

The Seal On The Church



Pastor Joseph P. Sugrue

This seal was designed to represent the twofold nature of God's seal on the church in a direct and simplistic way. Our position in Christ, "the Lord knows those who are His," is represented by the cross and the coin in the mouth of the dove. Together they represent the love of God displayed on Cavalry by our Lord and Savior and His statement from that cross that "It is finished." All sin is paid for. The coin of the realm that has released the captives is the blood of Christ. He has redeemed us in full and all believers belong to Him. The second part of the seal, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness," is represented by the dove and the scroll. Together they depict the Holy Spirit who resides in every believer and the word of God that should reside mightily in every believer. God the Holy Spirit is our true Teacher who reveals the deep things of God that are written in His word, and only the things written in His word. The wisdom and power that come to the believer from the indwelling Spirit and residing word enable him to walk in a manner worthy of his calling, i.e. to live and experience who he really is in Christ while yet in this life before he is fully glorified with Christ in eternity. This is our depiction of God's seal upon His church and therefore on every believer. It cannot be taken away or rubbed off, no matter what or who may try, even ourselves. This firm foundation stands forever. This booklet has been written so that the believer may know that it is his birthright to take hold of the eternal life within him so as to walk in that eternal life in time, now, while he patiently awaits eternity.

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Introduction

In my study of 2Timothy chapter 2 I came across verse 19 and was struck by the fact that the seal mentioned in this verse actually has two parts.

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands [perfect tense: stands forever], having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

The conjunction "and" separates the two parts of the seal. The word "seal" in the Greek¹ is the word sphragis which is a seal or signet which is an emblem of ownership and security. It is much like our American seal which displays an eagle with outstretched wings, holding arrows in one talon and an olive branch in the other, depicting peace in the one and the willingness to go to war to defend that peace in the other. There are many subtle parts to this American seal, such as the Latin inscription "E pluribus unum" meaning "one from many," or one nation made up of many states unified. The seal that our Lord has made for His Church has two parts, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

At first glance the two parts of the seal might not seem related. The Lord knows His own is in the one part and a lifestyle abstaining from wickedness or what is really unrighteousness. Righteousness is what God would deem as right and good. Wickedness is the antithesis or opposite of that. These two parts are not unrelated, but very much related. One cannot live righteously unless he belongs to the Lord. If one does belong to the Lord he has every qualification to live righteously and if God is the only right One, the only One who actually knows for certain what is right and what is wrong, then a person must belong to Him in order to know what is righteous and to actually live it.

Why live righteously? Many have been brought up in some religious system or have at least known of religious systems who teach that we should live righteously in order to impress God. This is not the case. How could we impress the One who knows everything and has always known it. Nothing we do or fail to do shocks or surprises Him. If we rather look at righteousness from the viewpoint of what the Creator

knows to be right and good then we see that righteousness is the ultimate in prosperity. But before we think of prosperity in terms of money, materialism, fame, admiration, power over others, and whatever else most of the world deems prosperous, we must look to where real prosperity lies, in the soul.

All have heard of rich and powerful people who are miserable. We have all known of beautiful stars in the entertainment industry who have succumbed to terrible bouts with alcohol or drugs and have become miserable. Riches and power do not prevent the breaking up of a marriage or the hurt that such things put upon the children involved. Yet, let's not put the blame on money itself. It's just paper or numbers made by pixels on a computer screen. The Bible states that it is the "love" of money that is the root of all evil, not the money itself. One doesn't have to have money to love it. The problem is what we love. True prosperity is only found in the soul and true prosperity only comes from God who knows what is right and good and what is wrong and evil. Wrong and evil always damages the soul in the long run and if continued they will cause its destruction. Right and good from God always prospers the soul and that prosperity continues no matter what the circumstances may be in the person's life. He may be poor or rich, sick or healthy, in a wonderful marriage or single. Circumstances don't matter here, all that matters is that God's goodness and righteousness have set up a home in that person's soul. This is the legacy of the children of God and it is for now, in time, and we don't have to wait for eternity.

