

Truth for Today

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The Holy Spirit: The Seal and the Earnest

When I was very small, about two and a half years of age, my mother, who had recently been widowed, did a very wise thing. She loved me. She wanted the very best for me. She knew her own limitations. So she took me to the local Sunday School. Furthermore, she made sure that I attended regularly.

In the Lord's mercy, it was a very good Sunday School. From that early stage in life I was privileged to imbibe the Word of God, which is "able to make us wise unto salvation". The world is much more sophisticated now than it was then, in those far of days between two major world wars. Children now might well be much more worldly wise than they were then. Sadly, that doesn't make them necessarily more truly wise. Rather the reverse, I fear. But, what a privilege was mine! Just learning to read and yet able to understand words and concepts like, "*Read your Bible Pray every day, and you'll grow*" (spiritually, of course)

We can do no better service for the children of any generation than encourage them to understand the immense benefit of taking in, and making good in their minds and hearts, the pure Word of God. I, for one, shall be eternally grateful that the truth of scripture was hammered home to me in my early days. Furthermore, it was confirmed to my young soul by good, Bible based hymns and choruses sung to rousing, stimulating tunes. I think it was General Booth of the Salvation Army who posed the question, "Why should the devil have all the best tunes?" I, personally, would go further and say, "The devil certainly hasn't got all the best tunes."

Among my many favourites, these words loom large in my memory

*"Jesus is our Shepherd:
For the sheep He bled;
Every lamb is sprinkled
With the blood He shed:
Then on each He setteth
His own secret sign,
"They that have My Spirit
These", saith He, "are Mine."*

Little though I realised it at the time, those words encapsulate very important Christian truth which forms part of today's subject. Among many other things, in describing the work of God the Holy Spirit in the Christian believer, the Bible speaks of Him as the Seal, the Earnest and the Anointing. Let us look at these terms one by one, in the light of what the Bible says about them.

First of all, then, the Holy Spirit as the Seal. In business terms, a seal is a mark of ownership. It is a sign of the power and authority of the one whose seal it is. It confirms the authenticity of any document bearing the seal. It gives the assurance of the care and protection of the owner of the seal until the transaction sealed is finally completed to his satisfaction. It gives the assurance of permanence and security to the parties involved. The power and authority of the person whose seal is imprinted on a contract ensures the final satisfactory completion of that contract.

The Bible takes up this concept and applies it to a very important aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in the Christian believer. Taking the verses in the order in which they come to us in the Bible, we learn, "(God) has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" 2 Corinthians 1:22. Again, "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" Ephesians 1:13. Then, in Ephesians 4:30, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption".

Briefly, these statements tell us this. In putting His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, God claims us for Himself. He is putting His seal of ownership upon us. He will never relinquish us to anyone else. He has committed himself to look after us until He finally brings us into His own presence. What confidence this gives us! Not in ourselves, of course, but in Him! He has secured us for our finally destiny by putting His seal of ownership upon us. This is why the Holy Spirit is called the Seal.

Again, I rejoice in the words:

*"Then on each He setteth
His own secret sign,"
"They that have My Spirit
These", saith He, "are Mine."*

And this is said of all who have believed the gospel, trusting Christ as their Saviour. Wonderful!

But that is not the whole story. Indeed, what I have said so far is in itself a lead in to the second thing that is said of the Holy Spirit in this respect. He is not only the Seal. He is also the Earnest. God's pledge! God's guarantee! As we learn elsewhere, "(God) Who has begun a good work in you will complete it". Philippians 1:6.

What He has begun, He will see through to completion. The Holy Spirit, Who is the Seal, God's stamp of approval and authentication of His own work in us, is Himself also God's pledge and guarantee that He will complete that work in us. That is what is involved in the Bible telling us that the Holy Spirit is the Earnest.

Listen again to 2 Corinthians 1:22, "(God) has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts". Again, in 2 Corinthians 5:5, "(God) has also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. "In Ephesians 1:14, we read, "The Holy Spirit of promise is the earnest of our inheritance". Note that! Our final inheritance is in the future. But God has guaranteed, even now, our part in it by giving us His Holy Spirit, even now.

Now, it cannot be without significance that these expressions are used of the Holy Spirit in the Letters of the Apostle Paul to the Christians at Corinth and Ephesus. Both were major sea ports in New Testament times. Incidentally, if you were to go to Ephesus nowadays, you wouldn't think so. Ephesus is now some miles inland from the Aegean Sea. Over several hundred years the sea retreated and the estuary silted up. But, two thousand years ago, Ephesus was a major sea port, supporting, among other things, a thriving trade in timber.

Think about it! Many miles inland, the timber was felled from the lush forests then in being. Then began the long journey down river to the port of Ephesus. How could it possibly be known, with any degree of certainty, to which merchant each tree trunk belonged? Oh, yes! Of course! Each owner laid his claim to his own timber by putting his own personal seal on each individual log. This seal fulfilled several purposes. First of all, it claimed ownership for each log bearing that particular seal. Also, the merchant, whose seal it was, was saying, in effect, "Leave it alone! It belongs to me! Interfere with it at your peril! I will hold you personally responsible to me for anything you do to it."

