

**THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND**  
**THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:**  
**A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**  
**(LESSON THIRTEEN)**  
**“THE DEAL HAS BEEN SEALED”**

**EPHESIANS 1:3-14**

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*

*4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

*5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*

*6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

*7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

*8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;*

*9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.*

*10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

*11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

*12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

*13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,*

*14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

In **Ephesians 1:10**, the Apostle Paul explains the nature of the “mystery” of God’s will which He has been pleased to make known to us. The “mystery” that has been revealed to us is that God has a great purpose and a great plan as it relates to the management and administration of the affairs of this world. It is a purpose and plan which He will, without fail, bring to a successful completion. God’s ultimate purpose and plan is to reverse the fallen condition of His original creation, including man, and to re-harmonize and re-unite the whole of creation to Himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse **11**, Paul proceeds to tell us something of the way in which God is working out this ultimate purpose and plan in and through Jesus Christ, particularly as it relates to us. He writes, “*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*”

Here, Paul tells us that not only have we received the initial blessings of redemption, forgiveness of sin, and spiritual illumination, because of our vital union with Christ, but, in addition to these, we were made an inheritance. The saints are God's heritage, they are His personal possession as a result of the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We have been made God's inheritance because He predestinated us to be so.

**The Passion Translation** renders the verse as follows: *"Through our union with Christ we too have been claimed by God as his own inheritance. Before we were even born, he gave us our destiny; that we would fulfill the plan of God who always accomplishes every purpose and plan in his heart."*

In verse **12**, Paul tells us why we were predestined to be made an inheritance of God. He writes, *"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."* The saints were made God's heritage *"that we should be to the praise of His glory."*

Brothers and sisters, God's ultimate purpose and plan for His entire creation was determined before the foundation of the world, and the destiny of His children was included in this ultimate purpose and plan. Furthermore, it is God Himself who is responsible for ensuring that this ultimate purpose and plan is carried out. Since this is the case, none of us have any reason whatsoever for boasting. Whatever we are, whatever we possess, whatever we enjoy and whatever we accomplish, has nothing to do with us. Therefore, our boasting should always be in God!

In **Jeremiah 9:23-24**, we read the following: *"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."*

We must be very careful that we correctly interpret the words **"should be"** in the phrase, *"that we should be to the praise of his glory."* To us, the words "should be" very often convey the idea of an obligation and they may suggest to us, as we read this verse, that it is the obligation of the Christian to ensure that he or she lives a life that will be to the praise of God's glory. But in this verse, Paul is not speaking so much of the Christian's **experience** as he is of the Christian's **position**. In other words, Paul is informing us that God is the One who is going to ensure, one way or another, that our lives bring Him glory.

Now, in verses **13-14**, the Apostle informs us of the **means** which God uses in order to **actually** save us and place us *"in Christ,"* so as to guarantee that His ultimate purpose and plan, as it relates to us, is fully realized. He writes, *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."*

The first thing we are told in this regard is that it is through the instrumentality of the *"word of truth"* that we believe. The Ephesian Christians heard the word of truth and listened attentively to the content of the Gospel message. Such attentive listening is necessary in order that an individual might be saved by faith (**Romans 10:17**).

When the Apostle refers to the gospel message as “*the word of truth*”, he is not making a reference to truth in general. He is referring to a particular truth through which, every person who is saved receives salvation. It is the truth contained in “*the gospel of your salvation*,” the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, His **Person** (Who He is), and His **work** (What He has done, including His death, burial and resurrection). It is this and nothing else that is the gospel, the good news; and no one can become a Christian except through hearing and believing the “*word of truth*.”

Paul calls the gospel the “*word of truth*” because the gospel reveals man’s true condition, it proclaims and advocates the only true way of escape from that condition, and it exhorts saved sinners to demonstrate true gratitude to God in every area of their lives. He refers to it as “*the gospel of your salvation*,” because when it is accepted in faith, it becomes “*the power of God unto salvation*” (**Romans 1:16**).

