

Letter #13: Jerry's Letter against Al Kresta; Seal of the Holy Spirit

Dear Jerry:

I have had a change of heart since my last letter when I agreed to stop corresponding with you. I was made aware of a very unfortunate letter you have written to *Young River Ministries* and I thought it was appropriate to confront you on your intolerance toward Catholics, especially when they stand shoulder to shoulder with you in confronting the secular and pagan world. Actually Catholics have been confronting the Culture of Death long before you even knew there was such a thing.

Second, since you brought up the issue, I wanted to make a few comments on the term *seal* and *earnest* as they are used in Scripture and understood in theology, both their implications and limitations.

This letter is being sent to your office because it has come to my attention that your wife is refusing any mail from me by writing "*Refused*" on the envelope—trying to protect you from Catholic influence and argument. Since I am writing to you Jerry, and not necessarily to your wife, I will just send this and future correspondence to your office to save us all postage and hassle and to be sure you get the letters.

Young River Ministries is an evangelical Protestant ministry reaching out to young people in the Detroit area with the good news of Jesus Christ. They have been active in the Detroit area for many years and I was involved with them myself in the early '70's. They used to be known as *Youth for Christ*. They have recently renamed their organization *Young River Ministries*. They are attempting to be faithful to Jesus Christ not only in the work of salvation, but also in the work of being the salt of the earth. There is a very important aspect of Christianity, practiced and understood by Catholics throughout the centuries, and recently understood also by many Evangelicals, which is the need to apply Christ and His teachings to culture. Salt preserves, flavors and purifies. This is what the Church should do in society. We are also to be a light on a hill to shed light into the darkness.

Young River Ministries is attempting to take this ministry seriously. They have joined with other Christians and ministries in an attempt to be faithful to the call of Christ. Recently, as you know, they have teamed up with Al Kresta, the host of *Talk From the Heart* on WMUZ. They have agreed to put on a series of lectures addressing

the secularization of our culture and helping Christians understand and live for Christ in our increasingly pagan society.

The leaders of *Young River Ministries* have received *one* letter, and one letter only, warning them of the “evil influence” of “Al Kresta the Catholic”. The letter brought a chuckle to their throats and a smile to their faces. You see Jerry, these people know Al Kresta, and have known him for a long time. They know Al is a Catholic and that he does more for Christ and His Church in one day than most Fundamentalists do in a month of Sundays. They know Al is one of the few with the courage to confront our godless society with wit, knowledge, conviction and the Spirit of God. They were very supportive of Al and were prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder in case any Fundamentalists would attempt to disrupt the evening’s talk. Os Guinness even made a point of changing his talk to add many Catholic examples after hearing about your letter.

The general impression of your letter, and I tell you this so you can avoid embarrassing yourself in the future, was ridicule and disbelief. The question was bantered about concerning the seeming paranoia of the writer of the letter. Here is a *believer* who is stabbing another believer in the back even as he is attempting to serve God together in our pagan society. Jesus prayed that we all be one and that we work together and as one Christian brother is working with others in *Young River Ministries*, a supposed fellow believer writes a letter in an attempt to disrupt the united efforts of Christians to influence the world for the Savior. Several people used the term *evil* in regards to your letter. Disunity and the unjustly judging of a brother are not holy activities.

Jerry, you have repeatedly stated to me that you have nothing against Catholics, you are only trying to learn and understand. Why do you belie your real intentions with such a letter? Your hostile actions show your real disposition which again makes me wonder how honest you have been with me. Just like faith is shown by works, so are the real intentions of your heart shown by actions—and your actions seem to speak louder than your words. I think I have said enough on this matter but I am concerned for your soul, my friend, for not only have you left the Church to follow schisms, but now you work toward further disunity by trying to interfere with Christians who are united to serve God in a pagan culture. And, if you were so right in your assessment of the Catholic Church, you would have been more eloquent and convincing, but as it stands you have failed miserably to explain and defend your Fundamentalist tradition.

The Holy Spirit as Seal and Pledge

Second, I would like to comment on your conception of the words “*seal*” and “*pledge*” as used in Paul’s writings. In order to help us understand it better I will do a bit of homework for you concerning its wider usage and its place in Paul’s writings.

