

Christians, how do you know that you are saved? Because we know all of God's promises. We know that he's promised that he's going to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ. We know that he's promised that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. We know that he promises that heaven waits for those who trust in him. We know what he says. But how do you know that those promises belong to you? How do you know that you're included in them? How do you know that Jesus died for your sins? How do you know that you will not perish but have eternal life? How do you know that heaven waits for you? That might be the more difficult question to answer. But Paul tells us in our Epistle reading for today that we can know. We can know that we are saved because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is proof that we belong to God.

Because notice what Paul says here in verse 13 of our reading: "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." So in him, that is, in Christ, you also were sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the proof that you are in Christ, the proof that you belong to him.

But what does Paul mean exactly when he says that we are "sealed" with the Spirit? What is he trying to tell us? Sealing is a business term, because in those days they would take wax seals and use it to show that a document was legitimate. You would either use it to close the document, like wrapping it up and then sealing it shut, so that it would go to just the right person, the way that we might use an envelope today. Or they would use it as a way of stamping the document, to say that this is genuine, to say that this is what they want to do. So in that way, a seal shows that what is being sealed is real. It's what the person who sealed it wants to do.

But we don't use seals anymore. Yeah, sometimes you see them, like on wedding invitations. If they want it to look a little bit extra fancy, they might seal it shut with a wax seal. But we simply just don't use that in everyday life. But that doesn't mean that we don't have things that are similar. We have things like a signature, for example. If I sign my name to a document, I'm saying that this is what I intend to do, that I am now bound to whatever this document says. Or something like a notary stamp. If I have something notarized, it shows that it's real, that it's genuine, that I was there when I signed the document, and this other person can attest to it. In the same way, Christians, God put the Spirit on us as his signature. God signs his name on us through his Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's stamp to show that we indeed belong to Him.

But the purpose of this signature is to show that we do belong to him, that we are indeed heirs of the promise. Because think about how we use signatures on documents today. If I have a document that isn't signed, then it doesn't apply at all. It's not binding in any way. I could promise you anything in a document. I could promise you the moon! But if there's no signature on it, it's just paper. There's nothing to it. But when I do sign it, then it becomes legally binding. Now I've said that I'm going to do what it says for you, because I've put my name to it. In this case, Christians, we are the document. And God has promised us all of these things. He's promised us salvation. He's promised us heaven. And he signs his name with the Holy Spirit to show that all of these promises belong to you, to each one of you individually. By putting the Spirit upon you, God is saying this is what I'm going to do. This is what I will do for you, and I am bound by my own promise to do what I have said.

But when did God sign his name on you? That happened as we hear in verse 13 again: "When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him." In other words, it was when you first began to believe. That moment when you first came to faith was the moment that God signed his name upon you. Whether that was when you heard the Word and believed in God, or when you were baptized, God signed you with his Spirit. Because think about the words that we use at baptism, Christians. We say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I baptize you in the name. God is signing his name on you when he baptized you. He's saying: "This is what I intend to do." God made those promises to you and gave you the Spirit and sealed you in that moment. That, of course, wasn't your work. No one would come to faith apart from God. But God made you an heir of the promise. He said that "this is what I'm going to do for you." And he signs you with the Spirit, all out of his undeserved love and mercy for you.

But the Spirit is not just the signature of God, Christians. The Spirit is something much more. Because as Paul says in verse 14: "Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." The Spirit is the guarantee of what God is going to do. In fact, that word "guarantee" could be translated as something like a "down payment." The Spirit is the down payment of your salvation. God is putting his money down in the Spirit to show that he intends to make you his own. That is what we see happening with the Spirit. You could also translate this as the "earnest" of our salvation or the "earnest money" of our salvation. In other words, the money which the buyer gives to the seller as a way of saying that "I'm going to buy this. Don't sell it to anybody else. I want you to hold on to it for me. And here's what I give to you as proof of that." And so the Spirit, then, is the earnest of our salvation, the proof that God is going to buy us for himself, to pay the entire price of our salvation in his Son.

But the Spirit is more than this still, Christians. That's what's so wonderful about this. Because he's not just a deposit on us. You might think of him as like a security deposit. Just giving something as a way of saying that this is what I'm going to do. Like handing over your driver's license to show that I'm going to come back. Or even a security deposit on an apartment, something that I pay before I move in. The problem with looking at the Spirit in that way, Christians, is that the deposit is given back to you. When I go back, they give me back my driver's license. They're not going to keep it forever. Or when I move out of the apartment, I will get my security deposit back, as long as everything is in good shape. They're not going to keep it for themselves. That's just a way of saying that this is what's going to happen, but nothing more. But God doesn't give you the Spirit just to take him back again, Christians. No, the Spirit is something more.

The Spirit is part of your inheritance. He's part of the payment itself. The Spirit is a small part of what we will be when we are with God forever. In other words, the Spirit is a foretaste of heaven itself, a foretaste of what will be ours. So having the Spirit right now is a little bit of what we will have when we are in heaven with God forever. So whenever we are in the things of the Spirit, we are already experiencing something of heaven. When we gather for worship, on Sunday or Wednesday or whenever it may be, in the Spirit, that's a small foretaste of what heaven will be like, a small part of our inheritance in God. When we have joy and peace as Christians in the Spirit, that peace which the world cannot have, that's a small part of our inheritance, a small portion of what we will have in God forever. And when we love one another as Christ first loved

us in the Spirit, we are seeing a small part of what will be, a foretaste of heaven itself. Because the Spirit has been given to us, Christians, to make us more and more like God. And in that way, when we are in the Spirit, we are being prepared for heaven. Heaven is already yours when you have the Holy Spirit. And when we get into heaven, everything that we now have will be perfect, because the Spirit will make us perfectly like Jesus forever. And we know that this is true because God has given us the Holy Spirit.

So Christians, when you are struggling with knowing if you are indeed saved, look to the Holy Spirit, because he is God's guarantee. Look to the Spirit and see him at work within you, making you into something more and more like Jesus. Look to those times when the Spirit comes to you, in the Word, in the sacraments, in worship, in all of these things. Because in that way, Christians, you can know that you are indeed saved. You can know that you indeed belong to God. God signed his name on you when he gave you the Spirit. God gives you a part of what you will have in the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit himself testifies, tells us within that we are indeed the sons of God. When you are struggling with doubt, look to the Spirit, and he will cause you to know that you belong to God.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Spirit as the proof of our salvation. We pray that you would cause us always to look towards him so that we may know that we are indeed your children. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.