

## **The Sealing of the Holy Spirit: Reality and Perception**

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The Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with a grand rehearsal of the great and wonderful things God has done for his redeemed people in Jesus Christ. He writes about “the redemption we have through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us” (1:7.8). It is the fulfillment of a sweeping plan that began in eternity past and will be completed in the fullness of time (1:4,10).

Then, after briefly reviewing these wonderful acts of God in Christ, he writes directly to the Ephesians: “In him [that is, Christ] 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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (1:13,14) Then, in the second half of the letter in which Paul works out the ethical implications of the first half, he cautions the Ephesians not to “grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (4:30).

The Apostle knew these Ephesians well. He had spent two years teaching and discipling the believers there (Acts 19:10), and so what he says of them is based on personal knowledge. He is confident that a true work of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit has been done among them, and part of this is their having been sealed with the Spirit. This sealing, according to chapter twelve of the Savoy Declaration of Faith, is part of the work of the Christian’s adoption. We “receive the Spirit of adoption” and are “sealed to the day of redemption,” this latter phrase being a clear reference to Ephesians 4:30.

It is our desire here to think about this “sealing with the Holy Spirit.” What is it? How did the Apostle Paul discern that it had indeed take place in the lives of these Ephesian Christians? And what about us nearly 2000 years later? When can I have reasonable assurance that this apostolic declaration that “in him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” is true of me?

So then, first of all, what is this sealing with the Holy Spirit? The place to begin here is with the word “seal” (σφραγίζω) which commentators all agree has three basic meanings. The first is to authenticate something as genuine; the second is to place on something the mark of ownership; and the third is to make secure. All of these uses appear in Scripture.

The word is used in reference to authentication in Romans 15:28, where Paul speaks about putting his authenticating seal on the gift being presented to the church in Jerusalem. In Romans 4:11 he speaks of circumcision as an authenticating seal on

righteousness that Abraham received by faith, and in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:2, Paul speaks of the Corinthians themselves as being an authenticating seal of his own apostleship. In John's Gospel, we are told that God has put his authenticating seal on Jesus. We see this same use of a seal today when an official document is stamped with the seal of a civil authority.

The word is used with reference to ownership in Revelation 7:3 where the servants of God are marked as his with a seal on their foreheads. We see the same use today in, for example, the branding of cattle.

Finally, the word is used with reference to security when the religious leaders had Jesus' tomb sealed so as to keep it from being tampered with in Matthew 27:66. In Revelation 10:4, John was told to "seal up what the seven thunders had said," keeping it secure, apart from the other revelations that he was to write down for others to read. We encounter this kind of sealing regularly whenever we try to open a new CD.

All of these—authentication, ownership, security—were and are well-known uses of sealing, and all of them have relevance to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. The indwelling Holy Spirit bears authenticating witness to the work of God in our lives: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit marks us as belonging to God: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:19). And the Holy Spirit secures us for eternity, as it is he by whom we "were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

In addition, some commentators also suggest that sealing involves impressing God's character on those who belong to him, in the way that a seal was often made with wax impressed by a signet ring. It is certainly true that this is also consistent with uses of the word and that the Holy Spirit does this by the work of sanctification. But it appears that Paul's emphasis when he uses the word puts a priority on the already accomplished work in redemption rather than the ongoing work in a believer's life.

And so we have three main uses, and because all three clearly define various facets of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, we don't necessarily have to choose one over the others. Paul chose a rich, multifaceted word that gives us opportunity to meditate on our salvation from a variety of points of view. The word encourages us to think on our security in Christ, our belonging to God, and the authentic reality of his work in us. Thus many commentators are not anxious to nail down a specific use in Ephesians 1:13.