Circumcision a Seal

Let’s take a quick look at the word seal to assist us in understanding. The Greek word is **sfragis** and in Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol 7, page 939) it has a very interesting fifteen page history of the word from antiquity to the early centuries of the Church, keying in of course on the Old Testament and New Testament usages, especially Paul. Kittel says of Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30, “*The Spirit is a pledge of the inheritance and hence the seal by which believers are marked and appointed for redemption.*”

We know from Paul that circumcision was also a seal of God upon the Jews. Let’s all turn in our Bibles and read together Romans 4:11 “*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.*”¹ Here Paul is showing that justification is by faith and that Abraham was given a seal of that faith which was circumcision. All Jews were sealed with the sign of circumcision. Did the sign of circumcision guarantee eternal life to every Jew no matter how they related to God? Did the seal of circumcision, to which the new seal of the Holy Spirit is likened, absolutely guarantee, without a possibility of failure, the assurance of heaven? If you say it does, the burden of proof is on you.

“Seal” and “Pledge” as used by Paul

The context of Ephesians is the Church, made up of Jew and Gentile, with the barrier of the dividing wall broken down between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). The Gentiles had been “*without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.*” (Ephesians 2:12). Now the Gentiles have been accepted in the beloved and have, like the Jews been given the Holy Spirit. What an amazing thing for the “*dogs*”²

¹ Kittel says, “*The idea of seal offers many themes in interpretations of circumcision: that of the sign (Gen. 17:11), that of identity of designation; it also points to membership, it is a sign of ownership, and finally the idea of power and protection also plays a part.*”

² Matthew 15:26 “*But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*”

to be included in the promises of Israel, accepted into the Church, and able to receive the same seal as the chosen people of God, the Jews.

Notice how Paul uses the pronoun “we” (the Jews) as he writes verses 1:11 and 1:12. He then switches to the pronoun “you” where he begins to speak directly to the Gentiles, showing how they are now included in the redemption of God through Christ and into the Church. In context the reference to seal is to the Gentile people who had been brought into the Church.³ The Jews had been the only ones with a seal as God’s people, but now the Gentiles also had a seal that identified them as God’s people. The other flocks have been brought together to form one fold with one shepherd (Jn. 10:16). Why do you automatically assume an *either/or* stance that Paul is referring to individual people and not to the Church as a whole? As you read, try to picture Paul as speaking to the Church, or to the Gentiles as a whole.

Do we find anywhere in Scripture where the circumcised Jew was a “shoe-in” for heaven based upon their seal without obedience to God? Do we see anywhere in the New Testament where a person who is sealed by the Holy Spirit is automatically bound for heaven regardless of subsequent choices, morals or disobedience? Paul does not tell us the sealed person is bound for heaven absolutely. The Bible finds Paul nowhere saying, “*Once sealed with the Holy Spirit, the believer is bound for heaven. They can sin, curse God later in life, refuse to forgive their brother, openly deny Christ, and they will still make it to heaven. God will overlook it all and call them holy.*” I used to believe such a skewed doctrine, but I realized it was contrary to Scripture. Not only that but the Fundamentalist teaching is contrary to the teachings of Christ and His Apostles, contrary to all Christian teaching until Luther and contrary to the holiness of God and reason.

The word *seal* can be considered in two ways and it is important to discern between them. **First**, one can say that the seal is a set of handcuffs that attach us to God with no regard for our actions or choices later in life. All sins are forgiven past, present

³ Remember, Paul is not thinking of salvation strictly from an individualistic point of view. He is referring to a group of people, the Gentiles. He is referring to their inclusion in the Church. Protestants usually read everything in Scripture from a “*me and Jesus*” perspective when more often the writers of the New Testament are thinking “*Christ and the Church.*” Protestantism is an individualistic, egotistical religion, centering on the individual person. Catholics have a *both/and* approach realizing that the New Testament writers often are speaking of God in His relationship to groups: families, nations, tribes, the Church. He deals with individuals, but just as often deals with individuals as part of a covenant family. Remember also that the theme of Ephesians is the Church, whereas the sister epistle, Colossians has for its theme, Christ the Head. The Body (Ephesians) and the Head (Colossians).

and future.⁴ This is reading Fundamentalist tradition into the text. The Scriptures do not warrant this view as we will see shortly. The **second** view is that the seal is the “down payment” and is not fully assured and realized until the day of redemption when the “full and final payment” will be made⁵.

