

March 4, 2012

Acts 1:1-8 / Acts 2:29-41 / Ephesians 1:13-14

The Guarantee of our Salvation

In the past few weeks we've been focusing on God's grace in election and predestination. And we've seen that Paul's purpose in making them known to us is that our hearts might be humbled and amazed and thus praise Him for the unfathomable riches of His grace shown to us through them.

And today's passage is no different. For as we see at the end of verse 14, what Paul shares today is ALSO intended to do the same thing. To help us see even more of the expressions of God's mercy to us, and by doing so, cause our hearts to, "praise Him" / or the "glory" that we call His grace.

And what are those other expressions of mercy he speaks about today?

They are the truths that God has not only chosen us (vv. 4 and 11) / and predestined us in love to be saved (vv. 5 and 11) / and worked all things together to bring about His saving purpose for us (v.11-12) / but that once He has saved us (and it is HIM who saves us, and not WE ourselves!) He then ***"marks us with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God's possession"*** (v. 14).

That is, He not only saves us, but in doing so, He also seals us with His Spirit -- thereby guaranteeing our eternal inheritance. That's what we'll be considering today. And I know I preached on a SIMILAR TOPIC just over a month ago, when I addressed the frequently asked question, "Can one lose their salvation?"

But today I'll approach it from a slightly different angle, trying as much as I can to limit my response to that question by sticking almost completely to what we find stated in this text alone.

So, without any further delay, let's look at what Paul says in these two short verses. Verses which obviously support the view that along with the grace of salvation, comes the grace of a sealing with the Holy Spirit which guarantees we will never lose it!

And as we look at our passage, I'd like to consider it by dividing it up under these THREE headings: **1st)** Our Inclusion in Christ. **2nd)** Our Sealing by or with the Holy Spirit. **3rd)** The Spirit as the Deposit that Guarantees our Salvation.

So **FIRST** -- Our *inclusion* in Christ. In the first part of v. 13 Paul says: ***"And you were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation."*** That is, our inclusion in Christ / or being joined to Him spiritually (according to Paul) / and becoming part of His Body / all comes about when we "hear" the word of truth.

And obviously, the word "hear" (which Paul uses in this verse) means MORE than simply "hearing"! / For if everyone who simply "heard" the Gospel was "included in Christ," then there would be very few (at least in the West) who were not saved!

Yet that's not what it means. For as Jesus made plain years before Paul wrote this letter: It is possible to "hear" something, without ever really "hearing" it. After telling the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says: ***"He who has ears, let him hear."*** And he doesn't mean these physical ears! He means ears that enable them to hear and grasp spiritual truth. / Ears that have been opened / or enabled to hear / by the gracious and mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.

That's why He can say of some people further on in that same chapter:

"Though hearing, they do not hear or understand." That is, they hear well enough with their physical ears the words that are actually being said, yet they don't really "hear" the truth that's really being conveyed. / The truth of the Gospel doesn't dawn on them. / The light of understanding, so to speak, never goes on. / They miss the whole point of what's really being said.

That's also why Jesus can go on to say to His disciples: ***"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear."*** It's the same point the author of Hebrews makes in chapter 4 verse 2 where he tells the Hebrew believers: ***"We also had the Gospel preached to us, just as they did, but the message they heard was of no value to them, because it did not combine with faith in the hearer."***

And most of us know all this very well. There have been times when we heard a text of Scripture read, and it went right over our heads. But then we heard it again on another occasion -- and wham -- it's truth struck us so hard we wondered what hit us.

Likewise, most every one of us has probably spoken with someone who grew up in churches all their lives (liberal churches / liturgical churches / even evangelical churches) hearing Gospel passages / or lengthy sections of the Epistles / read aloud from their pulpits or lecterns every week. Yet, though hearing what was read, they never really "heard" what was being read.

To use the words Isaiah uses regarding the Jews of His day: ***"They were always hearing, but never understanding."*** I've personally spoken with people who AFTER being born again or coming to faith have said: *"How could I ever have missed it for so long? I heard those passages read 100 times, but I never understood it until... (last month or last year)."*

So what made the difference? Why did they all of a sudden have ears that truly heard what they'd never heard before? Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 2:9: ***"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" -- BUT God has revealed it to US through His Spirit."***

Or later on in that same chapter: ***"The man WITHOUT THE SPIRIT does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he CANNOT understand them because they are spiritually discerned."***

The ability to understand them, says Paul, comes to us from the Holy Spirit. ***"The man without the Spirit,"*** he says, ***"cannot accept or understand the things that come from the Spirit of God"*** -- including the things He reveals to us in the Bible / or the Gospel.

So, what has to happen before anyone can really "hear" (or understand) the truths of the Gospel? The Holy Spirit must "bless them" with eyes made able to see / and ears made able to hear! / God's Spirit must enter into them / and move upon their hearts and minds to enable them to grasp spiritual truth.

Because the natural man (who does not yet possess the Spirit) CANNOT yet understand nor accept them.

