

EPH 1.13,14: THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

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“Nothing else can take the place of presence, not gifts, not telephone calls, not pictures, not mementos, nothing. Ask the person who has lost a lifelong mate what they miss the most; the answer is invariably ‘presence’. When we are unwell, we don’t need soothing words nearly as much as we need loved ones to be present. What makes shared life – games, walks, concerts, outings, and a myriad of other things – so pleasurable? Presence” (Gordon Fee, Paul, The Spirit & the People of God)

The Holy Spirit is God’s presence amongst.
It is through his Spirit that God dwells in the hearts of his people.
The Holy Spirit is not just a doctrine to be believed – he is also a person to be experienced. For he it is who satisfies our God-hunger.
He it is who brings us into the presence of God.

Over the next few Sundays we are going to look at the person of the Holy Spirit.
I have entitled the sermon series: *‘The Spirit has come: insights from Ephesians’*.
This morning I want us to look at the final section of Paul’s great paean of praise in Ephesians 1.13-14.

Let me read these two verses to you again: **“And you also (i.e. you Gentiles) became God’s people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his. Let us praise his glory”**.

Goodness, the very reading of these two verses uplifts stirs my soul.
I feel more like praising God, rather than preaching a sermon.
But preaching is the task you have called me to do – so let’s see what we can learn about God’s Spirit from this passage.

1. THE SPIRIT IS GOD’S GIFT TO ALL WHO BELIEVE

“You believed in Christ” – and the result was that God gave **“the Holy Spirit he had promised”** (v13).

Let’s get it absolutely clear: The Spirit is God’s gift to all who believe.
The Spirit isn’t an optional extra for the happy-clappies of this world.
The Spirit isn’t reserved for specially holy people.
The Spirit is God’s gift to all who believe.

Who believe what? Who believe in the Holy Spirit? No, who believe **“in Christ”**.
The gift of the Holy Spirit is not dependent upon hyping yourself up to believe in speaking with tongues or in some other activity of the Holy Spirit.
God gives his Spirit to those who put their faith in Christ.

“You believed in Christ”. What do Christians believe about Christ?

1. In the light of the opening chapter of Ephesians, we can say that in the first place Christians believe that in Jesus God has dealt with our past. Look at vv6-8: **“Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son! For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which he gave us in such large measure”**.

Yes, Christians believe that when Jesus died on the Cross, he dealt with the world’s sin. In a way which defies our understanding, he took upon himself your sin and mine, and experienced in his body the punishment that was due to you and me.

There on the Cross Jesus wiped the slate free for you and for me. As a result of the death of Jesus we have been set free from the consequences of our sin – we are forgiven. That’s what Christians believe when they believe in Jesus. They believe that when Jesus died, he died for them.

2. But there is another aspect of Christian believing.

For Christians believe that Jesus not only has dealt with the past – he has also secured the future. Listen to what Paul has to say in Eph 1.9,10:

“God made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as its head”.

What a fantastic statement! The day is coming when the powers of this world will be brought to heel – when Jesus will sit on the throne of the universe and justice and peace will be restored.

The future is not orange – as a certain telephone company once claimed – the future is Jesus.

“Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God’s glory” (Eph 1.12). The Good News is that God is going to put this world out of its misery – for as a result of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead a new world order is on its way. Yes, that’s what Christians believe when they believe in Jesus. They believe that when Jesus rose from the dead, he assumed the mantle of Lord of the universe.

“You believed in Christ”. Paul doesn’t say “you believe” – but **“you believed”**.

He uses the past tense to indicate that there was a particular moment in time when the people to whom he was writing put their faith in Christ.

Today we often talk about faith as a process: we speak about people being on a journey of faith. Most people today don’t become Christians as a result of a Damascus Road experience – but rather they gradually discover the truth of what Christ has done for them. Instead of calling people to come forward to the sinner’s bench at the front of the church, we invite them to join an Alpha course.

But at some stage, if we are to become Christ’s, we must cross the line & become his followers.

For many people baptism is the moment of crossing the line.

I sometimes compare the commitment made in baptism with the commitment made in the marriage ceremony. For marriage involves a process – over weeks, months, or even years love develops between a man and a woman – but then on the wedding day that love suddenly expresses itself in a commitment where there is to be no going back.

In the marriage ceremony a couple commit themselves to one another “*till death us do part*”.

Similarly in baptism we don’t just say we love Jesus – but we commit ourselves to Jesus forever.

“**You believed in Christ**”: whether in baptism or some other moment, says Paul, you gave yourself to Christ – and in return God gave his Spirit to us.

Believing in Jesus and receiving the Spirit are two sides of the coin.

One is not possible without the other.

When we put our faith in Jesus as the one who has dealt with our past and secured our future, God – here and now in the present – gives us his Spirit.

Do notice that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not, as some Pentecostals would have us believe, a second-stage experience. Paul is not saying: “You believed in Christ”, and then at a later point God gave his Spirit.

Rather the underlying Greek grammatical construction of this sentence clearly indicate that as we give ourselves to Christ, so he in turn gives his Spirit.

To repeat, believing in Jesus and receiving the Spirit are two sides of the same coin.

The Spirit is God’s gift to all who believe.

Paul goes on to use two metaphors to describe God’s gift of his Spirit.

2. THE SPIRIT IS GOD’S STAMP OF OWNERSHIP

“**You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised**”.