We find this truth highlighted in **James 1:18**: “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*”

James writes that the Father begat us with the word of truth. The word “*begat*” is the translation of the Greek word **apokueó** (**ap-ok-oo-eh'-o**), which literally means, “to give birth.” **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** advises us that the word “is used metaphorically of spiritual birth by means of the Word of God.” The phrase “*the word of truth*” in this passage is a translation of the same two Greek words that are translated “*the word of truth*” in **Ephesians 1:13**.

James is stating explicitly here that we are begotten or birthed, in a spiritual sense, by means of the **Word of God**. This refers of course to God’s gracious act of regeneration by which we are adopted into God’s family. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. He carries out this work by taking God’s Word and applying it effectively to the hearts of those whom He has elected unto salvation. It is only by the Holy Spirit’s work through the gospel that an individual can be brought to new life in Christ.

In **1 Peter 1:23**, the Apostle Peter emphasizes the truth that an individual is born-again by God’s Word: “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*”

In **Acts 16:13-14**, we have a practical illustration of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person who has heard the “*word of truth*.” “*And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*”

Paul and his companions apparently heard that a number of women were accustomed to meet for prayer by the banks of a river on Saturday afternoons. So, they decided to join the prayer-meeting and speak to the women. Paul spoke “*the word of truth*” to them and a woman named Lydia was converted. She believed the gospel and became the first Christian convert in Europe. But **how** did Lydia come to believe the good news? She believed **because the Lord opened her heart**.

The Bible does not say that it was when she attended unto the things that Paul was saying that her heart was opened. Rather, it was only when the Lord had opened her heart that she attended to what Paul was saying. If the Holy Spirit had not first unlocked the door of Lydia's heart, she would never have listened attentively to Paul and she would never have believed the gospel.

But **why** was Lydia's heart opened? The answer is given to us in an earlier passage in Acts. In chapter **13** and verses **44-48** we read the following:

**44** *And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.*

**45** *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

**46** *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*

**47** *For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*

**48** *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.***

In verse **48**, we read that "*as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*" This makes it incandescently clear that they were not ordained to eternal life because they believed the gospel, but rather that they believed the gospel because they had been ordained to eternal life. It was their ordination to eternal life that caused them to believe, and not the other way around. In the same way, it was because Lydia had been ordained to eternal life that her heart was opened and she believed.

Brothers and sisters, it is an impossibility in the nature of the case, for any person to be saved apart from the Word of God. Human intelligence, knowledge, persuasiveness or eloquence cannot save souls. God has not promised to bless programs or performances, but He has promised to bless His Word. The Holy Spirit testifies of the Son of God through the Word of God. God's chosen channel for saving souls is His Word (**1 Corinthians 1:18-21**).

In verse **13**, the Holy Spirit is mentioned explicitly for the first time in this letter. Of course, He has been involved in everything that we have noted since we started our examination of the book of Ephesians, but now Paul refers to Him directly: "*In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*"

The word "*sealed*" is a translation of the Greek word **sphragizó (sfrag-id'-zo)**, which means "to set a seal upon, mark with a seal." The **papyri**, a set of ancient scrolls containing a number of Greek philosophical texts, provide us with examples of the use of this word:

1. "If the *fruit* is *sealed*, then everything is in order: the sealing is the last thing that must be done prior to delivering;"
2. "let him seal a sample," obviously to prevent the corn from being tampered with during its transit;

3. "I gave the letter sealed (to the messenger);"
4. "send the ass to be branded" (**Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament***).

In the Scriptures, a seal was used in the ways outlined below:

- a. to mark ownership (**Song of Solomon 8:6; Jeremiah 32:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:19**);
- b. to protect against tampering or harm, therefore to secure (**Esther 8:8; Daniel 6:17; Matthew 27:66; Revelation 5:1**).
- c. to guarantee the genuine character of a document (**Esther 3:12; Jeremiah 32:9-10**), or of a person in a figurative sense (**1 Corinthians 9:2**);

It is my opinion that Paul uses the word "sealed" in this verse, in the context of all the above.

