

Sermon 9, Five Pentecostal Privileges, Ephesians 1:13-14

“The very fact that the Spirit indwells believers is a seal of God’s ownership of them. Fee says it well: “The Spirit, and the Spirit alone, marks off the people of God as his own possession in the present eschatological age.” — Hoehner, pg. 240

“The Spirit can be regarded as either the tool which leaves the mark of the seal on the object being sealed or the mark which is left. It is here almost certainly the latter.” — Best *in loc.*

“This seal pertains to nothing else than confirming in the hearts of believers the certainty of God’s promises concerning grace and salvation (as the seals applied to instruments denote their immutability) . . . the mode of sealing . . . is not only external by the sacraments, but also internal by consolation and sanctification (which are as it were so many parts of this seal) and which on the one hand confirm the eternity of God’s love in us, on the other hand persuade us to the constancy of our faith and obedience from the grace of God.” — Francis Turretin, 15.16.20

Thus, it is evident that to be sealed with the Spirit is to have the Spirit permanently applied to us. To be sealed is not the same thing as assurance, sanctification, and consolation. Rather, all three are consequences which flow from His presence in us.

ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς, ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, 14 ὅς ἐστιν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ. (Eph 1:13-14 BYZ)

In Him you also, having heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in Him having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of the treasured possession, to the praise of His glory.

Proposition: Through the Spirit’s activity in salvation, you have five distinct privileges: hearing, believing, being sealed, becoming a treasured possession, and living to praise God’s glory.

Outline

- I. Hearing the Word in Union with Christ, v. 13a
 - A. Its Content: Truth
 - B. Its Description: Good News
 - C. Its Message: Your Salvation
- II. Believing while in Union with Christ, v. 13b
- III. Being Sealed with the Spirit while in Union with Christ, vv. 13c-14b

- A. The Spirit's Identity
- B. The Spirit's Role in Redemption, vv. 13c-14b
 - 1. The Promised One, v. 13c
 - 2. The Seal that Identifies and Shapes You, v. 13c
 - 3. The Down Payment, vv. 14a-b
- IV. Becoming God's Treasured Possession, v. 14c
- V. Living to Praise God's Glory, v. 14d

Introduction

On August 21–23, 1924, Mars entered an [opposition](#) closer to Earth than at any time in the century before or the next 80 years.^[10] In the United States, a "National Radio Silence Day" was promoted during a 36-hour period from August 21–23, with all radios quiet for five minutes on the hour, every hour. At the [United States Naval Observatory](#), a radio receiver was lifted 3 kilometres (1.9 miles) above the ground in a [dirigible](#) tuned to a [wavelength](#) between 8 and 9 km, using a "radio-camera" developed by [Amherst College](#) and [Charles Francis Jenkins](#). The program was led by David Peck Todd with the military assistance of Admiral [Edward W. Eberle](#) ([Chief of Naval Operations](#)), with [William F. Friedman](#) (chief [cryptographer](#) of the United States Army), assigned to translate any potential Martian messages.^{[11][12]}

Such is the zeal of humankind for a true message from beyond our planet Earth. But brothers and sisters, we have in our laps this morning a far better message — a word of truth which is far better than anything we might possibly hear from Mars.

We have seen the activity of the Father, who chose us in Christ before the world began. We have seen the redemption of the Son, who shed His blood for us. And today in Paul's great opening doxology we behold the work of the Holy Spirit, who seals us for the day of redemption. Without the complementary activities of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, you could not be saved. The Trinity is important to you not just because of who each Person is, but because of how each Person functions in the economy of salvation. If your vision of salvation is not Trinitarian, then it is not St. Paul's vision of salvation! What I hope to show you this morning is the special privileges you have in your salvation as a result of the Holy Spirit's work. The accusation is sometimes made that Reformed theology neglects the work of the Holy Spirit. I don't believe that's true, but I certainly don't want it to be true of Harvest Reformed Presbyterian Church! So let's see what privileges the Spirit grants to everyone who is in Christ.

