

Person of the Holy Spirit, III

In our study of the Holy Spirit and His ministry, specifically His ministry of applying salvation to us, we saw that He joins us to Christ, gives us new life, regenerates us, converts us, gives us repentance and faith, and assures us of our adoption. If I had asked you what role the Holy Spirit plays in justification, you probably could not think of one. Do not feel bad, though, I could not either. I was actually surprised to learn that He is involved in justifying us. Yet it must be so according to 1 Corinthians 6:11, which talks about the wicked not inheriting the kingdom of God and then lists some of those wicked lifestyles that exclude people from salvation if they persist in those lifestyles. Paul writes, “And that is what some of you were.” The past tense is important there, and he continues by saying, “But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” All three of those activities—washing, sanctification, and justification—were done in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

We normally think of the Father as the justifier, as the One who declares us righteous. And that is correct. The Son’s role in justification in His saving work provides the basis of our justification. We are saved by faith, but faith, in a sense, does not save. Faith in wrong objects does not save. Mere believing does not save. But faith in Christ does certainly save. So the Father is the justifier. The Son’s work is the basis or ground of justification. This Scripture does not tell us what part the Spirit plays, but it does say we are justified by the Spirit of our God. I would argue again that it is in the role of conversion. The faith that we exercise is the product of God the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

The Spirit also applies salvation to us by sanctifying us. Second Thessalonians 2 combines a number of biblical perspectives and doctrines. It speaks of election, salvation, sanctification, and calling. Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, “But we ought always to 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 Spirit and through belief in the truth.” God brings His plans about. He fulfils them in time and space. He chose us to be saved and the means He ordained were the sanctifying work of the Spirit and belief in the truth.

The Bible speaks of three different aspects of sanctification: initial, progressive, and final. Which of those three do you think this might speak of in its context? All three are taught biblically, but I think initial sanctification is in mind here. Belief in the truth looks like belief in the Gospel, which is initial saving faith. Yet faith is progressive as well. We continue believing and we live by faith. We walk by faith, not by sight, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5. But faith initially saves us as well. And if Paul is speaking of initial saving faith in 2 Thessalonians, then it is most natural to take this sanctifying work of the Spirit as the initial or, as it is sometimes called, definitive work. It is the sanctifying work of the Spirit whereby He powerfully sets us apart unto God and holiness. The thought is that this initial sanctifying work of the Spirit results in our belief in the truth. At least, that is one possible way to put the two things together. Peter makes that point in 1 Peter 1:2. I just want to emphasize that the Spirit applies salvation to us in time and space in our lifetime and that application is spoken of in all these different wonderful ways. Each one corresponds to our need.

The Spirit also preserves us, which has to do with our next topic: the sealing ministry of God the Holy Spirit. We have talked enough about the Spirit as a person to give us a little background. He is a person and not merely a force and He is God the Holy Spirit, a divine person. The first thing we said when we talked about His ministries is the first thing that should be said. A primary ministry of God the Holy Spirit is to apply salvation to us. The salvation planned by the Father and accomplished by the Son is made real to us by God the Trinity, but especially by the Spirit of God. After He applies salvation to us, He continues to be involved in a ministry of preservation. His preserving work, His keeping work, is

spoken of in Ephesians 1:13-14: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” That is another one of those long Pauline sentences but it is marvelous in at least two ways. It speaks to the fact that the Spirit keeps us. God has sealed us with His Spirit, which is a way of saying that God keeps us. He has sealed us unto the day of redemption. There is also the notion of a deposit. The Spirit is the earnest, the down payment, the deposit of our heavenly inheritance. How good of God. He gives us a member of the Godhead. What a deposit that is. God Himself is our down payment. Surely God will come through with our final inheritance, with our redemption. I will develop that in a little bit. But these are at least seven ways that the Holy Spirit applies salvation to us.

Let us put the work of the Spirit into that broad framework we were working with before. God planned our salvation. Praise be to His name. He accomplished it. The Lord Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He brought His grace into our lives and He also will consummate our salvation in its fullest sense in the end. We have looked in a little detail at the Spirit’s ministry of applying salvation to us. If we went point by point and thought of our plight, our need—and how God has so graciously met our need—it is certainly a cause for a lifetime of thanksgiving to the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul speaks of final sanctification. The fact that sanctification is initial, progressive, and final, shows us how God’s salvation is holistic. It is of one piece. That is, those whom God initially sanctifies He progressively sanctifies. And those whom He progressively sanctifies, He finally sanctifies. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here is the teaching that we call entire sanctification. Notice the time dimension of it. It will happen when Jesus comes again. Notice who will do it. First Thessalonians 5:24 says, “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” The final sanctification is the work of God. Is that clear? There is a final dimension to sanctification. The initial dimension, seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, is where the sanctifying work of the Spirit is joined to belief in the truth.

