made to Christians by giving us the Holy Spirit. This commitment will one day be redeemed.

## REVIEW

Ephesus was one of the idol-worshipping capitols of the world. Multitudes of people from all over the world would come to Ephesus to see this goddess in the Ephesian temple—the goddess Diana. These people were just like you and me. We think we know God and worship God, but Paul says these people had been "dead in their trespasses and sins" and that they had been "children of wrath" like the rest of mankind. What happened in their lives was nothing short of a miracle. God opened their eyes. They were awakened. They were transformed. They were brought low by the working of God's Spirit applying the gospel to their hearts. They confessed to God that they were liars, thieves, adulterers, and blasphemers. And they rested on the mercy of Christ to forgive them.

Paul heard about this all the way in Rome, a thousand miles away from Ephesus. He had ministered among them four or five years earlier. How does Paul respond? Does he just say, “*Oh, that’s great? Nice to hear that. I guess I’ll go on with my pity party in this filthy Roman prison.*” No, he says, “*Now more than ever, now that these people have come to faith in Christ, I need to pray for them.*” And in praying for his Christian family in Ephesus, he ends up in a beautiful strain of exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Often praying for others can be what lifts our eyes to the glories and power of Jesus.

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## 2. OUR SUBMISSION IN THE SPIRIT’S SEALING (1:15-16)

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Ephesians 1:15-16 | For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,<sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Paul heard about God’s fingerprints on these Ephesian saints, and he began to pray for them. He heard about God’s salvation in their lives. They were saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That’s something to celebrate. Paul felt a personal responsibility to pray constantly for them. There is power in prayer. We ought to pray for every saint in our local assembly. It was Paul’s practice to pray for these saints without stopping. Paul mentions two marks that demonstrate that we have been joined to Christ. He mentions a God-ward mark (faith in Christ) and a man-ward mark (love to the saints). In short, those who live for Jesus are always loving his people. It is these two marks: love for God and love for others – that push him toward prayer.

### THE MIRACLE OF FAITH

Paul begins his prayer with thanksgiving for the faith the Ephesians have in the Lord Jesus. Paul said, *I heard about your faith and love in the Lord Jesus, and it caused me to pray and to rejoice.* What was it that would cause Paul to rejoice? The love and faith in the Ephesian church was something that God had done. Not long before, these Ephesians were pagans. Their girls had been temple prostitutes. They had been enslaved to superstitions. They had been selfish and self-consumed. But now there was this radical faith, and Paul heard about it, and it cause him to rejoice.

John Calvin regarded the faith necessary for salvation as a miracle: “**We could not have one single spark of faith, or of light unless God had worked in us already!**”<sup>3</sup> Paul says here in our text in Ephesians 1:15, “When I heard about your faith and love in Christ, I did not cease to give thanks to God for you.” When a gift is given, a person gives thanks. Faith and love are gifts of God. A man is totally unable to love God or cling to him in faith in his own natural power. There is need of a miracle.

Calvin went on to say that if a person could believe on their own, we should boast in man instead of God: “If every man was able to believe and have faith of his own accord or could get it by some power of his own, the praise for it ought not to be given to God. For it would be but mockery to acknowledge ourselves indebted to him for what we have obtained, not from him, but from elsewhere.”<sup>4</sup> If love and faith come naturally from our own hearts, why should we thank God for that? Is faith a miracle or is it a responsibility for all people? The answer is yes and yes. There is always a tension in God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. We must begin by giving God the glory for our faith. We have nothing to boast in.

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin. *Sermons on Ephesians* (Banner of Truth: Carlisle, PA, 1973), 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

## THE NATURE OF FAITH

When we speak of faith, we are not referring to mere intellectual acknowledgment. True faith has been defined as “radical dependency” that is more akin to trust and surrender than mere understanding.<sup>5</sup> It is **not a mere acceptance of Jesus—it’s a radical surrender to him!**

**“The devils believe and tremble”** (Jas 2:19). Faith is more than information. Faith is a radical trust. Christians through a miracle of God’s grace are given new eyes that cause them to cast themselves on God – we become radically dependent on Jesus. Saving faith means that we trust and treasure Jesus Christ. It is not when you were baptized or signed a card or responded to an invitation to accept Christ. Your conversion took place when you abandoned yourself to Christ by faith and became radically dependent on him. It’s not complicated. It’s so simple Jesus compares it to the trust of a child. When did that happen in your life? What happened to the Ephesians, has happened to us.