I. Hearing the Word in Union with Christ, v. 13a

Paul is in the midst of recounting the tremendous spiritual blessings which have been lavished on "us," that is on everyone who is united to Christ by faith. He switches here between "us" and "you" in the same way (as E. Best comments) that every preacher does over the course of a

² Wikipedia article on The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence

sermon. The same group of people is described either way. Call them Christians, believers, the elect, followers of Jesus, or what you will, the message is the same. Our Father has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Paul focuses on many of those spiritual blessings over the course of vv. 3-14, with a particular focus on 5 of them in the two final verses.

The first blessing we have is of hearing the word in union with Christ. Some English versions of this text (such as the NKJV) add a finite verb to this clause, but there is really no need to do so. The clause simply says that in Christ, we heard the word of truth. The word is great and wonderful, but it will not save us of itself. The word is ultimately of value only because of the one whose word it is, and if we have not become united to Him, then we will not benefit from hearing Him. But Paul, again, is describing the privileges of believers and one of those privileges is to hear the word while in union with Jesus Christ. As you sit in a pew listening at this very moment, you are exercising this spiritual blessing. You are getting to hear the word in union with Christ! You belong to Him and He to you, and it is His word that is coming to you as you sit and listen. What an amazing privilege, Christian!

A. Its Content: Truth

The first thing Paul draws to our attention is that the Word of God is made up of truth. It does not simply contain truth like chocolate chips sprinkled in here and there. No. It is a word made up entirely of truth. As Psalm 119 puts it, God's word is true from the beginning. It is the truth.

Now, what does that mean? Well, if you're looking for truth, look no farther. Also, if you hear a statement which purports to be truth yet is not compatible with the claims of this word, then that statement is false. Everything God says is true, and therefore any claim which vaunts itself against the truth of this word will ultimately be revealed as falsehood, lying, and deception.

When it comes right down to it, the question we must ask of any claim and any system is whether it is true. Does it accurately describe what is really the case? Scripture claims to do so. It calls itself the truth, right here in this very verse. Either it's lying or it's telling the truth. We know that it is true because we trust the Spirit's witness in our hearts. We intuitively know the voice of our Shepherd.

That's a pretty slender reed, a mocker might say. You put all your weight on intuition, on "just knowing" that this Bible is in fact the word of truth which it claims to be?

To which we answer, "Yes. The reed of pure reason on which you lean is founded on nothing more substantial than itself. You have no Archimedean point on which to stand. The skeptical philosophers since the seventeenth century have subjected pure reason to such devastating critiques that it is obvious that only an intuitive grasp of properly basic realities can provide the human being a genuine foundation from which to know anything. We know that God created us with the ability to hear His voice and to know that it is really His. We have empirical and rational helps that point us toward this conclusion, but ultimately our faith is neither in sense experience nor in rationality but in the God who speaks and whose words are truth."

We heard the word of truth, and we know that it is the word of truth. We have a true belief that it is the truth, and that belief is justified by the *sensus divinitatis* which tells us that we truly have heard from God Himself.

B. Its Description: Good News

But not only is the word true; it is better than we could imagine. For more than a century, some humans have been obsessed with the idea that we could receive a message from Mars or from some distant galaxy. But any message from such a source would hardly be good news. Even if it were, though, it would not be the good news that the word of truth conveys.

The Gospel is good news. It is not good advice; it is not in the first instance a demand that you shape up. It is simply a message about what God has done in Jesus Christ for you.

C. Its Message: Your Salvation

This good news is the good news of our salvation. In Christ, we have been delivered from everything negative, everything evil, everything that can ultimately harm or destroy us. We have been delivered from the wrath of God Almighty and received into His gracious favor. That is the good news of salvation!

This is what motivates our obedience, our evangelism, our discipleship, and our worship — this conviction that the news of salvation is good news and that it is the truth. This is what I'm here to proclaim to you: that you have been united to Christ and in that union you have salvation in its fullness. This is the coordinate result of the Father and Son working together to save you, along with the work of the Spirit and the word. All work together to bring salvation to those in union with Christ.

