

Sealed by the Holy Spirit

***“Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”
—Ephesians 4:30***

THE GREEK WORD IN OUR text translated ‘sealed’ means preserved, also attested. In ancient times, a signet ring, or a stamp, was used to seal important docu-

ments. This is still done today. A letter is sealed to secure secrecy for its contents. Contracts are sealed, or attested, to guarantee the fulfillment of what is agreed upon.

In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul speaks of the believer being “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” The ‘sealed,’ or attested, guarantees the fulfillment of what is agreed in the form of a down payment until the full inheritance is received. Here again we are familiar with the illustration, for it is still customary in transacting business to make down payments to secure agreements until they are fully consummated. In Romans 8:23, this down payment is referred to as the “firstfruits of the Spirit.”

In Acts 20:28, Paul speaks of the “church of God” which has been “purchased” by the blood of Christ. Those who have been called out from the world, and have come under the baptism of the Holy Spirit, constitute the ‘purchased possession’ awaiting deliverance in the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:5) The ‘holy Spirit of promise’ is given to them as a down payment, a surety, that the full inheritance will eventually be received. It is a wonderful inheritance, an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power [Spirit] of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—I Pet. 1:4,5

The glorious inheritance of the “new creation” (II Cor. 5:17, *New International Version*) will be entered into only by those who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, or, as Peter otherwise explains it, ‘kept,’ or secured, ‘by the power of God.’ Peter says this keeping power of the Holy Spirit is effective only in the lives of those who exercise faith. God does not arbitrarily preserve his saints and usher them triumphantly into the kingdom. They must exercise faith in his promises, and conform their lives to the conditions attached to those promises if they are to benefit from the sealing power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, and at Pentecost it was “shed forth” on those assembled in the upper room. (Acts 2:33) These represented the entire church which, by the Holy Spirit, have been baptized and anointed. Individually, the Holy Spirit of Truth has also

begotten the LORD's consecrated people to a new hope of life, and through ways indicated in, and by, the written Word, witnesses to them that they are the children of God. Surely, then, the baptism, anointing, begetting, and witness of the Holy Spirit constitute a very substantial down payment on the inheritance that has been promised.

Also, we believe it is proper to think of the expression, Holy Spirit of promise, which seals the Spirit-begotten children of God, as indicative of what we know to be a fact. By his Spirit, God caused to be recorded in his written Word scores of promises by which he guarantees that if we yield to the molding influences of his Spirit, and obey its directives, we shall be given strength for our every time of need, and that "an entrance shall be ministered" unto us "abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (II Pet. 1:11) What more could the LORD do to attest our victory in Christ than to reiterate his promises of grace sufficient and overcoming strength! We know that his promises are sure. Paul says, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. 15:57

IMPERFECTIONS COVERED

We know that in our flesh "dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18), that in the merit of our own righteousness we could never hope to attain that glorious 'inheritance' that is 'incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.' But God, in his great love, has made provision to cover our imperfections with the robe of Christ's righteousness. Because of this we have his assurance, his promise,

that he is not dealing with us according to our imperfections, but according to the desire of our hearts. This assurance should do much to seal our hope of the heavenly inheritance. “If we confess our sins,” John wrote, “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”—I John 1:9

This does not mean that we can in any measure become lax in our endeavors to keep the fallen flesh under control. To do so would be to ‘grieve’ the Holy Spirit—that is, go contrary to what its influence should be accomplishing in our lives. The context in which our text is found indicates this. We quote, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption [deliverance]. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”—Eph. 4:29-32

Thank God that through Christ he has forgiven us, which means that our fleshly imperfections need not stand in our way of inheriting the kingdom. But this means that we also should forgive others, and not exercise bitterness and malice toward them. If we harbor bitterness in our hearts toward others, or allow the imperfections of the flesh to influence us in any way, we ‘grieve’ the Spirit—that is, we resist its molding influence in our lives. It is God, by the Holy Spirit of promise,

who does the sealing, but we can resist the sealing process by not conforming fully to his will.

DIVERSIFIED PROMISES

The promises of God, recorded in his Word under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, cover every possible situation in our consecrated lives. This is why the sealing by the Holy Spirit of promise is so complete, so all-comprehensive. For example, as a rule the LORD's people realize their lack of wisdom in dealing with the daily problems of the Christian life. But, through the Apostle James, the LORD has promised, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." (James 1:5) How understandingly has the Holy Spirit of promise given us this assurance. Let us never hesitate to ask God for the things which he has promised, for he will always understand. God will never upbraid us for taking him at his word.