That's why we SO DESPERATELY NEED TO PRAY for the powerful moving / and the mighty working of the Holy Spirit / in the lives of people, before we EVER enter into the task of doing evangelism or sharing the Gospel with them! Because it's not enough for them to merely hear with their ears what we say.

The Holy Spirit must give them -- by His powerful moving upon their hearts and minds -- those ears that can truly hear and understand spiritual truth. If He does not, they will be as Jesus says, ***"ever hearing, but never understanding."***

Spurgeon, with his booming voice / and flawless use of the English language / and unequalled use of illustrations / and immensely convincing powers of reasoning / could say of his own preaching:

"Unless the Holy Spirit blesses the Word we who preach the gospel are of all men most miserable, for we have attempted a task that is impossible. We have entered on a sphere where nothing but the supernatural will ever avail. / If the Holy Spirit does not renew the hearts of our hearers, we cannot do it. If the Holy Spirit does not regenerate them, we cannot. If HE does not send the truth home into their souls, we might as well speak into the ear of a corpse."

Therefore he says: ***"It would be better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Spirit, than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit."***

You see, these Ephesian believers were included in Christ when they ***"heard the word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation."*** But as Paul and Jesus both make clear, their ability to hear came from the Holy Spirit.

If they understood it / and believed it / and were thus included in Christ / it was because the Holy Spirit shone His light into their dark souls / removed the veil that dimmed their understanding / and opened their eyes to see and their ears to hear / thus enabling their hearts to believe.

Meaning what? That even our coming to believe displays an act of God's grace through the Spirit. That's why the truth of our "inclusion in Christ" should cause praise and adoration to well up in our hearts for God. Because if it were not for the grace of the Holy Spirit moving upon our hearts and minds / and blessing us with "ears" that were able to hear / and minds that were given the ability to grasp and understand spiritual truths / we would NEVER have been able to do so.

And THAT show us very plainly why our inclusion in Christ should give us abundant reason to praise the glory of His grace.

Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing Paul tells us that should move our souls to praise His glory: Our sealing with the Holy Spirit. In v. 13b Paul says: ***"Having believed, you were also marked in Him with a SEAL, the promised Holy Spirit..."***

And here again in light of what Paul says about "believing," I need to STRESS that just because a person is chosen or predestined does NOT mean they don't need to hear and respond to the Gospel message in faith!

It is a cursed misunderstanding of these doctrines which causes people to say or think or suggest: That just because one is chosen or predestined to salvation -- it will happen anyway -- whether we preach the Gospel to them or not / or whether they believe it or not.

For as Paul assures us in II Thess. 2:13: ***"But we ought always thank God for you brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved, THROUGH the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth."***

"Faith," says Paul in Rom. 10:17, ***"comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** And he says that right in the middle of his lengthy 3 chapter discourse on election!

To be "saved," he says, one must "believe in the Lord Jesus." / And to believe the Lord Jesus they must hear the message about Him / And to hear the message about Him someone must go and preach to them!

That's why he was so determined to do evangelism and foreign missions. Because to be saved people must hear and believe the Gospel -- even if God has chosen and predestined them to be saved!

In fact, Paul makes its unmistakably clear in the passage from II Thess. 2:13: That they were, "***chosen to be saved***" -- not apart from believing, but quite clearly, "***THROUGH the sanctifying work of the Spirit and belief in the truth.***"

Therefore, to suggest that election and predestination do away with the need to do evangelism or missions (as some people have unfortunately suggested) is to completely misunderstand these two truths! For nothing could be further from the truth!

And LISTEN: Once people do believe to the saving of their souls, God graciously "*marks and seals them*" with the promised Holy Spirit.

And what does he mean when he says that the Holy Spirit "marks and seals" those who believe? In the days of the early church "seals" were used to ensure security. Hot wax was put on the back of valuable documents and then an official seal was pressed on it, assuring the recipient that if the seal was unbroken, the contents could be trusted.

Likewise, a "seal" was also used to show something was genuine and legally binding. In much the same way that the "seal" of a notary public is used to assure the authenticity and binding nature of a transaction.

And last, a "seal" was used to denote ownership. I knew a man who stamped the first page of every book he owned. There was an embossed imprint that said: "*This book belongs to the library of _____.*" It set them apart as belonging to him / or being his own personal property / in the chance that it was borrowed or misplaced.

And all three of those images represent what God does in the soul of any person the moment he or she truly "hears" and believes the message of the Gospel.

God declares us valuable enough to Him that He "seals" us in the same way that only important or valuable documents were sealed. / He sets us apart as being authentic and genuine believers -- people who have really and truly "heard" (and not just with physical ears) the Gospel message.

And most notably the "seal" denoted ownership. When one was sealed by the Holy Spirit (when the Spirit came to indwell or take up His residence within them) that was the proof positive that God had made them His own.