There is also 1 Peter 1:1 where the whole Trinity is involved in our salvation. It says, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, strangers in the world [...] who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.” The sprinkling by His blood speaks of the forgiveness of sins. Obedience to Christ in the Bible usually speaks of ongoing Christian obedience but that is not so here. Another way of talking about initial saving faith is obedience. The Gospel is a command and Peter and Paul both use obedience as a synonym for faith. Peter, in 1 Peter 4:17, speaks of those who do not obey the Gospel of God. First Peter 3:1 speaks of wives being submissive to their husbands, even to those who do not “believe the word.” A more accurate translation of that phrase, however, would be “obey the word.” Obedience to Jesus Christ means initial obedience to Christ as presented in the Gospel. I know it is so because it says, “and sprinkling by his blood.” We believe the Gospel in order to be forgiven. So because the obedience to Christ speaks of saving obedience—evangelical obedience is another way to put it, or obedience to the Gospel with consequent forgiveness of sins and cleansing by Christ’s blood—I thus understand this sanctifying work of the Spirit to be initial or definitive. So we have initial, progressive, and final sanctification. Altogether it magnifies the grace of God in saving us from beginning to end. It gives us encouragement by the way that we will, one day, be totally sanctified. Can you imagine never having another sinful thought? I honestly cannot. But I can believe God for it. Praise God. One day it will come. In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul says, “Faithful is the one who saved us, who called us. He also will do it.”

Now we turn to the concept that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is another ministry of the Spirit. I have done some work on this and want to share it with you. I will cover sealing in the Old Testament, sealing in the New Testament, then a broader look at sealing of all types, and then specifically the sealing ministry of God the Holy Spirit. First is sealing in general in the Old Testament. Thousands of seals have been received from the ancient Near East. The word “seal” was used to denote the instrument of sealing. To refer to the design or inscription of the seal, that was the seal, too. To denote the imprint or the stamp made by the seal was also called a seal. There were two types of seals in the Old Testament. Cylinder seals were used early on. This is more primitive. They were rolled on clay and their design came out on the clay in early Old Testament times. The seal was pierced and worn with a cord around the neck. We have the embarrassing example of Judah and Tamar from Genesis 38:18. He gives her his seal as something like a down payment. Stamp seals on rings were common from the time of the kingship of the monarchy on. In Genesis 41:42 Pharaoh gives Joseph his ring that had his seal on it, the royal seal. Thus Joseph could act officially with the authority of the king with that seal. That is incredible power. We find these in other places, too, in the Old Testament.

The materials used for the instruments by the poor—and thus the more common seals since most people were poor—were limestone, terracotta, or bitumen. Agate, jasper, and rock crystal were most common among those who were not poor. Other hard semi-precious stones were also used. The kinds of designs or inscriptions that were used were patterns of men and animals. There were also inscriptions consisting of names, title, or the name and title of overlord.

Moving on from this thrilling background of seals is the use of seals in the Old Testament because the use of seals in the Old Testament might shed some light on the use of seals in the New Testament. Seals were used in two major ways. One was to show ownership and along with that came the idea of authority and another subset of ownership was authentication. Pharaoh gave Joseph the right of owning the king’s ring. With that went much authority, and also authentication. Joseph could show he was the genuine article when he issued a decree because he had the king’s ring. Jezebel, the wicked queen, had the godly Naboth killed because he would not give up his vineyard. She had Naboth killed by deceitfully using the king’s ring. The letters that went out from Jezebel carried Ahab’s authority because she used his ring. The idea of ownership carried by the rings indicated that the letters belonged to the king. They had royal authority and were regarded as authentic. They all hang together. We see the same thing in the books of Nehemiah, Esther, and Jeremiah.

A second use of seals in the Old Testament is for the purpose of security. In Daniel 6:17 the lion’s den was secured with the king’s seal upon it to make sure that nobody tampered with it. A passage in Ezekiel speaks of the four heads of Jews who were sealed to protect them from judgment. That image recurs in the book of Revelation. So the purposes of seals there were to show ownership—and all that goes with that—and also protection or security. That is a summary of the Old Testament background of seals.

What are the uses of seals in the New Testament? First we can take an overview of the words used. There is a noun, *sphragis* in Greek, meaning “seal,” which occurs frequently. Then there is a verb, “to seal,” which is *sphragizo* in Greek and is also common. Most of the uses of sealing in the New Testament are general and do not refer to the sealing of the Holy Spirit. I find the same two uses as in the Old Testament: to show ownership, authority, and authentication; and for security. Paul spoke of his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9:2: “Even though I may not be an apostle to others,”—he is speaking sarcastically here, fending off the accusations of his foes—“surely I am to you for you. You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” That is a figurative use of seal, but the meaning comes through. The fact that there is a believing church in Corinth, maybe a number of congregations, is an authentication of