Yet here I have talked about the second part of the seal without talking about the first part. If you're going to have a legacy from God then you have to belong to Him. God saw fit to protect our free will and with that choice a person can reject God's offer of adoption into His family. Jesus Christ, God come in the flesh, is the key. Flat out, He has come into the world to save the world and this He did. But anyone can say no to that salvation. A drowning man can push the lifeguard away or he can take his hand. We're all drowning and Christ has extended His hand to each of us. I implore you to take it if you have not already.

The Gospel or Good News

How do we take His hand? The Bible is crystal clear on this issue. We believe in Him as Savior. That's it! There is nothing you can do to be saved. There is nothing you can do to gain entrance into God's family and kingdom. The fallen and guilty cannot absolve themselves from their guilt. Only the One qualified to judge can do so and while human judges can be lenient, God cannot. He is righteous and holy and sin must be judged. Now, He could have judged us, the human race, for our sin against Him and He would have had every right, but He decided on a different path. He Himself became a man, a true person, yet without sin, and He took upon Himself the sins of the world. The guilty were not judged. The innocent was judged in their stead.

All of us have been given a free will. We can chose many things when we have options. When it comes to the gospel of Christ this is no different. We can either say yes or no. We can believe in Christ as our Savior or we can reject His offer of salvation. If we reject the offer we instead believe something else about the man Jesus. He was a good man, maybe even a prophet. He had a lot of nice things to say, do unto others, and all that. He was a son of a carpenter from Galilee who gained a following not unlike other holy men, prophets, or visionaries. If we believe any of these things then we reject His offer of salvation and go it alone in the hope that in some other way we can deliver ourselves. Christ was God in the flesh. So many times, as recorded in the Gospels, He stated that He had come from the Father, had come from heaven, and had not come from the earth. He said He was the promised Messiah to Israel, God in the flesh, the Savior, and the only one qualified by which men can be saved. He is God and man and He has taken everyone's place of judgment on a Roman cross at Cavalry. God the Father judged Him instead of us and therefore, in Him there is salvation, from all sin and death.

To accept His offer of salvation anyone simply has to believe it. Is He who He said He was and did He do what He said He would do?

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, " I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

John 3:16-18" For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. " For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. " He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

John 12:44 "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

The result of believing in Him is that you become His forever. You become a child of God forever. You are given eternal life, you are entered into union with Christ, you are married to Him and a part of His body, forever. This is right and good and there is a life, beyond what you can think or imagine that comes from such goodness and righteousness and none of it depends on our ability, but rather our faith in it. Faith is a beautiful word since it nullifies all human talent and ability. Anyone can believe in Him and anyone can believe in what they are in Him once they accept Him.

If you are a believer, this seal is upon you. If you have not believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, I implore you to consider what I have said and to think about a seal that might be upon you right now. What would that seal read concerning you, who you are and what your purpose in life is? God is calling you. He is reaching out His hand right now. Grab it, be His and live.

The Church is Indestructible

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands [perfect tense: stands forever], having this seal, " The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

Though many false doctrines, heresies, cults, legalistic doctrines, etc. have invaded and hindered the church, which is made up of all believers in the world at any given time, the church has continued to go on and she will go on until Christ returns for her. It is amazing to think of all the attacks against Christ's church over the centuries, the public failures of its people of prominence, the revealed corruption for wealth and power by those entrusted with her message, and yet still she stands. This has nothing to do with believers and everything to do with God. God has set His seal upon the church, and to what God sets His mark, that cannot be destroyed. And, by the way, that seal is upon each individual believer in the church and so the same indestructibility applies.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, Paul described the Church as the pillar and support of the truth.

1Ti 3:14-15 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Christ and His disciples made a two day journey north of the Sea of Galilee and settled for a few days in a mostly Greek or Gentile town called Caesarea Philippi. It is a beautiful place, but likely more significantly, it was far from Jerusalem and even far enough from Galilee so that there was no influence of the Temple, a synagogue, priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, or scribes. And it was here, in a Gentile region, far away from the ways of the soon to be nullified, Law of Moses, that the first confession of the church was made by our Lord. He didn't give much detail, except to say that the church was indestructible.

