

God's Seal

Overview

Last week we explored men's pretensions in putting their seals on the tomb. God brushed those pretensions aside. But God has a seal as well. Men put their seals on letters and stones. God puts his seal on people. Let's consider three examples: our Lord, Paul, and us.

The Lord Jesus

In John 6, after our Lord feeds the 5000, the people seek him out. He criticizes their motives:

26-27 Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. 27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father **sealed**.

Their interest is misplaced. They care about food. They should have been preoccupied with what the food meant: that he came from the Father. He did not come to draw people's attention to himself, but to the Father, and he communicates this by saying that the Father has sealed him.

This sealing fits the four functions of sealing that we saw in our study of the tomb.

- **Identity:** the Lord Jesus was “signed” by the Father, to show that it was the Father who had sent him. The miracles were one way that God showed this (John 14:11; 20:30-31). But there is an earlier sign of his identity, attested by John the Baptist: the Holy Spirit (1:32-34 “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.”
- **Agreement:** the Father gave the Lord Jesus his message: Joh 12:49-50 “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50 ... whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” The Lord Jesus was like a living letter to us, sent from and sealed by the Father.
- **Authority:** the Son carries the full authority of the Father. Joh 5:23 “He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”
- **Protection:** Without the Father's permission, no one could touch the Lord Jesus.
 - He told the Jews (Joh 10:17-18), “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”
 - At the moment of his arrest, he told his disciples (Mat 26:53), “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”
 - When Pilate claimed (Joh 19:10) “I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release

God's Seal

thee,” the Lord responded (v. 11), “Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above.” He proved this by breaking Pilate's seal.

Believers

We concluded that Isa 8:16 is Messiah's request that the Father would seal the law in his disciples.

Isa 8:16, Bind up the testimony, seal the law among [in] my disciples.

The notion of securing the law in the believer is central to the new covenant. God promises (Jer 31:33), “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

Ezekiel tells us how God secures his word in the believer: by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Eze 36:27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Recall in our discussion of the Lord's sealing, the sign of the Spirit at his baptism.

Earlier covenants had distinctive signs or seals:¹

- the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:12-13 13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.)
- circumcision is the sign and seal of God's covenant with Abraham (Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised),
- the sabbath is the sign of the covenant of Sinai (Exod 31:13-17 16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant. 17 *It is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever).

The Spirit is the seal of the new covenant. The NT brings these ideas together when it tells us that we have been sealed by God, and the seal itself is the Holy Spirit. This theme appears in 2 Cor, and in Eph.

Paul's Sealing in 2 Cor 1:21-22

2Co 1:21-22 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; 22 Who hath also **sealed** us, and given the earnest of the **Spirit** in our hearts.

Paul is defending himself against adversaries in Corinth. He had urged the church to deal firmly with sin (1 Cor 5), and this decisive action had upset some people. There's a hint of this in 10:10,

For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.

Even in the first chapter, he is on the defensive. He had planned a second visit to them:

¹ The difference between “sign” and “seal” is interesting. The rainbow and the sabbath are signs but not seals, visible but not applied personally. Circumcision is both sign (visible) and seal (applied personally to each individual). The Spirit is a seal but is never called a sign.

God's Seal

1:15-16 And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; 16 And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea.

But he had not carried it out, and some accused him of being fickle or inconsistent:

17 When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

Ultimately, he explains the canceled visit at the end of the chapter:

1;23-2:1 to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. ... 2:1 ... I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.

But before that explanation, he offers a three-fold defense of his integrity.

First, he draws their attention to the Father's integrity.

1:18 But *as God is true*, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

God is true. He is not fickle. So, Paul insists, he cannot be fickle or inconsistent in his dealings.

Second, the Son is consistent.

19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. 20 For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

He did not waver in his mission to deliver God's salvation to his people.

“Fine,” Paul's adversaries might say. “We agree that the Father is consistent, and his Son is consistent. But that doesn't tell us anything about you.” But now Paul turns to the work of the Spirit.

21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; 22 Who hath also **sealed** us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Four participles describe what the consistent, unchanging God has done with Paul (and with the Corinthians). As the KJV accurately reflects, the first is in the present tense (“stablisheth”), while the other three are aorists (“hath anointed ... hath sealed ... given”).

The first one describes the overall process. “I am not fickle or changeable. I claim no credit for my steadfastness. God makes me, along with you, firm in Christ.” The preposition is actually εἰς “into,” reflecting their incorporation in the body of Christ. Because Paul is being made firm as a member of Christ, the steadfastness of Christ's ministry is characteristic of him as well.