But it appears that Paul did not intend to leave it so open. After he says in Ephesians 1:13 that we have been "sealed with the Holy Spirit," he immediately says in 1:14 that the Holy Spirit is the "guarantee [or down payment or deposit] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." Thus the emphasis of this sealing seems to be on the authentication of our new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit certifies to the believer that he

does indeed belong to Christ, that his redemption is sure, and that he will indeed receive all the promised benefits in the fullness of time.

Thomas Goodwin is particularly helpful on this point. He says that with respect to an inheritance, a seal has two purposes. The first is to make an inheritance sure, that is, testify to its authenticity. The second is to confirm to a particular person that an inheritance is indeed his. The first purpose is not relevant here, Goodwin says. The salvation which is the Christian's inheritance has already been authenticated before anyone is sealed. God has already authenticated the saving work of Jesus Christ, in his baptism, in his miraculous signs and wonders, in his fulfillment of prophecy, and most significantly in the resurrection. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:19 assure us that God knew who are his long before any particular sealing with the Spirit. God's eternal election, Goodwin argues, is a sufficient seal in and of itself in the first sense. It is, therefore, the second purpose of the seal with respect to an inheritance that is most needed.

*They are sealed by the Spirit to make them sure, to make their persons sure of their salvation, to persuade their hearts, to put them out of question that this inheritance was theirs, that they might be able to claim it. ... My brethren, not to make salvation sure in itself, but to make us sure of it, is plainly the meaning of the Holy Ghost here.<sup>1</sup>*

Goodwin makes the distinction between faith and assurance. By faith we apprehend that the things we believe are in fact true. Faith is, as the writer of Hebrews says, "the conviction of things unseen" (Hebrew 11:1). The assurance that the sealing by the Holy Spirit gives is the confidence that the truth I believe actually pertains to me, that "I have an interest in these things."<sup>2</sup> This sealing is

*light beyond the ordinary light of faith, that ordinary faith that a man liveth by. ... Faith doth indeed give the soul up to Christ, it dependeth on him, quieteth itself in the blood of Christ. A man feeleth the load taken off his conscience while he believeth, and while he washeth himself in that blood, and eyeth that blood; but this seal of the Spirit is more. ... I will give you Job for an instance: Job had an ordinary light he lived by, and an extraordinary light that came into his soul. Look at Job 42:5, "Mine ear," sayeth he, "hath heard of thee, but now mine eye hath seen thee." He calleth this vision, in comparison of what he had all his lifetime. I think Job speaks it in respect of a sight of God himself, but you may apply it to the sight of a man's interest; it is a sight by which a man seeth it, though he did but hear of it before. I have heard it whispered to me by the Holy Ghost—for the Holy Ghost whispereth secretly by blood and water—that I am in the state of grace, but now I see it, saith he.<sup>3</sup>*

It should be clear that if this interpretation is correct, then the sealing by the Holy Spirit is a separate work from regeneration. The Holy Spirit first works in our lives by making

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Goodwin, An Exposition of Ephesians (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973) 231-2.

<sup>2</sup> Goodwin 235.

<sup>3</sup> Goodwin 236.

us alive to God so that we may believe, indeed that we will believe. Ephesians 1:13 makes clear that his sealing follows upon faith: “when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him,” then you “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” The question then follows, how quickly after one believes is a person sealed by the Spirit? On this question there are two views.

Goodwin seems to argue that it is by no means immediate, that this sealing may come after a long delay. This is the view that Martin Lloyd-Jones takes in his sermons on Ephesians where he equates the sealing with the Spirit with the baptism of the Spirit and identifies it as a separate experience with the same empowering effects of Pentecost.<sup>4</sup> “We believe, and of course, we can only believe as a result of the operation of the Spirit, but still we may not have received the seal of the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> He argues that many true Christians have not yet in fact been sealed with the Spirit, and this is the reason for a serious poverty of Christian experience and living.

