

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

SECURE IN HIM

Ephesians 1:13-14

By

Steven J. Cole

September 2, 2007

© Steven J. Cole, 2007

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: www.fcfonline.org/sermons

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, Updated Edition
© The Lockman Foundation

September 2, 2007
Ephesians Lesson 8

Secure in Him
Ephesians 1:13-14

One of the joys of childhood (and maybe adulthood, too) is to receive presents at Christmas or your birthday. Sometimes you can guess what is underneath the wrapping paper, but it's still fun to open the present and find out what gifts you have been given.

That's what we've been doing in Ephesians 1. In verse 3, Paul says that if you are in Christ, all of the gifts under the tree have your name on them! God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Then Paul begins unwrapping the gifts for us. He shows that we have been chosen by the Father (1:4-6); redeemed by the Son, who revealed to us His eternal purpose (1:7-12); and, now, sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14); all, to the praise of His glory (1:6, 12, 14).

Today we will unwrap the third gift, the truth that believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is also called the pledge of our inheritance. God gives us these pictures of the Holy Spirit to make us feel secure in Christ. Many Christians struggle with a lack of assurance of their salvation. The enemy knows that if he can stir up doubts about your salvation, you will not glorify God as you should.

Imagine a cruel parent, who always threatened his or her child with, "If you do that again, I'm going to disown you as my child! I'll take you to an orphanage and abandon you!" The poor child would never praise such a cruel parent for his love. That kind of cruel threat undermines any kind of close relationship. Every loving parent wants his child to feel secure in his love. That assurance of steadfast love undergirds strong parent-child relationships.

Even so, the loving heavenly Father wants all of His children to feel secure in His steadfast love. After all, before we even existed, He chose us in Christ and determined that we would be adopted into His family (1:4-5). When He did that, He knew everything about us and yet He still chose us, based on His grace, not on anything in us. To assure us, He gives us the Holy Spirit as the

seal and pledge of our future inheritance, guaranteeing that He will complete what He has begun. So, Paul here says,

We should praise God because when we believed, He secured us in Christ with the seal and pledge of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one of the most controversial and divisive subjects among Christians today. Many churches have split over differences regarding the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophetic utterances, speaking in tongues, miracles, and healing. Some argue that all such miraculous gifts ceased with the apostolic era, while others argue that they should be experienced on a normative basis by the church today. My opinion is that we cannot prove biblically that such gifts have ceased. Yet, at the same time, most of what goes under that banner today is not genuine. The enemy is the great counterfeiter. Thus, we need biblical discernment in these matters (1 John 4:1).

I cannot deal with all of those issues today, but I want to ask and answer five questions that stem from our text regarding the Holy Spirit and His ministry of making us secure in Christ. Some of you may disagree with me on these matters. I would only ask that we treat one another in Christian love and that we allow any differences to drive us to ask God for more understanding from the Scriptures.

1. How do we get the Holy Spirit? We get the Holy Spirit by hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus Christ.

Some teach that not all believers have the Holy Spirit, but we must seek God to give us the Spirit. They usually teach that the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. They also call this experience “being baptized in (or by) the Spirit.” They base this on some texts in Acts, as well as Luke 11:13, where Jesus tells the disciples that the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

In seeking to understand these matters, it is crucial to understand that on the Day of Pentecost, God did a new thing with regard to the Holy Spirit. Before Pentecost, only some believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and even at that it was not necessarily permanent. Thus David, after his sin with Bathsheba, prayed (Ps. 51:11), “... do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” While believers

today may grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) or quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), they cannot lose the indwelling Spirit. It is part of God's gift of salvation after Pentecost.

In the Upper Room, Jesus promised the disciples (John 14:16-17) that after He left them, the Father would send "another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." Later, when Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, He knew their need for the Spirit's presence until they permanently received Him seven weeks later at Pentecost. Thus (John 20:22), "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Just before He ascended, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father had promised, namely, the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came powerfully upon the believers, thus fulfilling God's promise. The Book of Acts must be interpreted as a transitional book to the age (or dispensation) of the Spirit. We see the Spirit coming first on believers in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, then on the Gentiles, and then to those in the "remotest part of the earth" (see Acts 1:8; 2:1-21; 8:14-17; 10:1-48; 19:1-7). After the transitional time, all believers in Christ receive the Holy Spirit.

Other Scriptures affirm this interpretation. In Acts 15, during the debate at the Jerusalem Council, Peter refers back to his experience of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 10). He says (15:7-8) that they heard the word of the gospel and believed, and that God gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to the Jews at Pentecost. In Galatians, Paul argues that they received the Spirit at the beginning of their Christian experience by hearing [the gospel] with faith, not by works of the Law (3:2, 3, 5). And, in Romans 8:9, Paul writes, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Every believer in Christ has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.