Mat 16:13-18 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

The rock upon which the church was built was Christ, but Peter would be a pillar of that church as would be the other eleven apostles. And although the apostles had sin and failures and flaws as do every other member of the church, the gates of Hades (Hell) would never overpower her. "Ancient cities were surrounded by walls. In the gates by which they were entered were the principal places for holding courts, transacting business, and deliberating on public matters. The word "gates," therefore, is used for counsels, designs, machinations, evil purposes. "Hell" means, here, the place of departed spirits, particularly evil spirits; and the meaning of the passage is, that all the plots, stratagems, and machinations of the enemies of the church would not be able to overcome it a promise that has been remarkably fulfilled."² God has set His seal to the church and to every believer in the church and nothing can destroy them. Even in death the believer leaves the earth and immediately goes into the company of the Lord.

2 Cor 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord

Righteous as a gift or working to become righteous?

So then, in Christ, the believer has overcome death as well as sin and slavery to the world. How could the gates of Hades, which is the power of Satan and the kingdom of darkness that opposes God and His church, overcome such a victory in Christ? It cannot! And this gets to the heart of the seal upon us. We are His forever, the first part of the seal, and we are now qualified to walk in a righteous manner, the second part of the seal. Walking is used in the Bible of lifestyle. God never asked the believer to be sinless, but to have a manner or priority of having a life that pleases Him. We do not walk in such a way so as to become righteous, every believer is made righteous at the moment of salvation, but to walk in a manner that is worthy of the righteousness we are.

Rom 4:5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness

This is possible because Christ took our judgment on the cross and so satisfied the justice of God the Father. Now, anyone who believes in

Christ as their Savior is made perfectly holy and righteous at the moment they believe.

Rom 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

This is an astounding truth that will change your whole manner of life if you will let go of your old thinking that good things have to be earned and latch on to the wonderful truth of grace, that all good things have now been freely given by God. One's perspective can change life completely. If one is afraid of life he will have a much different experience in life from the one who has courage and an optimistic outlook of the future. If the believer knows the truth of his position in Christ, that he is righteous and justified forever before God, then he will walk as one who is already righteous and not as one trying to become righteous. Life is different for a person who is trying to earn a victory as opposed to one who knows he's already victorious in Christ. The latter produces a confidence, courage, and a humble awe of God because of the surpassing grace of His gifts.

Rom 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Loved by God

Every believer is loved by God just as much as He loves His Son Jesus Christ. This love cannot increase or decrease. It does not change no matter how much we change for the better or for the worse. God is immutable and when He sees you He sees His Son because you are in union with Christ. Every member of the church has this, and if that is true, and no one is more powerful than omnipotent God, then how could anything destroy the church?

1 Thess 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Rapture

Part of the mystery of the church is that Christ is going to return for the church and remove her from the world. This is often confused with the second coming of Christ, but the two events are different. In the Rapture the Lord will not actually return to the earth, but in the clouds of the air. At this event, which happens as quickly as the blinking of an eye, those dead and who are already in heaven will receive their permanent resurrection bodies and those who are alive on Earth will be immediately resurrected from wherever they are on earth and they will join the Lord and the resurrected dead in the air. This is found in two passages in the New Testament.

1 Cor 15:50-55 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

1 Thess 4:13-18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of

the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Now, if the Lord is going to return for the church it stands to reason that the church will survive until that time. So the seal stands the test of time. Nothing, not even the gates of Hades, will be able to overpower Christ's church. No matter how much apostasy infiltrates the church, there will always be a portion or a remnant of those who are revealing the true gospel and teaching the truth, and if you desire the truth, God will get it to you. And if in anything we have been mistaken, if we desire the truth, God will reveal our inaccuracies. The key is to humbly desire the truth, and not some form of knowledge that you hope will serve your personal agenda. God is not what people expect Him to be. This is clearly shown by the world's depiction of Him and their ideas about what the Bible contains. We must humbly submit ourselves to the truth of the word of God if we are going to take advantage of our qualification in Christ to walk in a righteous manner.