*What is the relationship of the conversion experience to this sealing with the Spirit? It is argued that when a man is converted he is given a rest of soul: ‘Being justified by faith we have peace with God’ (Romans 5:1). Now what is the difference, someone may ask, between that and the sealing with the Spirit? When a man has this rest of justification he knows that his sins are forgiven, and he is given a sense of peace and of quiet. Is that therefore not the same thing? The answer is that the ‘sealing with the Spirit’ goes well beyond what is experienced at conversion. The man who is justified by faith believes the Word and believes the teaching of the Word, and as a result he has this sense of rest and satisfaction. That may often be tested and shaken, however, and he will be driven back to the Word and will have to work out the scriptural arguments to silence his doubts. But as we have seen, when the sealing with the Spirit comes there is no longer any argument. That is so because this is a direct assurance, it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit in an unmistakable manner.<sup>6</sup>*

This “unmistakable manner” is an experience so very clear that those who have had it have no doubt about it. “When we have this ‘seal of the Spirit’ we know it, and others know it. It is the highest, the greatest experience which a Christian can have in this world.”<sup>7</sup> Lloyd-Jones describes the intense spiritual experiences of John Wesley, John Flavel, Jonathan Edwards, D. L. Moody, and George Whitefield as examples of the sealing of the Spirit that all believers should seek and says,

*It is almost incredible that any should say that “the sealing with the Spirit” is non-experimental, and so rob themselves of such experiences. Has your heart*

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978) 243-300.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones 253.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd-Jones 283.

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd-Jones 270.

*been ravished? Have you known this overwhelming experience of the love of God? Let every man examine himself.<sup>8</sup>*

Well, not all see it as that incredible. Far from a separate experience, others see the sealing with the Spirit as an essential consequence of saving faith. Among these is John Calvin who is worth quoting at length here:

*When we have once embraced God's grace by faith, so that we know that our Lord Jesus is he in whom we find all that is required to make us perfectly happy, it is very necessary for us to be established in this truth. And why? Let us notice how volatile men are. He that is best disposed to follow God will soon fall, for we are so frail that the devil will overcome us every minute of time, if God does not hold us up with a strong hand. And for that reason it is said that God manifests his power in upholding us when he has elected us to our Lord Jesus Christ. For if he did not fight for us, alas, what would become of us? We should be so absolutely confounded, and not by reasons of one stroke only, but there would be an infinite number of falls, as I said before. As soon as we were in the way of salvation, we would at once be turned out of it by our own frailty, lightness and inconsistency, if we were not restrained and if God did not so work in us that we might, by his Holy Spirit, overcome all the assaults of the devil and the world. Thus God's Spirit does a twofold work in us with respect to faith. For he enlightens us to make us understand things which otherwise would be hidden from us, and to receive God's promises with all obedience. That is the first part of his work. The second is that the same Spirit is pleased to abide in us and to give us perseverance, that we do not draw back in the midst of our way. That, then, is what St. Paul is handling now.*

*It is as if he should say, My friends, you have known God's grace and had experience of it, and he has drawn you to obey his gospel. For you would never have come to it, if he had not shown himself merciful to you. But be sure of this also, that he increases his grace in that he gives you power to persevere in it. For had you continued only three days, or three years, or even more, God must needs have helped you in that, or else you would always have been tossed about like poor wretches at your wits end, without any certainty at all, unless God had promised to take care of you and to guide you continually till you have come to the end of your way and have finished your course. That, therefore, is the reason why he says here they were sealed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>*

What Calvin does is to take the use of "sealing" in Ephesians 4:30 where it seems to refer more to the Holy Spirit's work of securing the believer, and he draws that meaning forward into 1:13-14. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, a guarantee of our inheritance not just in the sense of authenticating it, but also in the sense of securing that inheritance. By this understanding every true Christian must also necessarily be sealed with the Spirit. Even Goodwin admits that this seems to have been normative in the experience

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones 278.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973) 73.

of the Ephesians: that in their case, and as a general rule in the early church, this sealing was the common experience of the believer. Why then should a delay, or even a Christian who never knows this sealing at all, now become commonplace?