In our text (Eph. 1:13), Paul gives the same order. "You also" refers to the Gentiles (contrasted with the Jews, 1:12). First, they listened to the message of truth, the gospel of their salvation. Then,

they believed that message and they were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise. The gospel is the good news, that God forgives all our sins and gives us eternal life as His free gift through faith in Christ, apart from our good deeds (Eph. 2:8-9). The moment you believe that message and put your trust in Christ, God seals you with the Holy Spirit and gives Him to you as His pledge that you will inherit all the blessings of heaven for all eternity.

2. Who gets the Holy Spirit and when? All believers receive the Holy Spirit the instant they believe in Christ.

I've already said this, but need to address it further because many teach that there is a time lapse between believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit and that only some experience the sealing of the Spirit. This view was fostered by the old King James translation, which stated, "in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." The word *after* implies a time lapse. Even Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, whom I greatly respect, err in arguing that the sealing of the Spirit is an experience that only some believers receive subsequent to salvation. But that undermines Paul's entire point here, which is to assure all believers that God has sealed them with the Spirit at the moment of faith in Christ.

While the Greek grammar of Ephesians 1:13 allows for the translation, "after you believed," it also may be translated, "when you believed." We must go to the context and to other Scriptures to determine which is correct. In the context here, Paul is enumerating all of the blessings that we received *in Christ*.

And, as we've seen, other Scriptures (Gal. 3:2-5; Rom. 8:9; and the Book of Acts, properly interpreted) show that we receive the Spirit at the moment of salvation. But there are more. In 2 Corinthians 1:22, Paul writes that God "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." He repeats in 2 Corinthians 5:5, "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge." He does not say that this only applied to those in Corinth who were spiritually mature or who had sought this blessing, but he writes it to the entire church. To the same church (1 Cor. 12:13), he wrote, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." In Ephesians

4:30, he commands, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Again, he does not imply that only some had been sealed. It was the blessing of all in the church of Ephesus who had believed in Christ.

Also, it is significant that believers are never commanded to be baptized with the Spirit or to be sealed with the Spirit. If these were experiences that we need, surely there would be commands to this effect. We are commanded to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), which is a repeated and growing experience. So while every true believer in Christ has the Holy Spirit indwelling him from the moment of salvation, not every believer experiences the fullness of the Holy Spirit in daily life. We should ask God for that and remove every hindrance in our lives so that we increasingly are characterized by being full of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 11:24).

3. How do we know if we have the Holy Spirit? Many evidences reveal the Spirit's presence in our lives.

Our Pentecostal brethren argue that speaking in tongues is the normative sign or evidence of having the Holy Spirit. But, even if you allow that the gift of tongues is valid for today, Paul is clear (1 Cor. 12:30), "All do not speak with tongues, do they?" In the context, he is arguing that we all have differing gifts. What are some evidences of the Holy Spirit in our lives? We could list many more, but here are five:

- (1) We heard the gospel of salvation and recognized it to be the truth.

In Ephesians 1:13, Paul recounts what had happened to these Gentile believers. First, they heard the good news about salvation and the recognized it to be the truth. For that to happen, the Holy Spirit had to open their blind eyes. In Ephesians 4:18, Paul writes that unbelievers are "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." In 1 Corinthians 2:14, he states, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." So, for anyone to understand the truth of the gospel, the Holy Spirit must open his blind eyes (see John 8:43; 9:39).

(2) We believed the gospel and were saved.

While no one is able to believe of his own "free will" (because the will is enslaved to sin and not free), at the same time no one can be saved apart from believing in Jesus Christ. So how does a person come to believe in Christ? Answer: the Holy Spirit must open spiritually blind eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ so that the person can believe in Him (2 Cor. 4:4-6). So if you have believed the gospel and God has saved you by His grace through faith in Christ, it is an evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life.

(3) The Holy Spirit replaced our despair with hope in God's promises.

In Ephesians 2:12, Paul describes unbelievers as "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But when God saves us, His Holy Spirit makes us heirs of God's promises and gives us hope (Rom. 15:13). He is "the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13).

(4) We began to enjoy the riches of our inheritance in Christ.

Although we will not experience the fullness of the riches of God's grace even throughout eternity, the instant that we trust in Christ we begin to discover and enjoy all that God has prepared for those who love Him. Paul says that God reveals these things to us through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

(5) The Holy Spirit began to produce His fruit in us.

Paul writes (Gal. 5:22-23), "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Again, fruit takes time to grow, but if the Spirit of God dwells in us, He begins the process of character transformation. Over time, you will see these qualities developing in your life. He makes you progressively holy (2 Cor. 3:18).

These are just some of the evidences that God's Spirit is at work in your life. But, Paul's main emphasis in our text is the security that we now enjoy because of the seal and pledge of the Spirit.

4. What does it mean to me to have the Holy Spirit? I have the security of knowing that I belong to Christ forever.

I want each of you that knows Christ to personalize this. He wants you to feel the security of His unchanging love. Paul uses two metaphors to drive home this point:

- (1) You can feel secure in Christ because the Holy Spirit is the seal of God's promises to you.