Lightfoot says of this passage, “*Nevertheless the present gift of the Spirit is only a small fraction of the future endowment. The idea also would be suggested by the usual relation between the earnest-money and the full payment. But the metaphor suggests, and doubtless was intended to suggest, another idea. The recipient of the earnest-money [the believer] not only secures to himself the fulfilment of the compact from the giver [God], but he pledges himself [the believer] to accomplish his side of the contract. By the very act of accepting the part payment, he has bound himself over to a certain reciprocation. The gift of the Spirit is not only a **privilege**, but also an **obligation** . . . The Spirit has, as it were, a lien upon us.*”⁶

In two separate passages where Paul uses the word “*seal*” (Eph. 1:13,14; 2 Cor. 1:22) he says it is given as a pledge (*arrabwn*) which means a down payment. The seal of the Holy Spirit is given as a *down payment*.⁷ This does not strike me as a verse on which to hang our Eternal Security hats. It is understood in terms of a “down payment,” and not necessarily as a full “guarantee.”⁸ A down payment is not the full payment; it is not a done deal. There is a big difference here.

⁴ Interesting words of Jesus spoken to His disciples, believers: “Matthew 18:32,35 “*Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* How does the seal apply here?”

⁵ According to Strong’s Greek Dictionary: 1) an earnest, 1a) money which in purchases is given as a pledge or down payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid

⁶ Notes On Epistles of St. Paul by J. B. Lightfoot (MI: Baker Book House, 1895, 1980, pg.324).

⁷ A very strong case can be made that *seal* applies to baptism. Many Protestant scholars believe that this is the context and meaning of Paul’s words. This is based upon Jesus’ baptism, His words in John 3, the teachings of the apostles, the correlation between circumcision and baptism, and the teaching of the early Church. I will not take the time to defend this position, since it is not the topic of the discussion.

⁸ Many Evangelical Protestant commentators say it is a guarantee of heaven. If they mean God will make sure He does His part to get us there, I can agree. But if they mean that a person is guaranteed heaven by a “one-time mental assent” to the Gospel regardless of future choices and holiness, I cannot agree. Those who believe the latter are reading their Fundamentalist presumptions into the text which is the practice of eisegesis.

The Holy Spirit's indwelling does not absolutely assure us of salvation (as a guarantee) but represents a deposit, the firstfruits if you will, of our future inheritance. God promises those without hope that they now have all the grace and enablement to make it to heaven. He supplies all the grace necessary through the indwelling Holy Spirit. But the man who drives the Holy Spirit from his life by purposeful mortal sin or apostasy has lost his down payment and cannot expect full payment at the last judgment, in fact he can expect quite the opposite. The One who pledges Himself to the believer promises to accomplish *His* side of the contract. God also expects men to keep their end of the contract. In other words there are two free moral agents in the transaction: God and us. He has done His part by giving us the down payment⁹ and he expects *us* to accomplish *our* side of the contract.

Notice if you will that Paul says the seal of the Holy Spirit is a down payment (**arrabwn**) *with a view* to the redemption. It is not a done deal. It is only a down payment and it is *toward* (with a view to) the redemption. Notice the words used: *toward* or *with a view to*.¹⁰ There is still a ways to go, and we need to obey God, take up our cross and follow Christ, forgive our brother, etc. We have not yet arrived. One can see this as an Eternal Security verse if they want, but not if they view it in Paul's overall theology in Ephesians. What do I mean? Let's look at what Paul says later in his letter to the Ephesians.

We see in Ephesians 1:13, 14 several words used together:

- **seal** or **pledge**,
- **Holy Spirit**
- **inheritance**

Where else in Scripture do we find these three terms used together? It is no surprise that they are used by Paul later in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The **Holy Spirit** is given as a **seal** or **pledge** (down payment) of our **inheritance**. Where else are these same three words used together in Ephesians? Look at Ephesians 4:30 - 5:5. "*And do not grieve the **Holy Spirit** of God, by whom you were **sealed** for the day of redemption.*" Paul then gives a list of things we should do and should not do. And then Paul

⁹ One way of seeing this is as follows: The Law made demands but no strength to obey the demands. The Spirit also makes demands, but He gives us the grace to obey. He has done His part and now we have to do our part by working out our salvation with fear and trembling. He is our down payment which enables us to accomplish our side of the contract.