Col 1:25-27 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Phil 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [mature], have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

The Rapture is imminent, which means it could happen any day and at any time. There are no prophecies that need to be fulfilled before the Rapture occurs. Many have attempted to determine its date but all have failed. God has not told us the time for a very good reason and that is so that we will live one day at a time and not be troubled about tomorrow or anything in the future. We all have bad days. Sometimes we have truly terrible days, but during those times if we remember that our Lord could transfer us physically out of that mess in an instant, before the day is over, that wonderful truth enables us to not grow weary and lose heart. Day by day the church will survive, and there isn't a day when the believer is not sealed with God's perfect seal.

Matt 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

If the timing of the Rapture has been hidden from both angels and the humanity of Jesus, how much more so is it hidden from mankind in general. Live one day at a time. God's seal is upon you if you are a believer in Christ, and if you are not, consider Him who entered such hostility against Himself and took your place in judgment.

Acts 1:6-7 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.

The church is so secure that the Lord revealed that He would provide everything that she needed. No matter how much man messes things up, he cannot undo what God has done. That would simply make him more powerful than God and that is the ultimate in arrogant blasphemy. Too few believers have this understanding and so attitude. They fear and complain and are miserable because of something they think has or is defeating them. No opposition, no addiction, no amount of persecution, attacks or bad news can defeat God nor stop His purpose. The believer must come to know that he belongs to God and so cannot be defeated either. Sure he has failures but if he knew who he was in Christ he wouldn't let those failures get him down. He would pick himself up, dust himself off and continue to walk in the glory of His Lord and Sav-

ior. People have lifestyles of failure because they love to do the thing that makes them fail, pure and simple. A lot of people have hundreds of excuses for why they do what they do, but if they are honest with themselves, they simply love to do it more than not doing it. How can one change? Change what you love, or rather, change who you love. Come to know that you are sealed by God as a believer and you will begin to love Him more than anything else, especially yourself.

Matt 6:25-34 "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? "And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? "And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. "But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. "I and the Father are one."

Living one day at a time and knowing that you're victorious in Christ that day is a wonderful life. It's fun, purposeful, joyful, and substantial since the fruit of God's goodness is born in such a believer of faith and confidence. This believer sees the seal of God upon Him and knows that what God has entrusted to him, He will protect until the day that believer leaves this earth.

2 Tim 1:12 for I know with an absolute knowledge the One in whom I have permanently placed my trust, and have come to a settled persuasion that He is of power to guard that which has been committed as a trust to me [his Christian service] with reference to that day. [An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest copyright © 1961]

The Sealing Ministry of God the Holy Spirit

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands [perfect tense: stands forever], having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

The New Testament states that God the Holy Spirit sealed us at the moment of salvation, the moment we believed in Christ as our Savior. Seal is the Greek word sphragis which is a seal or signet which is an emblem of ownership and security. It is the type of seal that one would put on a contract or legal document to ensure its authenticity and that the party making up the contract was legally and personally bound to its conditions. At salvation God the Holy Spirit sealed a contract with each of us and in that contract, found in the word of God, we are said to be in union with Christ and co-heirs with Christ. This means that each believer is in Him forever and that he has been given the very inheritance of Christ. The inheritance is not divided up amongst all believers like a wealthy father might leave his many children, but in fact, each believer has the very inheritance of Christ - he is called a "fellow heir," (Rom 8:17; Eph 3:6).