The foes of the New Creation are many and powerful. We tremble with fear when we think how weak and how utterly incapable we are of fighting victoriously against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Were it not for the promises of God we would have no hope of attaining the heavenly inheritance. But God has given us the assurance of his protection and care. In Psalm 91, the Holy Spirit of promise has clearly attested to the LORD's ability to protect his people, and to show them his salvation. We quote some of these sealing promises:

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my

fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.”—vss. 1-4

“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.”—vs. 7

“There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.”—vs. 10

“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”—vss. 15,16

How wonderfully these precious promises guarantee help and protection under all circumstances, assuring deliverance from ‘the snare of the fowler.’ It is only if we dwell ‘in the secret place of the most High’ that we can have his protection, under the ‘shadow’ of the Almighty. None of the sealing promises of God are unconditional. In every instance it is our obligation to conform to the conditions attached to them—to yield to the imprint of the Divine stamp. To be sealed with the Holy Spirit does not imply the erroneous view, “once in grace, always in grace.”

Being sealed by the Spirit does not imply perfection of character development, or full control over the weaknesses of the flesh. Paul says that we who “have the firstfruits [the down payment] of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption [deliverance] of our body [the body of Christ].”

(Rom. 8:23) But, despite our weaknesses and imperfections, we have the assurance that “It is God that justifieth.” (vs. 33) Satan will endeavor to discourage us, and others may condemn us. But God has drawn us to Christ, and has given us the hope of that glorious inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. Christ died for us and is risen again, and is now “at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” (vs. 34) In view of this, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”—vs. 35

Paul’s answer to his own question as to whether any of these difficulties, these hardships, will separate us from Divine love, and cause us the loss of our inheritance, is most reassuring—a seal indeed to assure us of final victory. He wrote, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—vss. 37-39

WILL FINISH THE WORK

Another sealing text of scripture is Philippians 1:6. Here the Apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says to the brethren at Philippi, and to us, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [finish, *Marginal Translation*] it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The strength of this seal is the unchangeableness of our God. It was

God who began the good work of grace in our hearts. He drew us to Christ, through whom we are justified. He inspired us by his promises even of the “divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) He encourages us to set our affections on things above. He has made us “heirs” of himself, and “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), and he will not change. We know that he wants us to enter into our inheritance; so, like Paul, we too can be confident the LORD will finish his work of grace in our hearts, and eventually we will hear his, “Well done.”—Matt. 25:21

There is the necessity of our continuing to cooperate with our Heavenly Father. We are to “work out” our own “salvation,” even though God is working in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12,13) It is God’s ‘good pleasure’ that we shall have an inheritance with Jesus in the rulership of his kingdom. Jesus said so. (Luke 12:32) It is to this that we have been called. It is for this that we have been, to use Paul’s language, “apprehended of Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:12

Paul explains that for himself he did not then consider that he had ‘apprehended,’ or finished working out his own salvation. “Not as though I had already attained,” he says, “either were already perfect: but I follow after,”—that is, I continue on in cooperation with God who is working in me ‘to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ “This one thing I do,” Paul said, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (vss. 13,14) Our own part in this arrangement must be the ‘one

thing,' the all-important, all-consuming thing in our lives. If it is, and continues to be, we can have full assurance of faith that God will finish his work in us, that we will be made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."—Col. 1:12

PROGRESS ESSENTIAL

The sealing promises of God apply to his Spirit-begotten children from the beginning of their walk in the narrow way. He drew them, called them, and through the Holy Spirit of Truth, begat them to be his children. Even as "babes in Christ" (I Cor. 3:1) it is God's pleasure that they receive the inheritance which he has promised, that through his strength they may 'apprehend that for which they have been apprehended' by him. His wonderful assurances of conquering grace and strength become increasingly reassuring to us as we endure patiently the experiences which his wisdom permits to mold us more and more into the image of his dear Son.

This thought is brought out beautifully by the Apostle in Romans 5:1-5. "Being justified by faith," he says, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Through Christ also we "have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand," a grace so boundless, so marvelous, that now we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." What a rich inheritance is 'the glory of God.' It is the Divine nature, and the Divine glory. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21

But there are conditions; we must be tested and found worthy. Paul says, "Not only so, but we glory

in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience [Greek, 'test' or 'proof']; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." (Rom. 5:3-5) The key to this passage is in the meaning of the Greek word mistranslated 'experience.' Its literal meaning is 'test.' It is this word that Paul uses in II Corinthians 2:9, which reads, "To this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things."