Let us continue the journey downstream. From time to time a piece of timber might well have become "log jammed" as they say. Some twist or turn in the river, or increase in the volume of traffic, or variation in the flow of the water due to rocks or shallows, might have resulted in a log, or logs, becoming trapped and in need of a nudge in the right direction. But, with help, gradually, each Log would progress downstream until it would eventually arrive at the sea port, from where it would be exported overseas.

Until its time came for loading and departure, the seal on each log identified whose timber it was and secured for it its ultimate destination. Lying there in the mud and sediment of the river bed, not much to look at, it nevertheless had a stated future marked out for it. The seal that claimed ownership was also the pledge of its final destiny.

I can see that the Ephesians (and the Corinthians) would understand well what the Apostle Paul was saying to them. Something like this! "God has great things in store for you. He has hewn you out of the forest of this sinful world. He has claimed you for Himself. You are His forever. Life's journey is not yet over. But, even in this life, God wants you to know that he will never give you up. Even if you appear at times to be submerged under the mud and the filth of this wicked world, God has identified you as His own. He has sealed you with His Holy Spirit. He has marked you out as one of His. That, also, is His pledge that He has committed Himself to preserve you and care for you until He takes you to your final destiny, glory with Christ in heaven. The presence of the Holy Spirit within you now is the present proof of what God is going to do in the future. He has left nothing in doubt".

Here we have to remind ourselves of a very important principle in studying the Bible. Illustrations can be very useful in helping us to understand the truths of scripture. However, the truth itself is always, necessarily, fuller and deeper than the illustration.

In the present case, I find the local illustration of the timber trade at Ephesus most graphic in highlighting certain features of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. But, when all is said and done, the illustration has its obvious limitations. After all, the log was inanimate. It had no life. It had been severed from its source of life and nourishment. It had no idea what was happening to it. It made no difference to it whether it was floating downstream, stuck in a log jam, or submerged beneath the mud of the river bed. It had no feelings or appreciation of its environment. It had no

desires or ambitions about its future, final destiny. It had no sense of honour as to the dignity conferred upon it. It had no idea whether was to be burned as firewood or built into some architectural wonder or palatial structure. Each log was just a lump of wood.

By way of contrast, the Christian has feelings. He is sensitive. He is aware of the temptations and opposition of the unbelieving world in which he lives. He is sensitive to his own limitations, deficiencies, inconsistency and frailty. But he is aware of other things, too. He knows that God loves him. He knows that God sent His own Son to be his Saviour. He knows the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth from all sin. He knows his sins are all forgiven. He knows his place in heaven is secure. He knows God has placed the Holy Spirit in his heart. He knows the Holy Spirit is Himself, in Person, the Seal, the proof of God's ownership of him. He knows that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is God's guarantee of the final glory that lies ahead for every Christian believer.

All these things are illustrated in scripture by the terms Seal and Earnest. But scripture goes even further. The Holy Spirit is certainly the Seal. He is most certainly also the Earnest. But He is also the Anointing. In the Bible, anointing is always used to mark out a person for future distinction and to empower him to enjoy, even beforehand, the honour that will bring. For us, the Holy Spirit, as the Anointing, gives us the power to live now in the enjoyment of that bliss to which we are going. That is, the Holy Spirit is the present power for enjoying now the truth of what God is going to bring us into, in the future. As the Anointing, He is the power by which, or rather by Whom, the believer lives in the present good and enjoyment of all that spiritual inheritance that God has laid up in store for all who are His.

Listen again to how Scripture puts it: "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts", 2 Corinthians 1:21 and 22. There is no doubt that, however much God has made known of Himself, at the present time it will always be possible, indeed, in this life, necessary to say, "The best is yet to be. Nevertheless, there is no lack, in the provision that God has made, that would prevent us from being in the present, spiritual enjoyment of all that God will display in the future. Of course, the fullness of eternal bliss will exceed, by far, anything we now know or experience. In Romans 8:18, Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us". He also speaks about "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Corinthians 4:17. The Apostle Peter refers to "the glory that shall follow" 1 Peter 1:11. Like the Queen of Sheba when King Solomon showed her all his treasure, when we are ushered into the reality of heavenly bliss we shall be glad to say, "the half was not told me", 1 Kings 10:7. Still, God has made this special provision for the present joy of our souls. He has given us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to promote and empower in us the present enjoyment of the spiritual inheritance to which God is ever drawing us.

One more illustration, lifted straight out of the pages of Holy Scripture. By the way, while many illustrations are very good indeed, I, personally, am convinced that the best illustrations of Bible truth are found in the Bible itself. You will remember that, when Israel could have been at the end of their journey through the wilderness, Moses, God's appointed leader, sent spies into the promised land of Canaan, to bring back a true report of conditions there. When they returned, their reports and recommendations varied. They all spoke in glowing terms of the wonderful produce of the land and showed samples they had brought back with them. Sadly, the majority allowed the scale of the opposition to put them off but, for those with the necessary faith and conviction, it was possible to enjoy the fruit of the land even before they actually got there. Refresh your memory. Read the story again in Numbers 13 and 14.

As far as we are concerned, have we the faith to claim the promises of God? Have we the conviction to take God at His Word? God says He has put His Spirit within us. Do we believe it? God says we can enjoy, now, in the faith of our souls, the foretaste of heavenly joy, even before we get to heaven. Do we really accept that and act upon it? God grant that we might know it, and enjoy it, more and more, while we wait for the Lord to come. Amen.

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