Eph 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation —

having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

2 Cor 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Rom 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Eph 3:4-6 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Titus 3:5-8 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement;

As Paul writes in that last passage, this is a trustworthy statement, in other words, you can count on it! At salvation the Holy Spirit did several things to you. He called you, He baptized you into union with Christ, He regenerated you into a brand new creature, He indwelt you thus making you the holy temple of God, and He sealed you. None of these things are felt physically, nor are they in any way an emotional experience. Imagine if they were. Wouldn't we doubt it happened because we weren't sure if the feeling were "real?" Wouldn't we be confused as to what the true feeling was? Was it the same as what someone else said it was? Don't we all feel things slightly differently? God didn't leave the interpretation of salvation up to us, for we would surely distort it. He made it absolute and clear. If you have believed that Jesus Christ is your Savior through His death on the cross then it happened. You believed in Him by faith, so then believe what is said to happen to you at that moment by means of faith. This is a trustworthy statement. God put His own name on the contract with you as He did ages ago with Abraham.

Heb 6:13-14 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you."

A Guarantee of Blessing

The seal of the Spirit at salvation is a guarantee of blessing since it is the very inheritance of Christ. Just like 2Ti 2:9 states, there are two parts to the seal, a position in security and an opportunity in purity. Every believer has eternal life as well as all the blessings that come with a permanent relationship with God as the child of God. This is his position. The other part of this inheritance is what he is capable of as one who is now God's child, this is his opportunity. There is no secret catch, fine print, or requirement. Both are given as gifts, freely given. God has given gifts that if used properly will fill the believer's heart with joy and peace. The Christian does not earn the right to have God's joy and peace. He is given gifts that make for joy and peace within him. He does not require any special talents or upbringing or intelligence, he just simply needs to employ the gift in his life and the happiness of God and the tranquility of God's strength and love will encompass his soul. This is a gift.

Some gifts are given to us in life that are not very useful, like a knick-knack that might get put on a shelf and forgotten. But some gifts, like tools or kitchen gadgets, can be very useful. God has given us gifts that are useful, in other words, they are designed to be used. For example, God gave us His very own divine love and He intends us to use that love on ourselves and on one another. Christians are not forced by Him to use His gifts. Each has a free will that can resist the influence of his divine Father or to take full advantage of the many grace gifts that are given that comprise the inheritance of Christ. The promise in the word of God of the results unto the believer's own heart (the part of his soul, not the blood pump in his chest) and the influence he will have on others is beyond what he could have ever seen, heard, or imagined was possible, for with God, all things are possible.

Some of the gifts cannot increase or decrease and these are the part of the seal that is the believer's position. The believer cannot increase his status as a son of God any more than he can decrease it. The same is true of his status as the bride of Christ. He cannot get more or less of eternal life (infinite is infinite) nor can he be loved more or less than he is by God, 1 John 4:16. Yet his virtue (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; Gal 5:22-23) can increase or decrease depending on how he makes use of the opportunity part of the seal. The Bible is full of examples of God's people becoming more and less virtuous. The first king of Israel, Saul, was a virtuous man in his youth, until the temptation of power and wealth made him an evil man. Saul was given gifts by God and instead of making use of those gifts he instead turned to his own selfish desires, trying to employ God's gifts for that purpose. If we wish to enjoy the benefits of God's gifts we must employ them according to His desire, the true purpose of the gift, and not attempt to use them for something they are not intended for. This will only result in failure and instead of resultant virtue there will be pain.

Gal 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

Professional builders have many tools because they have learned over the years to use the right tool in the right way for the right job. Their reputation is on the line if they cannot build sound structures in a timely fashion. This requires personal skill and skill developed with proper tools. A builder does not hammer nails with a pair of pliers. In the same way, many of the gifts that God has given us require use and some skill in using the gifts in God's way. The love of God is a gift, but God's love is not to be confused with human romantic love. They are not the same. I might be able to get a nail driven into a piece of wood with my pliers but I cannot build a house with that method and neither will I fulfill God's grand plan for my life by using the gifts He has given me in a way that was never intended for them. The intent of every gift God has given you as a believer is revealed in the word of God. Study the word of God under a prepared pastor and in time the Holy Spirit will reveal to you every gift in the inheritance and how God intends for you to use those gifts. For example, God the Holy Spirit has been given to each believer as a gift to empower the believer, teach him and to guide him. Many people think the Spirit was given to them so they could speak in tongues or feel certain ecstatic emotions³, neither of which is true. If they are believers then they have the gift, the tool that is God the Holy Spirit, and they don't understand how this supreme gift desires to work through them in faith and not in emotion. God is sovereign and He is righteous. A gift must be used in the right way in order for it to function. If it doesn't function then the believer fails to realize his given opportunity to walk in righteousness in time and so fails to enjoy God's virtues in life. It begins with knowledge from the scripture and it becomes reality when the believer acts upon that knowledge through faith and dependence on God the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and empower him. We are not to just to learn of the gifts and not use them. If we don't use them and use them properly then when the problems of life come we will be overwhelmed by them.