Now Paul had been among them for 3 years, but he had been gone for a while. Many people were coming to faith in Christ that he did not know. He heard of their radical conversion from paganism to *passion* for Christ. We ought to be looking for this in our children. We ought to be looking for this in each other. Not some mere mental assent, but a deep, moving, flowing, radical faith. **“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead”** (Jas 2:26). In Matthew 7, many come to Jesus in the Day of Judgment, who had faith without works. They had religion, but they were lawless in their heart. They were without the law and compulsion and power of Christ in their hearts. Christ tells us his verdict ahead of time: “Depart from me, I never knew you” (Mt 7:21ff).

## THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH

Faith is alive! It bears fruit. Paul rejoices that faith is expressed in a glorious love toward all the saints. Paul had spent three years with the Ephesians. He knew many of them by name. It’s one thing to observe things yourself. Paul observed their love but also heard of their love from many others. They did not merely speak of love but actually lived it out so that others could see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven (Mt 5:16). This is how saving faith always works itself out. The great commandment teaches us that we are to love God by loving our neighbor. Our Lord said this is how the world will recognize true followers of Christ: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). Indeed, John says:

*1 John 4:20* | If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Paul said he was thanking God, he was rejoicing concerning their love unto all the saints. There are a lot of local churches in the body of Christ, but God looks down and he says, “I see one Church.” There is a lot of division even among those denominations and God says, “But I see one Church.” We seem to have the incredible ability to build walls in the body of Christ. When Jesus Christ and the apostles and those that have gone before us have spent countless effort and energy, not to mention blood to tear down those walls and build bridges.

Do you have a commitment to the Lord’s people? I’m not talking about one day a week for worship but every day. Are you committed to being a disciple and discipling others? You must have a deep love toward *all* the saints. You must care where they are spiritually.

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<sup>5</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 5.

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### 3. THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF OUR SEALING (1:16-17)

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Paul heard about God's fingerprints on these Ephesian saints, and he began to pray for them. Paul felt a personal responsibility to pray constantly for them. There is power in prayer. We ought to pray for every saint here. It was Paul's practice to pray for these saints without stopping.

**Ephesians 1:16-17** | I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,<sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Paul cannot go and visit the Ephesians. He's under house arrest far away in Rome. But Paul has a practice that helps the Ephesian church grow in maturity: he prays. And what is his prayer? That God may give the Spirit... in the knowledge of Christ, or as one translation puts it: "That you might know him better" (1:17b). It is amazing to consider what God does for us in our immediate salvation. Yet there is more to salvation than just having your sins forgiven. God wants us to "know him better!" We are to be constantly growing. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). God does not want you to remain immature in Christ.

A tree doesn't produce fruit until the roots are down deep. An architect does not build until he understands architectural engineering and structures. I don't let my twelve-year-old operate on my three-year-old. If my three-year-old needs an operation, I send them to a mature expert. Are you in a place where you are growing in Christ? Oh that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (1:17). Do you know him better? You must look into God's Word and not be a forgetful hearer. You desperately need the assistance of the Holy Spirit. He has to give you the wisdom and revelation to know Christ better. Flesh and blood cannot change you. The Father in heaven through the Spirit must give you eyes to see. It's not just about knowing the Word, but the Spirit revealing God to you through the Word. Don't be superficial about your devotional life. Seek for your roots to grow deep by the filling of the Spirit, the renewal of the Word, and the intimate knowledge of walking with Jesus. Go deep!

Get into the word each day so that the illumination of the Spirit enlightens the word. This means you are not just learning facts, but you are applying the word of God to your life.

#### *Conclusion*

Here is the challenge of this text: are you saved, growing spiritually and serving? Are you growing spiritually? Are you serving joyfully under the exalted Christ? Is Christ exalted in your life? What kind of fruit are you producing for the kingdom? Is your character changing to be more like Christ day after day?