The other three describe the foundation on which this establishment rests. Paul uses three metaphors.

- We have been anointed. “Anointed” is χριστας, from the same verb that lies behind Χριστον “Christ, the anointed one” two words earlier. Christ was anointed, and we share his anointing.
- We have been sealed.
- We have received the earnest of the Spirit. The “earnest” is a down payment, an initial promise of something to be delivered later. God has promised us a share in the age to come. To assure us

God's Seal

that we will receive this, he has given us an earnest, a down payment.

The last of these three is explicitly said to be the Spirit. The other two are naturally understood in the same way. “Anointing” is a common metaphor for the Spirit, and we will see in Ephesians that the Spirit is how God seals believers.

Paul's claim to sealing follows the four meanings of the symbol that we found earlier.

- **Identity:** the heart of his argument is that he is identified with the Father and the Son, and thus partakes of their steadfastness. This is the main use of the symbol in this context.
- **Agreement:** as “a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim 1:11; cf. 2:7), he wants to remind them that his message is not his own, but bears the seal of God.
- **Authority:** people were challenging his commands (as they still do today). But since he is sealed by the ultimate lawgiver, his instructions must not be ignored.
- **Protection:** Paul is confident that his adversaries will not defeat his ministry. God could break the seals of Rome and the Sanhedrin on the tomb; but nobody can break God's seal on Paul.

The Sealing of Believers in Eph 1 and Eph 4

Twice in Ephesians, Paul speaks of believers as having been sealed by the Spirit. As in 2 Cor 1, the context in both places emphasizes the work of the Spirit in the context of that of the Father and the Son.

Eph 1, Sealing and Salvation

Eph 1:3-14 is the longest sentence in the NT, with over 130 words. It has three parts, each with a refrain (vv. 6, 12, 14b) looking forward to “the praise of his glory.”

1. In 3-6, God elects us in Christ before the foundation of the earth.
2. In 7-12, Christ redeems us, which happened in the first century.
3. 13-14 describes the Spirit's ongoing work to assure us of our share in the promised inheritance.

Eph 1:13-14² In whom ye also, when ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also when 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.

The Father chose us, the Son redeemed us, and now the Spirit keeps us until we are reunited with him. The Spirit's role is depicted with two images that we saw in 2 Cor 1. He has sealed us, and he is the earnest, the down payment.

Eph 4, Sealing and Sanctification

The seal in Eph 1 explains the role of the Spirit in our salvation. The verbs are indicative. Paul is

² Omit the italicized “trusted” in 13; the two instances of “in whom” are parallel and both modify “were sealed.” Also, the aorist participles, modifying the aorist main verb, should be translated “when” rather than “after that.”

God's Seal

stating facts. In Eph 4, the context is imperative. Paul is instructing believers how they are to live. Again, he invokes the Father, Son, and Spirit.

- In 4:29-30, our speech is to be edifying, not corrupt, so that we do not grieve the **Spirit**, who has sealed us unto the day of redemption (recall 1:14 “until the redemption of the purchased possession”).
- In 4:31-32, we are to be kind and forgiving to one another, because the **Father** has forgiven us.
- In 5:1-2, we are to live in loving sacrifice toward one another, because the **Son** loved us and gave himself for us.

We bear the seal of the indwelling Spirit. Let the knowledge of his presence give us pause whenever we are tempted to sin. He protects us and guarantees our inheritance. Don't make his job difficult!

Again, we can relate the Spirit's sealing of the believer to the four meanings of the symbol. In Paul's case, identity was in the foreground. This time, protection is the main emphasis.

- **Protection:** The Spirit seals us “unto the day of redemption.” All the forces of hell cannot turn us away from the destiny that God has prepared for us. God broke the seals of Rome and the Sanhedrin to deliver his Son; nobody can break the seal that God has placed on us.
- **Identity:** It is by the Holy Spirit that we have been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).
- **Agreement:** The Scriptures compare us to letters from God to a watching world, signed by the Spirit: 2Co 3:3 “*ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” Thus we grieve the Spirit when our lives do not correspond with our message.
- **Authority:** Like our Lord, we speak God's word with authority. 1Co 2:13 “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”

Conclusion

Rome and the Jewish leaders sealed the tomb to assert their authority over Jesus. By breaking their seals, God announced his son as their king and their lord. God, not man, is sovereign over this world. His seal, not man's, will stand, and we who have believed are sealed by his Holy Spirit. The Spirit shows our identity with Christ, our agreement with his message, his authority in our lives, and the promise of his constant protection. Christ is risen, and we are risen with him.