Matt 7:24-27 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. "And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."

Yet no matter how fleshly⁴ a believer may become he is forever sealed by God the Holy Spirit. This means that if he is still alive there is always the opportunity to change his mind concerning God's gifts. This is the patience and longsuffering of God. He is not like man who loses patience quickly, if he has it at all. God is patient and desires all men to come to repentances and this without guilt or condemnation. The Corinthians, in spite of their many failings, are said to be sealed with the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 3:3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

2 Cor 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

God gave the Corinthians the warning and the promise through the apostle Paul so that they would change their minds concerning these gifts.

Grieving the Spirit

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

It is hard for us to imagine God being grieved, but under the proper circumstances sorrow is not sin. Christ wept over Jerusalem as He was grieved over the future of the city that was to be destroyed and many Israelites with it. We would not consider the Spirit to be depressed over a believer's life but we would surmise here that the word grieved is used to show us His desire to fulfill His ministry in and through the believer. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in the Church age is an important and extensive study.⁶ In brief, the believer is to depend by faith on the ministry of God the Holy Spirit within Him. His ministry within the believer is not an experience or an emotion but a reality through faith, just like salvation, and for the same reasons as stated earlier. He has been given the task of teaching the believer the truth, leading the believer to make good decisions with the truth, and empowering the believer to fulfill God's plan for his life. We are to trust Him to do this by faith. We know that we are trusting Him to do this when we are not trying to do things without Him. There are not procedures involved and no rituals to perform. As we believed in Christ for salvation we now believe in the Spirit to take us on the journey that is God's plan for our lives, Gal 5:16. That means that we don't try to fulfill our lives on our own; without Him. It means that we are cognizant of relying upon Him. We know we are cognizant of relying upon Him when we recognize the times that we grieve Him and we fight to stop grieving Him. You wouldn't strive to stop grieving the Holy Spirit if you didn't want Him to run the show in your life. He will teach only the word of God and He will guide us in good decisions based only on the truth of the word of God and He will empower us to do only God's will. He will not compromise these things because He is just as much God as God the Father and God the Son.⁷

What it means to grieve the Holy Spirit isn't hard to figure out from the context of Ephesians chapter 4. It is sin. Sin means to miss the mark or to go out of bounds. It shouldn't surprise a believer that God commands him not to sin. Yet it might surprise the believer that God reveals that He is aware that no believer will ever become sinless in this life.

1 John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Verses 8 and 10 state that we are liars if we say we are not born in sin, and that we make God a liar if we say that we are without personal sin. We have all been born into this world as fallen sinners, Rom 5:12, and for this reason we will continue to personally sin. As unbelievers we were hopelessly mastered by sin, being alone in the world and without God. If we became believers then we were set free from sin through the sacrifice of our Lord. Yet as believers, none of us, no matter how spiritual or mature we may become, will be free from sinning. As we mature the occurrence of sin will get more sporadic, but none the less, we are sinners until the day we die. The question is not whether we sin or not, i.e. whether we at times grieve the Spirit or not, but how do we view that decision to sin. Are we in agreement with God that what we chose to think has missed the mark of His righteousness and goodness, that it has gone out of bounds of that righteousness, or do we disagree with what God says is righteous while we pursue a life out of that boundary?