It's this aspect of sealing Paul specifically alludes to in II Cor. 1:22 where he says: ***"[God] set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts, as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."***

It's a point Paul makes equally clear in Rom. 8:9 where he says of the "Spirit of Christ" (which is essentially a synonym for the Holy Spirit): ***"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (or the Holy Spirit) they do not belong to Christ."***

It was such verses that led Gordon Fee to state: ***"The Spirit, and the Spirit alone, marks off the people of God as His own possession in this present eschatological age."***

Like us, they may have heard the Gospel superficially many times, but at one point they really heard it (through the enabling work of the Spirit) and truly believed, and were thus marked and sealed as God's possession by the Holy Spirit.

And what a privilege it is to become a body or temple in which the presence of our holy God has come to dwell. It's a gift every OT saint longed for! Because in the OT there was no permanent indwelling / or sealing with the Spirit. The Spirit came upon people (usually prophets, priests and kings) and empowered them for a certain task / for a certain period of time / and when the task was done, the Spirit was removed.

Yet in this age God has graciously chosen to bestow that unspeakable grace upon us, making us who believe (as Peter puts it), "partakers of the divine nature." And how we need to praise God for that wonderful gift.

And **LAST**, though all those other things are (in and of themselves) more than sufficient reason to adore God, we now come to the one thing which even more than they, should lead God's people to praise "the glory of His grace."

What is it? It's the fact that the possession of the Holy Spirit is a deposit (made in us) that **GUARANTEES** our inheritance until the redemption of those who are His possession."

And the key word here is "guarantees." In the Greek the word for 'guarantee' is 'arrabon.' (A word used in modern Greece for an engagement ring.) But in ancient times it signified a first installment, deposit or down payment that paid part of the purchase price for some item or service in advance and so secured a legal claim to it.

In fact, Barclay actually cites an antiquated Greek document where dancing girls were paid an "arrabon" (a portion of their pay in advance) as the guarantee that the remainder would be paid after they had performed.

And here's the beauty of the truth Paul shares in this verse. It is NOT US who is said to put down a deposit in the hopes of some day possibly securing our full inheritance.

It is GOD who puts it down on our behalf -- guaranteeing that in the future (after all whom Christ redeemed on the cross have been brought into the fold of God) -- we WILL (without any question) receive the full and promised inheritance.

And what is the inheritance of which the indwelling Spirit is the deposit (or down payment)? It is the promise of fully / perfectly / entirely / constantly / and eternally -- possessing God and be possessed by Him! If the partial deposit (down payment) is the Spirit's indwelling and sealing / then the full inheritance if the Spirit's complete, immeasurable and eternal fullness!

In this life we get "occasional foretastes of heaven" / because we get to experience / for limited times / on different occasions / the blessed fullness of the Holy Spirit's presence.

But those euphoric times of blessed, intimate, closeness and communion with God where we feel more alive than at any other time are little more than a taste of what will be our constant and eternally uninterrupted experience in heaven.

So, faith in Christ brings a sealing with the Holy Spirit / which invisibly marks us off as belonging to God / and GUARANTEES we will one day receive our full inheritance.

It's like the engagement ring that pledges the consummation of the marriage day / or the family ring (with the family crest or insignia) which a father gave to his sons as an assurance that one day (as family) they will get their full inheritance. No if's / or maybe's / or fear / or walking on egg shells / or habitual anxiety / or constant dread.

Which brings me to the mention of our little video clip we saw about the Muslim gentleman at the beginning of our service. Because there was a man who was terribly unsure and terribly insecure about his eternal destiny.

For as much as he did, he could never, ever, ever, know for sure (unless he died a martyr in some jihad-like venture) that he would saved.

And it's not just Islam. ANY RELIGION that bases one's salvation in works or makes ones salvation dependent on what ones does / or how well they do it / keeps its adherents from ever being able to KNOW FOR SURE if they're heaven-bound or hell-bound (regardless of how much, or how well, they do what they do).

And LISTEN: The same would be true of us as well if it weren't for ONE MAJOR DIFFERENCE -- that in Christ, GOD was the One who did all the good works required to save us / and He was also the One who made the deposit (the downpayment of His own Spirit into our soul) which guarantees we WILL receive our promised inheritance!

If we (like our Muslim friend) were the one's who had to do it, then we also (like him) would walk in fear and anxiety and the horror of never knowing -- no matter how much we did -- if we'd end up in heaven or hell.

Yet knowing that the gift of the Holy Spirit GUARANTEES our inheritance - should cause our hearts to overflow in praise to God! Better yet, if you really understood the grace God has conveyed on your soul by doing so (and the joy and rest of soul you gain as a result) then unlike our solemn Muslim friend -- you'd be dancing and singing in the aisles!

For unlike our Muslim friend, we need make no payments when it comes to securing a home in heaven. No mortgage payments / No withdrawals taken from the account of our labors each month to go toward the purchase price. / And thus no way we can default / come up short / be foreclosed upon / or ever have our inheritance taken away.

God sealed the deal Himself and thus our inheritance could not be any more unquestionably guaranteed than it already is!

So, in light of what Paul says in verse 14, let me ask you: As I've been sharing these truths has praise been welling up in your hearts toward God? / Is your spirit now singing and leaping with joy!

It should be! For as Paul tells us throughout this entire chapter / and here again in v. 14 / everything he has shared was meant to be, "to the praise of God's glory."