The same imagery is found elsewhere in Paul’s letters:

- In 2 Cor 1.22 we read: “**God has placed his mark of ownership upon us and given us the Holy Spirit...**”
- Again in Eph 4.30 Paul writes: “**The Spirit is God’s stamp of ownership**”

Literally, “**You were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit**” (NRSV).

In the ancient world a seal was a mark of belonging. Slaves, for instance, were branded with a mark to show that they belonged to their owner - just like today sheep or cattle are marked to show that they belong to their owner.

When my father-in-law was alive he used to print ‘*ex libris*’ stickers for me to put in my books. These stickers declared to those who borrowed my books – this book belongs to Paul B-M – it is from his library. The Spirit is God’s ‘*ex libris*’ sticker on our lives. We belong to him.

The question arises: what was this stamp? What was this seal?

Paul clearly has in mind something quite tangible.

Some people have claimed that Paul is here referring to baptism.

Baptism is God’s stamp of ownership – it is his seal.

Certainly, from the second century onwards baptism was sometimes referred to as ‘*the seal of the Spirit*’. Indeed, some years ago a learned tome on baptism was published with that very title.

It is true that there is no explicit reference to baptism here.

However, in the New Testament the receiving of the Spirit was often linked with baptism – so much that one could say that the reception of the Spirit and baptism in water were two sides of the same coin.

Yes, I know that just a moment ago I said that believing in Jesus and receiving the Spirit were two sides of the same coin. But that doesn't contradict my statement that being baptised and receiving the Spirit were two sides of the same coin, for in the New Testament baptism was faith in action.

In baptism believers surrendered their lives to Jesus, they publicly turned their lives over to him, and he in turn blessed them by sealing them with his Spirit, thereby stamping them with his mark of ownership.

This idea of 'ownership' is present in the words that we use when we baptise somebody: for when we baptise a person, we baptise them "**in the name of Jesus**", or "**in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**".

The phrase "in the name of" was a banking term – which meant "into the account of", "into the possession of".

When people are baptised they are baptised with a view to belonging to Jesus.

Baptism is the outward sign that we belong – the gift of the Spirit is the inward sign that we belong.

Maybe Paul also had in mind other tangible signs of the presence of God's Spirit.

- For instance, when we put our faith in Jesus, the Spirit is the one who makes God real to us. We know that we belong to God because the Spirit enables us to call God 'Abba Father'. So Paul writes in Rom 8.15.16: "**The Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father! My Father! God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are children of God**"
- In Eph 5 the gift of God's Spirit is marked by a new desire to praise God from the bottom of our hearts: "**Be filled with the Spirit... sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts**" (5.18-19).
- Or more generally, the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit are all signs of the Spirit's presence – all signs that we belong to God.

The Spirit is a sign that we belong to God.

3. THE SPIRIT IS GOD'S GUARANTEE OF MORE TO COME

"The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people" (v14)

We find similar language in 2 Cor 1.30: "**God has placed his mark of ownership upon us and...has given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the guarantee of all that he has in store for us**"

Eph 4.30: "**The Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free**"

The word translated as **guarantee**, *arrabon*, literally means "down-payment".

In the first century it was a commercial term used for a first instalment of money paid, and is often found in Gk legal documents of that period: e.g.

- a woman selling a cow received 1000 drachma as an "*arrabon*" that the rest of the price will be paid
- some dancing girls engaged for a village festival received an "*arrabon*" as a guarantee that the contract would be honoured & the money paid in full
- a man writes to his master that he has paid Lampon the mouse catcher an "*arrabon*" of 8 drachma, so that he will start & catch the mice while they are still young.

Interestingly, in modern Greek *arrabon* is the word for an engagement ring – which in turn is also a promise of more to come.

In some shops you'll see a sign: "*A 10% deposit secures any item*".

The idea is that people make a part-payment – and then the item is theirs, even if they haven't been able to pay everything straight-away.

Similarly the Spirit is God's part-payment – or rather his part-gift – the first instalment of all the good things God has in store for us.

Literally Paul writes that the Holy Spirit is the "**down-payment of our inheritance**".

The day is coming when as sons and daughters of God we are going to come into a massive endowment which God has in store for us – and in the meantime the Spirit is "**a pledge**" (NRSV) of that endowment.

Let me illustrate: three years ago, when my mother sold her five bed-roomed house and down-sized to a one-bedroomed flat, she decided to give some of the profit she had made to her family – that was an '*arrabon*', a pledge, a foretaste of more to come – provided, of course, she doesn't have to use up all her resources for personal care!

In what sense is the Spirit a "**guarantee**" or "**pledge**" of the life to come?

The Spirit acts as a guarantee or pledge in that he gives us a foretaste of heaven.

Yes, already in the here and now we can begin to know something of the life of heaven.

"The kingdom of God is... righteousness & peace & joy in the HS" (Rom 14.17

NRSV): i.e. already now we may know something of the peace and joy which comes from being right with God - and that is the work of God's Spirit in our lives.

God's Spirit not only makes God real in our lives, by the Spirit we already begin to share in the life of God.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives we begin to experience a new relationship with God – a relationship which will one day blossom into something even more wonderful

No wonder Paul ends this section by saying: "**Let us praise his glory**".

When we commit our lives to Jesus for his safekeeping, God gives his Spirit – he marks us with his stamp of ownership, as a guarantee of the life that is to come.

But to know the blessings of the Spirit, you must "believe in Christ".

As I bring this sermon to a conclusion, let me end with a challenge to each one of you: have you taken that step of faith?

Have you publicly surrendered your life to Jesus in the waters of baptism?

The fact is that God gives his Spirit only to those who give themselves to him