There seems to be no satisfactory reason for making the scope of those Paul declares in Ephesians to be sealed with the Spirit any less inclusive than the scope of those who are “in Christ.” This the natural reading of Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30, as it is in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:21-22:

*And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

This reading also fits in better with the overall context of the Ephesians 1:13, particularly the transition from “us” in the verses leading up to and including 1:12 to the “you” of 1:13. Ephesians is, after all, very much interested in the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. In chapter 2:11-22, Paul argues how the Gentiles had been “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise.” But now in Christ the Ephesian Gentiles “who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” The “dividing wall of hostility” has been torn down, and now Jews and Gentiles together are “fellow members of the household of God.”

In light of this, Charles Hodge argues that those “first to hope in Christ” of verse 1:12 are Jews, and the “you also” of verse 1:13 who are now sealed with the Spirit are Gentiles. Thus the point is not that the Ephesians have had the same spiritual experience as other Christians, but that the Gentiles are now included in the same redemptive plan that included of Israel, and together with them they are now sealed with the Holy Spirit and guaranteed to inherit together the same wonderful promises. “This is the great gift which Christ secures for his people—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the source of truth, holiness, consolation, and eternal life.”<sup>10</sup> It is this “great gift” that both Jews and Gentiles now enjoy together.

The problem with thinking of this sealing as a separate experience that is not a necessary consequence of saving faith is that it then seems to make the sealing itself something to be sought after, without which a person is a second tier Christian. For me the result was that, as I read Lloyd-Jones, I felt the same angst arising that I remember from long ago when my Pentecostal friends were urging me to seek the baptism in the Spirit. But Paul, however, seems to attach his confident declaration of the Ephesians’ sealing not to some subsequent, post-conversion experience, but to the very essence of God’s redemptive work which they have appropriated through faith. “When you believed... you were sealed.”

Furthermore, if sealing in the Spirit does what Calvin says it does, it cannot be an “add-on,” but must be of the essence of salvation. This makes sense in light of the

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, [A Commentary on Ephesians](#) (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964) 32-35.

connection between sealing and the “day of redemption” in 4:30. We find a similar connection in Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 14. In the former we read:

*And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. (Ezekiel 9:3-6)*

And in the latter we read:

*And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." (Revelation 14:9-11)*

As Richard Phillips points out, we are either marked and sealed by God and carried safely through the judgment, or we are marked and sealed by the beast,<sup>11</sup> but sealed we will be, one way or another.

If all this is true, then it answers the earlier question: How did the Apostle Paul discern that this sealing with the Holy Spirit had indeed taken place in the lives of these Ephesian Christians? He wasn't speaking of an additional experience he had witnessed or heard of, but of the work of the Spirit which was a necessary consequence of their saving faith. Because they had believed and turned away from sin and to the living and true God in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they could be assured that they were, as a necessary consequence, sealed by the Holy Spirit, that their salvation was secured. This sealing was the guarantee that they would persevere until the end, that the promises they had now received in part they would one day receive in full, and that they would be safely carried through until the final day of redemption. As in Calvin's words above, God had “promised to take care of you and to guide you continually till you have come to the end of your way and have finished your course.”

The evidence of this sealing would not be in some separate experience after conversion, but in conversion itself. And what was the evidence of conversion? The best evidence of conversion is, as David Wells has said, a converted life. Such a life can be tested against a variety of different biblical standards, one of which being the five distinguishing marks of a true work of the Holy Spirit as described by Jonathan Edwards. First, the esteem of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard D. Phillips, Chosen in Christ (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004).

Second, the opposition to Satan and turning from sin. Third, a lively interest in God's word. Fourth, a grasp of sound doctrine and a zeal to defend it. And fifth, a love of God and man, especially for one another in the family of God. If these be genuinely evident, we may have reasonable assurance that God's grace to us has not been without effect and that we are indeed sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption, an objective work done by God, not a later subjective experience sought by us.