The seal in biblical times was usually made of hot wax, impressed with a signet ring or other official insignia. It represented at least three things:

ü Security

The seal made something secure. The Roman guards sealed the tomb of Jesus so that no one could steal His body (Matt. 27:66). They probably put a rope across the stone that blocked the entrance and secured both ends with wax, stamped with the official Roman seal. Also, a letter or legal document was sealed with wax and stamped with a special seal so that the recipient could be sure that it had not been tampered with. When you trusted in Christ, God sealed you with His Holy Spirit, making your salvation secure. No one can break God's seal.

ü Identification of ownership

The seal marked out property or documents as belonging to the one who put his seal upon it. Much like a brand on cattle, the seal showed who officially owned something (Jer. 32:10). Even so, God's Spirit is the seal on the believer, showing that you are no longer your own. He bought you with the blood of Christ and you now belong to Him. No one can take you from Him.

ü Authentication

A seal makes something official or authentic. If it has the official seal on it, you know that it's genuine. If you've ever had to get an official transcript from a school or an official copy of your birth certificate, it had to have the official seal on it to be valid. Or, a notary public will authenticate your signature on an important document by stamping it with his seal. Even so, God's Holy Spirit assures us that we are His genuine children. False believers do not have the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:16, Paul says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." I believe that He does that mostly by an inner assurance that God's promises in His Word are true and applicable to our lives. In other words, when you read the Scripture and find yourself exclaiming, "Praise God, this promise is for me!" it is the Holy Spirit giving you authentication that you are God's child. You belong to Him.

So, the Holy Spirit is God's seal, testifying to us that we are His for time and eternity. But, also ...

- (2) You can feel secure in Christ because the Holy Spirit is the pledge of your inheritance in Christ.

The word *pledge* might better be translated as *down payment* or *earnest money*. A pledge is something valuable that you give as temporary collateral until you complete the agreement. But a down payment or earnest money is the first installment, with more of the same to follow. If you are selling a house, the other party gives you earnest money to show that he is serious and he plans to complete the deal. In modern Greek, the word used here for *pledge* means an engagement ring. It is a token of a promise that says, "Take this for now, but there is more to follow."

God gives us the Holy Spirit as the down payment or earnest of the full blessing of our future redemption. In one sense, we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (1:7). But, in another sense, our redemption is not complete until we get to heaven. Right now we can begin to enjoy the inheritance that is ours in Christ. But it's just a foretaste of future glory. We don't get the complete inheritance until we go to heaven.

Scholars are divided over whether "the redemption of the possession" ("God's own" has been added by translators) refers to our receiving the fullness of the redemption that we now partially possess; or, does it refer to God's redeeming His people as His possession? While both ideas are true biblically, most understand it to mean that God has put down the earnest of His Holy Spirit to show that He will take full possession of what is rightfully His (1 Pet. 2:9). The Holy Spirit's indwelling us shows us that God will complete the deal. God uses these two metaphors, the seal and the

pledge, so that if you have believed in Christ as your Savior, you will feel secure in His promise of eternal life.

5. How should we respond to having the security of God's seal and pledge? We should praise and glorify Him.

Paul especially wants his Gentile readers to know that they now enjoy equal standing in Christ before God with Jewish believers. F. F. Bruce puts it (*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 267), "That such language should now be applied to Gentile believers is a token of the security of their new standing within the community of God's own people, fully sharing present blessing and future hope with their fellow-believers of Jewish stock." He goes on to point out that Paul is here echoing the words of Isaiah 43:20-21, where God says, "My chosen people, the people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise."

For 2,000 years, the Gentiles were for the most part excluded from God's promises to Israel. But now, as Paul goes on to argue (chapters 2 & 3), "the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:8). This should cause us to praise His glory (1:14).

Conclusion

If you have trusted in Christ as Savior, God gave you His Holy Spirit as the seal and pledge of your inheritance so that you will praise and glorify Him. In other words, you will not praise and glorify God properly unless you feel secure in His eternal love that saved you from your sin and sealed you for His own possession. Since the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, you need to feel secure in the salvation that He has given you so that you fulfill that purpose. So, unwrap the present and revel in God's gift of the Holy Spirit, who secures your salvation!

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to distinguish between the sealing of the Spirit, the baptism of the Spirit, and the filling of the Spirit?
2. What dangers are inherent in the view that we receive the Holy Spirit (or the baptism of the Spirit) as a “second” blessing, subsequent to salvation? Are there dangers in the view that these blessings are received once and for all at salvation?
3. When a professing believer is living in sin and justifying himself, should we give him assurance of salvation? Why/why not?
4. When a believer is grieving over his sin, should you help him regain his assurance of salvation? If so, how?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2007, All Rights Reserved.