Brothers and sisters, it is the desire of God's heart that His people feel secure in His love and in His power. Everything else in life is unstable, including our health, our families, our careers, our society, our world. In the area of our spiritual lives, however, God does not want us to have any uncertainties. He wants to assure us that we are His and therefore our position in Christ is secure.

The sealing of the Holy Spirit is God's proof that He owns those whom He has saved (**2 Timothy 2:19**). God does not present this evidence to anyone else, for, as the Creator and highest authority, no other stands above Him to whom He must appeal. Instead, His proof of ownership exists for our benefit, to assure us that we belong to Him.

In the ancient world, written correspondence, cattle, and other objects were imprinted with specially designed seals that identified their owners via symbols, letters, and so on. The Holy Spirit has sealed us in this sense, branding us with the image of our Lord and Saviour. Knowing that we have the Holy Spirit assures us that God owns us, that He possesses a love for us as His people that He does not have for the rest of the world. This seal comforts us with the knowledge that God is our Father. This is confirmed by **Romans 8:14-16**:

*14 "The mature children of God are those who are moved by the impulses of the Holy Spirit.*

*15 And you did not receive the "spirit of religious duty," leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the "Spirit of full acceptance," enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as he rises up within us, our spirits join him in saying the words of tender affection, "Beloved Father!"*

*16 For the Holy Spirit makes God's fatherhood real to us as he whispers into our innermost being, "You are God's beloved child!" (The Passion Translation)*

The Holy Spirit is given to the saints to seal them as God's purchased possession, thereby, ratifying their son-ship and guaranteeing their personal share in the promises of God. It is a bond between God and men; a sign of what we are and shall be to God, and of what He is and will be to us. It **secures**, and it **assures**. It stamps us for God's possession, and it guarantees His kingdom and glory as our possession.

Paul refers to the seal as “*that Holy Spirit of promise*” because the Holy Spirit was announced by promise. The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit was announced by promise in the following Old Testament passages: **Isaiah 32:14-15**; **Isaiah 44:2-4**; **Ezekiel 11:17-20**; **Ezekiel 36:25-27**; **Ezekiel 37:14**; **Joel 2:28-29**; **Zechariah 12:10**. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “*the promise of the Father*” in **Luke 24:49**.

In verse **14**, Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as “*the earnest of our inheritance.*” The word “*earnest*” is a translation of the Greek word **arrabón** (ar-hrab-ohn’).

The word means a pledge given to ratify a contract; it is a part of the price, or purchase money; a down-payment; it is that which confirms the bargain, and which is regarded as a pledge that all the price will be paid. Paul uses the same word, in exactly the same context in **2 Corinthians 1:22** and **2 Corinthians 5:5**.

The noted American theologian **Albert Barnes**, made the following comments concerning the matter of the “earnest:”

*“In regard to the “earnest,” or the part of a price which was paid in a contract, it may be remarked:*

- (1) That it was of the same nature as the full price, being regarded as a part of it;*
- (2) It was regarded as a pledge or assurance that the full price would be paid. So the “earnest of the Spirit,” denotes that God gives to his people the influences of his Spirit: his operation on the heart as a part or pledge that all the blessings of the covenant of redemption shall be given to them.*

*And it implies:*

- (1) That the comforts of the Christian here are of the same nature as they will be in heaven. Heaven will consist of like comforts; of love, and peace, and joy, and purity begun here, and simply expanded there to complete and eternal perfection. The joys of heaven differ only in degree, not in kind, from those of the Christian on earth. That which is begun here is perfected there; and the feelings and views which the Christian has here, if expanded and carried out, would constitute heaven.*
- (2) these comforts, these influences of the Spirit, are a pledge of heaven. They are the security which God gives us that we shall be saved. If we are brought under the renewing influences of the Spirit here; if we are made meek, and humble, and prayerful by his agency; if we are made to partake of the joys which result from pardoned sin; if we are filled with the hope of heaven, it is all produced by the Holy Spirit, and is a pledge, or earnest of our future inheritance; as the first sheaves of a harvest are a pledge of a harvest; or the first payment under a contract a pledge that all will be payed. God thus gives to his people the assurance that they shall be saved; and by this “pledge” makes their title to eternal life sure.”*

The Holy Spirit is Himself the seal. God places the Holy Spirit in us permanently, indicating that the great transaction in which Jesus Christ paid for sin, thus satisfying the just demand of God’s holy law, is finished. It indicates that the saints belong to Him as His heritage, and that we are eternally secure.