The Greek word for "confess" in verse 9 is *homologeō* which is a compound word made up of *homo*, "same" and *logeō* "to say" and so it means to say the same. In essence this is the believer's acknowledgment or confession that he agrees with God as to the sinfulness of his decision to sin. Sin always begins with thought before it becomes a sin of speech or an overt sin of action. What they all have in common is that they are not within the bounds of God's goodness and righteousness. So when I commit a sin, and all believers will, I acknowledge or confess before God my Father that I have sinned. If I agree with God as to wrongness of sin then would I desire to continue in the pattern of thinking that is sin? The answer would be no. However, the reality is that I will find it hard at times to break the current pattern of sin at any given time. And this is where the Lord Jesus Christ comes in as God the Son with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The first help They give is aimed at removing any guilt or self-condemnation.

The promise that follows, which is stated in many other places in the Bible, is that every believer is forgiven and cleansed in Christ Jesus, and from all unrighteousness, and this is true whether he acknowledges sin or not. Whether I agree with God that sin is sin or I disagree with Him and go my own way thinking my unrighteousness is just fine, I am forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness forever because of the first part of the seal, as a believer I'm forever a son of God, redeemed,

forgiven, and cleansed as one in union with Christ, that is my position.

Eph 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Col 1:13-14 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col 2:13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions

John 15:3 " You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We learn of our forgiveness and our position from the word of God. This shows us that we cannot fulfill the second part of the seal without the word of God. If we try to go about our Christian lives with ritual, religion, emotion, human philosophies or psychologies, then we will not know of God's gifts or how He intends us to use them. Once we have learned not to be guilty or condemned due to our failures, in the word of God we also learn the solutions to every conceivable kind of sin so that we can break its current pattern of holding our souls captive. It is the simplest rule of physics that two objects cannot occupy the same

space at the same time. We can never pursue a way that is opposed to God and pursue God's way at the same time. This is why it is imperative to stop grieving the Holy Spirit as soon as it is discovered. I think the best way to illustrate this is to pick an example of sin and apply the word of God to it. You can do this exercise with any sin provided you know enough of the scripture to finish it. If you don't know enough scripture there is a remedy for that. Find a prepared pastor and sit under his teaching.

Let's take fear as an example of sin. There is a fear that is not a sin which is a reverent awe of God and His power. But that legitimate fear is not being afraid. Being afraid of anything in life is a sin because it is a lack of trust in God and His promises.

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled

Rom 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Rom 14:23 whatever is not from faith is sin.

We are not to fear anything in life, not even death. God has richly blessed us in both life and death and so there is nothing to fear. Being afraid of enemies or opposition is to not trust God in what He has said and so this fear would fall under the category of sin, i.e. missing the mark. I like to choose fear as an example because it's so easy to recognize. Some sins are more subtle and take us a little time to see, but fear has an emotional response right from the ball of nerves in the solar plexus or neurons firing off like crazy in the brain, and usually both. Now if I'm in agreement with God that fear is a sin I acknowledge that and I know that I am forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness; no guilt, no condemnation. Perfect. Yet, if the situation that I fear remains and I go on in fear I'm still allowing sin to rule my soul. I'm still forgiven no matter how long it goes on, for if I weren't I wouldn't have eternal life, but if I want to take full advantage of the opportunity that God has gifted me, I must overcome my fear. I can never do this on my

own and if I think I can I'm lying to myself. I can only overcome fear through God's grace. What has God given that can solve my problem of fear? All gifts are listed in the word of God and faith in them will stop the current pattern of fear ruling my heart. This doesn't mean that it won't return at another time, but I am not to live in tomorrow's troubles, just today's.

Luke 12:4-7 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.

In this life changing verse both the fear that is sin and the fear that is virtuous are mentioned. Do not fear any man but instead fear God who has the power over life, death, and eternity. In the case of fear as a virtue, it is reverence of His power, respect of His sovereignty and goodness, and awe of His person. Look at the sparrows or pigeons, depending on where you live, God takes care of them, and since you're His son or daughter, are you not much more valuable?