Paul's ministry of apostleship. A well-known example is the seals on the foreheads of the 144,000 in Revelation 7. That shows ownership. These are the people who belong to God. It also overlaps with the idea of security because they are protected by God. When the death angel comes through, he is instructed not to harm those who have the Lord's seal on their foreheads. So seals in the New Testament, like seals in the Old Testament, also show security. Another example of this is from Matthew 27:65-66. First Pilate the Roman governor responds to the Jews' request that they make the tomb of Jesus secure, lest the disciples come and steal the body away, by saying, "'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." It does not mean they plastered the whole thing shut with cement, but in one area they applied some kind of a substance and then pressed the governor's ring into it in order to show that it belonged to the governor. It was a message that the tomb belonged to the governor and should be left alone, otherwise trouble would ensue. But mainly it was for security, as the text says it was to make the tomb secure. Ironically it serves as a proof of the resurrection of Christ. They made it secure so that no human could get by, but the Son of God could get out when He was raised by the power of God. Revelation 20:3 also refers to Satan being sealed in the abyss. It is a way of showing he is locked up and secure.

Now we are ready to move to the sealing ministry of God the Holy Spirit. There are only three passages that speak of this. In 2 Corinthians Paul is answering his enemies who accuse him of being a vacillating person and no apostle. Second Corinthians 1:21-22 says, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Notice that God "set His seal of ownership." There is that idea of ownership coming through in conjunction with anointing and also the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. So in this one text we see ownership and security.

Ephesians 1:13, which we looked at once already, says, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." Once again, the emphasis there seems to be security. Ephesians 4:30 says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." The context is sins of speech and anger, which especially grieve the Spirit. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Let me make some final observations from these texts before we conclude.

God the Father is the author of sealing. The Father is the sealer in that way. In the Ephesians 1 passage it says we were marked "in Him" with a seal. That refers to being in Christ. So once again we have the Trinity involved in sealing. The Father does the sealing. And we are sealed in union with God the Son. How else could it be? Every good thing God does for us is in union with Christ. And the actual seal is not wax but it is God the Holy Spirit Himself. God is so good to us. The Father is the author of the sealing. Those who are sealed have believed in Christ, or believed in the Gospel according to Ephesians 1. You were sealed with the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—they are all involved in the sealing of believers. God is so good.

You may never have even thought about this issue. It is a neglected teaching to be sure. It is not the most important thing the Bible says about the Lord and His salvation but it is one thing. It is as if we are a little child and it is Christmas day and there are all these packages under the tree and that is how it is when we are saved. The rest of our lives we open up the packages and we learn more and more of the grace of God. It is a big tree and there are many packages there. We are just scratching the surface.

What is the significance of God the Father sealing us with the Holy Spirit? Quite fittingly it is to show ownership, authority, and authentication, and to demonstrate security. Let me demonstrate with one passage for each. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Paul says, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand

firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” I must tell you a story of a dear brother who did missionary work in Haiti. He told of a witch doctor and the spiritual warfare that was going on in that country. He said a friend of his who did not believe in Christ was being told by the witch doctor about his power over people, which was considerable. That power was coming from the wrong source, you might understand, but there was real power there. The friend was impressed with the power, and when he saw a Christian walk by he said to the witch doctor, “What about that man? What power do you have over him?” The witch doctor, at least on that day, was an honest man. He said, “In him is the Spirit of God. We cannot touch him.” And this unsaved guy thought that sounded like even more power. In this case, the Lord used the wrath and evil of men to praise His own name and the witch doctor was able, somehow, to identify by the identification of spirits who belonged to the Lord. The Holy Spirit marked out that man as a believer in Christ and his ownership by the Lord.

If you are a Christian, remember Romans 8:9 says that the Spirit is the one who causes us to belong to the Lord. “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” The converse is true. If one does have the Spirit of Christ, he does belong to Christ. If you have the Spirit of God, you belong to the Son of God. The Spirit is the seal of God’s ownership of our lives. That gives me a feeling of great comfort to belong to God. It would be nice enough to belong to God just by Him saying it. But He gives His Spirit to seal that knowledge to us.

The Spirit also demonstrates our eternal security by God’s grace. Remember that Ephesians 1 says that we were sealed by the Holy Spirit “who is a deposit, guaranteeing our heavenly inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” Thank the Lord for His grace. Thank the Lord for His Spirit. We have done a brief survey of His person and some of His ministries. When we continue we will study the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Let us close our class in a word of prayer. Please pray along with me in your hearts.

Father, we thank You that You planned our salvation before the beginning of the world. Lord, we confess we do not understand everything about it, but we praise You for Your grace and we praise You for Your Son who loved us and gave Himself for us. And we praise You, Father, for the Spirit of God who applied salvation to us and who even now seals us for the day of redemption. Father, we thank You that we belong to You. We thank You for the way You protect us in the faith. Give us holy lives and lives of love that say thank You to You for Your wonderful grace in God the Holy Spirit. Through the Lord Jesus Christ we pray.