II. Believing while in Union with Christ, v. 13b

But not only have you heard the word of truth, the good news of salvation. You also have the benefit and privilege of believing if you are in union with Christ. Now, this is not quite the same thing as believing in Jesus, which the NT talks about so frequently. To believe in Jesus is to personally trust Him to be what He said He would be. But to believe while in union with Him is to trust Him while in formal relationship to Him. Ultimately, you could say that it's the difference between trusting your boyfriend and trusting your husband. You trust your husband in the context of already having been formally joined to him in a public binding ceremony. You trust him knowing that he is totally committed to being there for you. You trust him not as a stranger, but as a spouse.

Saving faith is great. Faith that says "I'm not totally sure who this Jesus is but I think I can trust Him" is a beautiful and blessed thing. But faith that has walked with Him through thick and thin, faith that knows His loyalty and His faithfulness, is even more beautiful and grand. That kind of faith is a privilege which you get to enjoy as a believer. You get not only the presence of Christ, but the depth of knowing and walking with Him for a lifetime.

So trust Him. Believe Him. And do it in the context of being united to Him now and forever.

III. Being Sealed with the Spirit while in Union with Christ, vv. 13c-14b

Well, along with believing comes yet a third benefit — the benefit of being sealed by the Holy Spirit. Again, this is only something that comes to those who are in Christ. Paul repeats that phrase so often because he wants us to remember that not one of all the benefits and blessings he lists would or could be granted to us except through the saving work of Jesus Christ. These are not simply things that the Father could have given to us without and apart from what Jesus did. No. All these things are ours only because Jesus Christ did what He did and suffered what He suffered for our sakes.

A. The Spirit's Identity

So in union with Christ, we have been granted this blessing of being sealed with the Spirit. Who is this Spirit? He is the third Person of the Holy Trinity. He too possesses the entire divine nature, just like the Father and the Son. He too is absolute, eternal and unchangeable God. Yet His personhood proceeds from the Father and from the Son. He is who He is by virtue of who the Father and Son are, as unimaginable as that truth is to us. The important point is that He is the Lord and Giver of Life, and that He is truly and fully God.

B. The Spirit's Role in Redemption, vv. 13c-14b

Paul points out three key facets of the Holy Spirit's work in our redemption. He has already said that every blessing he lists is only given through the Spirit's work. Now he illuminates what else can be said of the Spirit and His work in our lives.

1. The Promised One, v. 13c

First of all, He is the promised one. He is called “the Holy Spirit of promise” as a reminder that His presence among God's people was promised by the prophet Joel, who may have been the earliest of all the writing prophets; some date his message to the time of Elisha around 850 B.C. The Spirit's presence was further promised by Jesus Christ, who promised to send Him after He Himself returned to the Father's right hand.

What an amazing identity, right? The Holy Spirit, we could say, is a much-anticipated Person! The early church spent 10 days waiting for Him. Does the thought of the Spirit's presence move your heart? Do you consider Him to be worth waiting for?

Also, think of this way. How can God be sent? How could it be fitting for God to be told where to go? And yet the Spirit has been sent to us by the Father and the Son — by our Father and our Jesus. He is the token of Their presence with us! The Spirit humbled Himself, in a metaphorical sense, to come and be with you. Yet that coming was in accordance with the Father's promise and with Christ's promise.

2. The Seal that Identifies and Shapes You, v. 13c

Well, the promise of the Spirit has been fulfilled and now He is here with us. He is present in this very room. And you and I have been sealed with Him.

What does that mean? Well, we could list the function of a seal under the marks of identity, ownership, and authenticity. Those are good ways of thinking about this sealing. But personally, I find it more memorable to simply say that the Spirit's presence is the seal. He's not

primarily the tool that seals, but rather the mark left on us by that tool. If you have the Holy Spirit, then you have proof of your identity as a child of God. If anyone lacks the Spirit of Christ, that person doesn't belong to Christ! But conversely, Christ and all His benefits belong to everyone who has the Spirit.