The truth that the Holy Spirit is placed in us permanently is highlighted in **John 14:16**: “*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, **that he may abide with you for ever.***” The seal of the Holy Spirit is God’s down-payment in the salvation He gives the believing sinner. This down-payment guarantees the full delivery of all parts of the salvation given. Salvation is in three parts;

- **justification**, which is the removal of the guilt and penalty of sin and the bestowal of a positive righteousness which is Jesus Christ Himself, is given at the moment the sinner puts his or her faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour;
- **sanctification**, which is a progressive work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, is a present possession in which He eliminates sin from the experience of the believer and produces His own fruit;
- **glorification**, which is the act of God transforming the present bodies of believers into perfect, sinless, deathless bodies, will be realized when the Lord returns for His church.

The believer has the first two (justification and sanctification), now. The Holy Spirit, indwelling the believer, is God’s earnest money, guaranteeing to him or her, the future glorification of his or her body.

When God deposited the Spirit in the hearts of His children, He put Himself under an obligation to give them subsequently the full remainder of all the blessings of salvation merited for them by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The down-payment or first instalment is, accordingly, a pledge or guarantee of glory to come.

Paul says that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee until “*the redemption of the purchased possession.*” The words “*purchased possession*” are the translation of a Greek word, which expresses the general idea of preserving, acquiring and gaining for one’s self, without specific reference to a price. It refers to the saints as God’s heritage which He preserves for Himself. The final redemption of this possession is glorification, when the physical body of the saints will be the recipient of the work of salvation. The soul and spirit are now the recipients of God’s saving grace. The body will experience that work when the Lord returns. When the saints are fully delivered from all the effects of sin, it will be made manifest that they are indeed God’s peculiar treasure. This will result in the praise of God’s glory.

Brothers and sisters, everything that God does is done to magnify the intensity with which His people praise Him for His glory. Therefore, He takes decisive steps to secure for the magnification of His glory forever. He **seals** the believer with the Holy Spirit, and **guarantees** that we will come to our inheritance praising His glory. God is so determined to secure for Himself a people for His own possession who will live forever for the praise of His glory that He will not allow our eternal destinies to depend on us. He commissions His Holy Spirit to enter our lives and to seal us secure forever. So, brothers and sisters, **the deal is sealed.**

We will end this **Lesson** with a quote, taken from a message entitled “**Sealed by the Spirit to the Day of Redemption,**” by the American theologian **John Piper**: “*So then, what is God saying to us when he gives us His Holy Spirit and calls Him a guarantee or a down-payment? He is saying, ‘My great desire for those who believe in me is that you feel secure in my love. I have chosen you before the foundation of the world.*”

*I have predestined you to be My children forever. I have redeemed you by the blood of My Son. And I have put my Spirit in you as a seal and a guarantee. Therefore, you **will** receive the inheritance and praise the glory of My grace forever and ever. And I tell you this here in **Ephesians chapter 1** because I want you to feel secure in my love and my power. I don't promise you an easy life. In fact, through many tribulations you must enter the kingdom (**Acts 14:22**). I don't promise always to speak in soft tones of approval, but to warn you in love whenever you begin to seek security in anything but me. Let me say it again: 'I have chosen you,' says the Lord. 'I have predestined you; I have redeemed you; I have sealed you by My Spirit. Your inheritance is sure, because I am passionately committed to magnify the glory of My grace in your salvation.'"*