This way of understanding the sealing of the Holy Spirit seems to make the most sense of the variety of ways Christians experience it, which is sometimes clear and overt and other times not. We have, for example, the experience of a John Wesley who speaks to the moment when his "heart was strangely warmed." Then we have, on the other side, someone like a William Cowper who never seemed to attain to any lasting measure of assurance. At one point he wrote:

*Loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, once it were ended... My friends, will I know, expect that I shall yet see again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not my own?... God's ways are mysterious, and he giveth no account of his matters.<sup>12</sup>*

Here is one who wrote some of the greatest hymnody testifying to the work of Christ, who apprehended that work in its fullness, who confessed its truthfulness, his sin, and his belief in Jesus Christ as the only savior of sinners. Yet he was tossed between periods of clear-sighted faith and hope and other periods of crushing despair. Where was his experience of being "sealed for the day of redemption"? Of what consolation and encouragement would the words of Paul be to Cowper if they spoke only of a separate experience of the Spirit which he would never know? But what a comfort they will be to one who is rocked back and forth in this life, for whom the ground of faith is often shaky, for him to know that, whatever trials may come, our faith in Christ results in a redemption that is sealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

None of this should be understood as suggesting that the Christian should be content without an inward sense and assurance of having been sealed with the Spirit. Such an experience is of tremendous benefit to the Christian. It is a great comfort to the believer as well as a great encouragement to Christian service. A diminished sense of the Holy Spirit's sealing is no doubt a significant result of a time of personal or corporate spiritual decline, and a renewed awareness of God's grace and favor personally sensed by the believer is to be sincerely desired and is no doubt one of the fruits of renewal and revival. But an absence of the sense of a thing is different from the absence of the thing itself, and so it is with the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Thus Paul urges those in Ephesus, whom he has already declared to be sealed with the Spirit, not to "grieve the Spirit"

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<sup>12</sup> William Cowper, quoted in John Piper, The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001) 99.

(4:30) but to be “filled with the Spirit” (5:17). In this way, as we are more filled with the Spirit, we sense more of the reality of our sealing by the Spirit.

Thus it is that Richard Sibbes speaks of “degrees of the Spirit’s sealing.” He even says that “joy and strong comfort come from a superadded seal of the Spirit,” and that this also comes by degrees:

*Sometimes it is so clear and strong, that the soul questioneth not its state in grace ever after, but passeth on in a triumphant manner to that glory it looks for. Sometimes after this sealing there may be interrupting of comfortable communion so far as to question our condition; yet this calling into question comes not from the Spirit, which, where it once witnesseth for us, never witnesseth against us, but it is a fruit of the flesh not fully subdued, it is a sin itself, and usually a fruit of some former sin. For howsoever we should not doubt after a former witness of the Spirit, yet there will be so much weakening of sense of our assurance, as there is yielding to any lust. The knowledge of our estate in grace and comfort thereupon, though it may be weakened by neglect of our watchfulness, yet still it hath the force of an argument to assure us when the Spirit pleaseth to direct us to make use of it, because God’s love varies not as our feelings doth; and a fit doth not alter a state. The child in the womb stirs not always, yet it lives; and that may be gathered from the former stirrings.<sup>13</sup>*

The Christian, then, should not be content with a mere objective knowledge of having been sealed, but should expect and seek an increasing sense of that sealing. The fruits of such an increased sense are many and certainly include the following as outlined by Sibbes:<sup>14</sup>

1. An enlarged desire for the Word of God by which we find comfort from him.

*The eye of the soul is strengthened to see further into truths, and is enabled more spiritually to understand the things it knew before, ... The Spirit by which we are sealed is the Spirit of illumination, not that it reveals any thing different from the word, but giveth a more large understanding and inward knowledge of the same truths as were known before.*

2. “A liberty and boldness with God.”