Where do you and I encounter seals? Occasionally we see them on formal documents. But in our day-to-day lives, we generally see sealed packages of food that contain the message "Sealed for your protection." Think of a sealed can of cola, for instance, or a package of animal crackers that says "Do not use if seal is broken." What's the reasoning behind those statements? Ultimately, it comes down to this: Only the factory can seal this package. If the package is sealed, then it contains only what was put into it at the factory. But if it is open, then who knows what could have been introduced into it?" So a seal marks a can of cola or a bag of chips as being unopened, untampered-with. It identifies the package on which it's found as safe. Well, the Holy Spirit is that seal on you and me. His very presence is in and of itself our seal. Some people say that the Spirit seals God's promises — that He guarantees that salvation is by grace through faith, for instance. But Paul doesn't say that once we believed, the promises were sealed to us. He says that *we* were sealed. You are like a package of cookies — sealed for your own protection! But rather than that seal consisting of glue that holds you shut, that seal consists of the personal, active presence of the Holy Spirit within you.

As a result of the Spirit's sealing presence with you, you become holy. You grow in assurance of faith. You grow in comfort and joy. But these things are not themselves the sealing presence of the Spirit. They are its results.

Remember how we saw in v. 3 that the blessings of salvation are indivisible? If you have one, you have them all. But the greatest of all the blessings of salvation are the Divine Persons who come and take up residence in you. If you have Christ, then you have all His blessings, including perseverance and Heaven itself. The same is true if you have the Spirit. If you have Him, His personal guiding powerful presence, then you have *every* spiritual blessing, including Jesus Christ.

Stop thinking piecemeal, in other words. You can't have joy but not sanctification. You can't have justification but not the Spirit. You can't have Christ but not love. The Christian life is all one organic piece, and it cannot be broken or interrupted.

3. The Down Payment, vv. 14a-b

Paul highlights that truth for us again in a different way when he calls the presence of the Spirit in us a "down payment" on our inheritance. Such a concept is entirely fitting, of course, because the Holy Spirit came on the Feast of Firstfruits. The first fruit or down payment idea is the same idea. You receive a small portion of something as part of a promise of more to come. The first apple is a sign that you'll be getting an entire treeful. The first grain of wheat is a sign that you'll be getting an entire field's worth. And the Spirit is a sign that you'll receive every spiritual blessing, everything promised in and at the consummation of redemption. God's promise is so

certain that if you have the Spirit, you can know that He has committed Himself to saving you to the uttermost!

When you put 20% down on a house, you do it because you want to buy that house. It's a sign of how settled your decision is. And in the same way, the Spirit as down payment is a sign of how settled God's decision to save all those in Christ is. He would not give you His precious Spirit unless He were already certain that He desires to save you.

How do you know whether you have the Spirit in your life? By whether you are growing in your appropriation of every spiritual blessing. Are you actually growing in love for Christ, in peace of conscience, in grace and in obedience to your Father? If so, then you know that only the Spirit can grant those spiritual blessings and that He must be present with you. If the fruits of the Spirit are yours, then the Spirit Himself is too.

IV. Becoming God's Treasured Possession, v. 14c

You will not get the benefits of redemption in all their fullness until the redemption of God's treasured possession. Who is that treasured possession? It is His people, the church, the "peculiar people" or "special people" described so often in both testaments. You get to be this treasured possession in and through Jesus Christ and the Spirit's saving work.

We've seen that in Christ we have been highly favored, like the Virgin Mary. We have been redeemed. We have received every spiritual blessing — including the blessing of becoming God's treasured possession!

So how should you respond to these blessings?

V. Living to Praise God's Glory, v. 14d

You should live to praise God's glory. You should enjoy and delight in nothing less than declaring how beautiful and wonderful He is. This can and should be done in public worship, but it also can and should be done in every facet of how you live your life. You should be seeking to make God look good in everything you do — in how you run your business, in how you manage your household, in how you respond to your governing officials, and on and on. Paul will describe much of this in detail in chapters 4-6, and particularly in the household code of those chapters. Does your life praise His glory? If you are in Christ, you have everything necessary to glorify God. Amen.