Matt 6:33-34 " But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

David wrote:

Psalm 56:4 In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?

Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;

Yet in the Church we can say something that David couldn't, Thou art "in me." In the Church God indwells the believer so we can say that when we walk through a valley that is enshrouded in death, or at least it seems so, we fear no evil; for God indwells us forever. There are many more examples but I think this suffices to make the point. When I discover sin and so am grieving the Holy Spirit I acknowledge that is sin before the Father and I then apply the word of God to stop that current pattern of sin controlling my soul. And if I don't succeed immediately I keep at it, fighting the control of sin over my soul so that I may take full pleasure in the opportunity that God has given me through His gifts.

1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called

If I'm already forgiven and clean then why bother to fight the tendencies of sin?

However, if I go my own way, which in reality is to not agree with God as to what He deems righteous and what He deems sinful, in other words if my heart says that a life that is not in submission to His ways but in the pursuit of my own ways is just fine and right, then I'm not making use of the useful gifts He has given me. Like Saul who received the gift of kingship and then disobeyed the way in which God asked him to use that gracious promotion by feeding his own greed, I'm rejecting God's given opportunities when I reject the proper use of His gifts. This is the second part of the seal.

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands [perfect tense: stands forever], having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

If you name the name of the Lord, abstain from wickedness. The word of wickedness in the Greek is *adikia* which made up of the negative *a* with *dike* which means "right." It is therefore a condition of not being right. But who gets to pick what is right and what is not right of wicked? Left up to man this line of division between right and wrong moves quite a bit, but not with the Creator of all things. God is the only One

who is righteous by nature of His very existence. He is righteousness. He embodies righteousness in His own person and has done so and will do so for eternity. To abstain from wickedness is another way of saying that we choose to use God's gifts in God's way and so take full advantage of the opportunity that is given in the inheritance of Christ, in the second part of the seal.

As stated, we are liars if we say we are without sin or if we say we have not been born in sin. Realizing the fulfillment of the opportunity that God has given us through the sealing of God the Holy Spirit is not at all about sinlessness. All believers are sealed at the moment of salvation. The first part of the seal is our position as believers. We are in Christ and He is in us forever. This can never change and it cannot increase or decrease. The second part of the seal is what the new creature in Christ is given as an opportunity in time and the results of that opportunity which will go on forever. Through the useable gifts from God, every believer, regardless of background, can walk in the righteousness of God and thus glorify God. When we walk in God's righteousness we display His righteousness in our lives and thus also become a witness for God in time. Not everyone around us will recognize it for what it is, but a witness we will be none the less.

Eph 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Footnotes

1. the NT is written in Koine Greek or the common Greek of the first century
2. Barnes' Notes
3. There are several gifts from the Spirit that were given in the early Church in order to establish the Church that are no longer in existence today such as the gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, and tongues. These gifts ceased once the Church was established, 1Co 13:8
4. Fleshly is a term used in the Bible for a lifestyle of sin as opposed to isolated sin that the believer recovers from; see below
5. Greek metanoia - meta = change; noia = mind; thus to change one's mind
6. An extensive study of the ministry of God the Holy Spirit in the Church age can be found on my website www.cgtruth.org between the dates July 24 thru Nov 6, 2014.
7. God is One who is three in personality, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in no particular order who are co-equal and co-eternal. This is the Trinity .



Pastor Joseph Sugrue employs a scientific approach to the study of the word of God. Science is simply the natural born man's discovery of God's physical laws; doctrine is the born again man's discovery of God's spiritual laws. Our God is not a God of confusion, and Pastor Sugrue wishes to dispel any of that confusion from the tremendous grace that began God's plan for the Church Age. It is Pastor Sugrue's intent and desire to open the grace of God to every man that has been fooled into the lie that it doesn't exist.



GRACE AND TRUTH MINISTRIES
Pastor Joseph P Sugrue

1900 Hines S.E.
Salem, Oregon 97302

Website: www.cgtruth.org