*That is, further enlargements from the law, guilt of sin, and the fear of the wrath of God, that we can come with some boldness to his throne and to him as our Father; a freedom to open our souls in prayer before him. ... Where the Spirit sealet, it giveth this liberty, freely to open and spread our case before him and call upon him.*

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Sibbes, The Works of Richard Sibbes: Volume Five (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977) 439.

<sup>14</sup> Sibbes 441-444.

3. A greater desire for sanctification, which is arise in souls that are more humbled by their nearer communion with God.
4. An “encouragement to duty, or suffering in a good cause.”

*The soul by this witness of the Spirit finds increase in spiritual mettle. If finds itself steeled against opposition. Whilst this wind filleth their sails, they are carried on amain, and are frighted with nothing that stands in their way.*

5. “A lifting up of the head in thinking of our latter end.”

*It makes one think of the times to come with joy.... The saints are describe in Scripture to be those that “look for the appearing of Christ,” (2nd Peter 3:12). They are Christ’s, and in him their reckonings and accounts are even. And therefore with delight they can often think and meditate upon the blessed times that are to come.*

All these benefits, and no doubt many more, arise from an increased personal sense of the sealing with the Spirit that God has done in us when we, like the Ephesians, heard the gospel of our salvation and believed in Christ. At that time, the Holy Spirit began his dwelling in us and we were certified as belonging to God, guaranteed our inheritance in Christ, and secured for the coming day of redemption. As the Savoy Declaration says, “All those who are justified ... [are] sealed to the day of redemption.” Consequently, we can now enjoy peace, confidence, boldness, and joy. Although we may experience these in various degrees at different times, the fountain from which they come will never run dry, though it may ebb and flow according to God’s providence and to our own quenching of or fullness with the Spirit. The people in our churches need both to know the objective work of the Spirit’s sealing and to experience more of the personal reality of that sealing, whether they be by nature after the mold of a John Wesley or a William Cowper.

A wonderful picture of the sealing with the Spirit has been provided for us by John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress*. He describes what happened when Christian finally arrived at the cross and the burden fell off his back and rolled into the empty tomb.

*Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, “He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.” Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Zech. 12:10. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with, “Peace be to thee.” So the first said to him, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” Mark 2:5; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment, Zech. 3:4; the third also set a mark on his*

*forehead, Eph. 1:13, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate.*<sup>15</sup>

Here Christian becomes in reality what his name professes. He is forgiven by the Father, he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and he is sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is this roll with a seal that Christian is told to look upon as he travels—indeed runs—to the Celestial City. But at one point he falls asleep, drops this precious roll, and, upon finding that he has lost it, must return to look for it. Then, coming back to where he had dropped it,

*at last, (as Providence would have it,) looking sorrowfully down under the settle, there he espied his roll, the which he with trembling and haste caught up, and put it into his bosom. But who can tell how joyful this man was when he had gotten his roll again? For this roll was the assurance of his life, and acceptance at the desired haven. Therefore he laid it up in his bosom, gave thanks to God for directing his eye to the place where it lay, and with joy and tears betook himself again to his journey.*<sup>16</sup>

Now he carries the roll close to his heart where he can draw regular comfort from it. Then later, in the House Beautiful, he is questioned by Prudence about his struggle with indwelling sin, especially of thought. Christian confesses that it is at times a great burden to him, but that are also wonderful “golden hours” when thoughts of sinful things are vanquished. Can you remember, Prudence asks, by what means these “golden hours” come? Christian answers,

*Yes: when I think what I saw at the cross, that will do it; and when I look upon my brodered coat, that will do it; and when I look into the roll that I carry in my bosom, that will do it; and when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that will do it.*<sup>17</sup>

Yes, that will do it. May such reflections on our sealing with the Spirit lead us to many such golden hours.

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<sup>15</sup> John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) 27.

<sup>16</sup> Bunyan 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> Bunyan 34.

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