¹⁰ The Greek preposition *eis*.

continues, “*But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know **with certainty**, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, **has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**”*

Wow! Is Paul speaking to unbelievers, pagans or infidels? No. He is speaking to the Ephesian believers and telling them they are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a pledge (down payment) toward the day of redemption and the inheritance. But then, as he gets past the theological portion of Ephesians¹¹ and into the moral section, he interprets his own earlier teaching and says that even though we have the pledge of the Holy Spirit, we will *not* gain the inheritance if we practice sin! Can you read it any other way and stay objective and honest with the text? The seal and down payment of the Holy Spirit cannot, even by the farthest stretch of the imagination, be equated to mean final redemption and heaven no-matter-what. You can read eternal security into these verses, but you do so to your own detriment and that of those you love. “*For this you know **with certainty**, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, **has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**”* Remember, this is a warning to *believers*, not a comment in passing about unbelievers.

The Protestant Principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture really does have some validity. We can see it here. How do we understand *seal* and *pledge* as used in Eph. 1:13, 14? Simply by seeing how Paul interprets his *own* teaching later in the same epistle. Paul interprets Paul. You are sealed with a pledge looking toward your inheritance, but if you practice sin and disobedience you will forfeit your inheritance, *with certainty!*

Romans 8 tells us with great passion that nothing can separate us from God. Paul goes through a litany of possible things that could separate us from God.

“Romans 8:35-39 “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor*

¹¹ Ephesians is divided into two large sections: theological (chap. 1-3) and moral/practical (chap. 4-6).

things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I always thought Paul was giving us a very complete list. I never realized until recently that it is *not* a complete list. There are several important elements left out. Do you see *sin* listed here? Do you see *disobedience* listed here? Why does Paul noticeably leave these items out of his list? Did he just forget? Or did he leave them out on purpose? It is quite obvious that sin kills! It destroys grace and sets one's soul at odds with God. Does Romans 6:23¹² apply to Christians? It is in the section of Romans dealing with the Christian life, right? Sin kills. It is deadly. The biblical definition of death is separation from God. The Catholic Church is the regal defender of Paul's doctrine. Sin is serious business. It can send one to hell. Eternal Security sounds so comforting but it is unbiblical and is an invention of the last few hundred years. I defy anyone to show the doctrine anywhere prior to the Protestant revolt. Even prominent theologians admit “faith alone” and “eternal security” are relatively new doctrines,¹³ reactionary doctrines. They were created not out of honest biblical study, but out of intense reaction against the Catholic Church. Again the teaching of the Catholic Church is right on and has been for 2,000 years.

So, one cannot honestly claim Romans 8 or Ephesians 1 as absolute guarantees of eternal bliss “no matter what.” Paul does not say so, in fact Paul contradicts the false doctrine of “faith only” and “eternal security” in Ephesians 4:30 - 5:5, not to mention a plethora of other passages, too many to address here. If one places their faith in their own skewed interpretation of the New Testament, based on received Fundamentalist tradition, not only are they jeopardizing their own eternal prospects, but they are also jeopardizing the eternal prospects of others by teaching false doctrine. “*It would be better to have a millstone . . .*” Not only that, but when one misinterprets Scripture, they display a poor ability to interpret Scripture with Scripture, and they read their own ideas into God's word and put words into Paul's mouth, missing the essence of everything he is trying to say.

¹² Romans 6:23 “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” This is speaking to the Christian readers and is embedded deeply in the passage of Romans dealing with the deeper aspects of the Christian life.

¹³ For one prominent example see the footnote in my paper [Crossing the Tiber](#).

I have said enough. I have mailed this to your brother's office because the mailman seems to get mixed up lately when I send the letters to your home. Keep in touch Jerry.

May the grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord be with you. In the Blood of the Lamb,

Steve Ray

PS. Here's a few verses for you to consider as well. Colossians 1:22 *"In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight, **if** ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister."*