After begetting us by the Holy Spirit of Truth, and engendering in our hearts the hope of partaking of his glory, the LORD permits tribulation. If we patiently endure the trials that his love and wisdom allow as a test of our obedience, it proves our standing before him, and strengthens our hope. It is then, Paul says, that we have a hope which 'maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.'

From the very beginning of our Spirit-begotten life, we have a glorious hope—the hope of the glory of God. By God's grace, that hope is maintained throughout our entire Christian way. When, through the LORD's help, we patiently endure the tests which he permits, this hope becomes one of which we will not be ashamed. In the Greek text the thought is that we will not be 'disgraced.' When one starts out to accomplish a certain undertaking and by his own negligence fails, he is disgraced in the eyes of others. We can be sure that God will always do his part on our (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) behalf, working in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. The question is, Will we do ours? In our text, Paul is speaking of those who have endured patiently and have thus demonstrated, up to a point, that they will continue to be faithful. His assurance is that these now have an abiding hope because they will not be disgraced through failure of their own.

Paul then takes us a step further into this tested relationship with God. We will not be ashamed of our hope, he says, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. It was through the written Word that the Holy Spirit began to shed the love of God abroad in our hearts from the time we first became New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Even before this the Word revealed God's love to us, and it was his love that drew us to him, and prompted us to surrender our wills to him and devote all we have and are to his service.

John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." (I John 3:1) This full 'manner' of the Father's love continues to be an increasing power in our lives, inducing sacrificial obedience, and helping us patiently to endure the tribulation by which we are tested. Even these trials are evidences of God's love, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." (Heb. 12:6) Thus daily, through his Word and providence, God's Holy Spirit continues to shed Divine love abroad in our hearts. It becomes an increasing power to sustain and help, and we become overwhelmed with determination to make our "calling and election sure." (II Pet. 1:10) In

this wonderful manner, then, the sealing power of the Holy Spirit continues to work, causing its imprint to sink deeper and deeper into the hearts of those who are being molded into the likeness of Christ.

This increasing ability of the believer to receive the imprint of the Holy Spirit's seal is seen in the experience of the Apostle Paul. As we have noted, when he wrote to the brethren at Philippi he acknowledged that he had not yet apprehended that for which he had been apprehended by Christ. Up to this time Paul had endured much, and under most difficult circumstances had demonstrated his loyalty to God and to the Messianic cause. He had in no way been unfaithful, and he enjoyed the smile of his Heavenly Father's approval. But would this continue to be the case?

Paul indicates that he was reasonably sure of being released from the Roman prison in which he wrote the letter. If this were true, he knew that there were many trials and tests ahead. He knew that he could depend upon God to help him, yet in his humility he felt that it was too soon to claim that he had proved faithful. Later, during his second imprisonment, and when he knew that soon he would be executed, he was in a position to take a different view. Doubtless, even at this late date, the apostle could have renounced his Lord, saved his life and gone free. But he did not do this; he had met this final test. Deep in his own heart he was still willing to die in the Master's service. His actual execution would now be but a detail, a formality.

In Paul's own mind and heart he had already been faithful unto death, and by faith he now knew

that he would receive the crown of life. So no longer did he say, "I count not myself to have apprehended," but instead, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—Phil. 3:13; II Tim. 4:7,8

‘And not to me only.’ This Spirit-inspired statement by Paul is another of the sealing promises. Because Paul had fought ‘a good fight,’ because he had faithfully ‘finished’ his ‘course’ and ‘kept the faith,’ he knew he would receive the promised crown of life. He knew this because the Holy Spirit of Truth had revealed it to him, and had assured him that the Lord was a ‘righteous judge,’ a judge that would not fail to fulfill all his good promises. These reassuring facts that Paul sets forth apply not to him only, but to all who continue to put their trust in the LORD.

Concerning God’s faithfulness there can be no doubt. Paul wrote of him as the One “who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (I Cor. 1:8,9) Again, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”—I Thess. 5:24

Will we be faithful? Every test through which, by God’s grace, we successfully pass, increases our confidence of final victory; for we are confident that he who loved and helped us in the past will continue to do so. We expect that the trials will

continue to the end of the way, but we know that, because God is faithful, he will not permit us to be tempted or tried “above that ye are able” to bear, and if and when the difficulties become too severe, the fiery trials too hot, he will provide a way of escape. (I Cor. 10:13) What more could the LORD say to seal, to secure, our inheritance for us? Let us rejoice in his assurances of victory, and continue on faithfully to the end! ■