

SESSION 10

Sealed

Ephesians 1 • 2 Corinthians 1 • Ephesians 4:30

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Participants learn what a seal meant in the ancient world, ownership, authentication, protection, permanence, and then find Paul applying exactly that word to ordinary Christians: "you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance." In the live discovery they find Ezekiel's vision of a mark set on the foreheads of the faithful before judgment falls, and in the steelman they face the strongest Protestant use of these very verses, eternal security, and answer it with the honesty it deserves. Tonight the study also pays its oldest debt: Session 2 ended with "you cannot seal the wind" left standing. Tonight the group learns that God says otherwise, and what His seal does and does not guarantee.

Catholic Touchstone

The symbolism of the seal marks the sacrament: a seal is a sign of personal authority and ownership, the mark by which soldiers were enrolled and documents authenticated; Christ himself is marked with the Father's seal, and the Father marks us with his in Christ (CCC 1295-1296). Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the character, which is why the sacrament can never be repeated (CCC 1304).

What You Need to Know

What a seal did. Teach four functions and let every text tonight land on one of them. Ownership: masters marked what belonged to them; soldiers of Rome were marked at enlistment, and the mark said whose army you were in for life. Authentication: a king pressed his signet into wax, and the document carried his own image and could not be forged. Protection: what bore the owner's seal was under the owner's guard, and tampering with it meant answering to him. Permanence: a seal pressed into wax or skin was made to last. The Greek word is *sphragis*. The word itself simply means a seal or mark; the four functions are what seals DID in that world, the associations Paul's first readers would carry, illustrative background rather than four dictionary definitions packed into one word.

Arrabon. Paul's other business word: the Spirit is given as the *arrabon* of our inheritance, a first installment, a down payment, the earnest money that binds the seller because part of the price has actually changed hands. Modern Greek still uses a form of the word for engagement and betrothal. The Spirit in a Christian's heart is not a promissory note about heaven; He is heaven's first installment, already paid in, guaranteeing the rest because the rest is of the same kind. This is the study's answer to what "guarantee" means: God binding Himself.

The debt from Session 2, and how to pay it. Nine weeks ago the steelman said: the Spirit departed from Saul; David begged "take not thy holy Spirit from me"; you cannot seal the wind. The answer then was that the Old Testament's revocable era was the setup for a promised abiding gift, and the question was held open. Tonight it closes: the prophets promised the Spirit within; the Spirit came to rest and remain at the Jordan; Pentecost distributed the resting; and Paul names what the recipients now carry:

a SEAL. The new gift is different in kind from what Saul lost, and "sealed" is the apostolic word for the difference. Name the debt out loud when Question 3 pays it.

The precision that keeps tonight honest. Hold two truths with equal grip, because the steelman will test both. First: the seal is truly permanent; the Church teaches that Baptism and Confirmation imprint an indelible character that no sin erases, which is why neither is ever repeated, and why a Catholic who leaves and returns is not re-confirmed. Second: the sealed can still grieve the Spirit, and Paul says so to the sealed themselves (Ephesians 4:30), in a letter that goes on to warn the sealed about sins that exclude from the kingdom. Permanent mark; resistible grace. St. Augustine's deserter, in tonight's Voices, is the image that holds both: the brand outlasts the desertion, which is exactly why the deserter can be recognized, and reconciled without re-branding.

For the parents in the room. The character doctrine lands pastorally on parents more than teens: a parent who drifted for twenty years and came back was never unmarked, and any parent grieving an older child who has left the practice of the faith should hear tonight, plainly, that the seal on that child has not come off. The Church leaves lights on for the marked. Do not force this application on anyone; leave it on the table where the people who need it can pick it up.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Ezekiel 9:3-6 (a mark set on the foreheads of those who grieve over evil, sparing them in judgment) is tonight's live discovery: the protective seal is older than Paul, and St. Jerome noted that the mark, the Hebrew letter tav, was written in the old script as a cross shape.
- Haggai 2:23 ("I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you"): God calls a chosen man His own signet ring, the intimate emblem of His choice; devotional readers have loved to extend the image to the pressing of the King's likeness into the world.
- Genesis 4:15 (the mark on Cain, protecting even the guilty from vengeance): the Bible's first mark is protective, and set on a sinner: in that story at least, God's mark guarded the very man who deserved it least.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (*against the Donatists, on the sacramental character*)

Arguing with the Donatists, who wanted returning apostates re-marked (see especially *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani* II), St. Augustine reached for the army: a soldier of Rome carried the military mark on his body, and if he deserted, the mark deserted with him; when he returned, he was received back, and no one branded him again, for the mark had never left. So it is, Augustine taught, with the seal of Christ: the character remains even in one who abandons the ranks. It does not save the deserter by itself, but it names him forever as one who belongs to the King's army, and it is why the Church receives the returning without ever repeating the seal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Ephesians*)

Preaching on "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (*Homilies on Ephesians*, on 1:13-14), St. John Chrysostom dwelt on the word *arrabon*, the first installment: God has not merely promised us our inheritance; He has given a part of it in advance, and the part pledges the whole. The certainty of

the Christian hope, on this reading, rests on a deposit already given, and the deposit is the Spirit Himself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* III, q. 72)

St. Thomas taught (*Summa Theologiae* III, q. 72, a. 5) that Confirmation imprints a character, an indelible spiritual mark, and he explained what the mark is for: it is a spiritual power deputing the Christian to profess the faith of Christ publicly, as it were by office. The image of household and front line is our application of his point, and it is faithful to it: what the mark makes you, in Thomas's account, is someone deputed to confess Christ before the world.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1295.** A seal is a symbol of a person: a sign of personal authority and ownership; soldiers were marked with their leader's seal, and documents authenticated by it.
- **CCC 1296.** The seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ and enrollment in his service for ever; Christ himself is marked with the Father's seal, and the Father has sealed us in him.
- **CCC 1304.** Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints a spiritual mark, an indelible character, on the soul; for this reason it is received only once.

Thread Watch

Debt payment, announced. When Question 3 lands, say the words: nine weeks ago we left an objection standing, "you cannot seal the wind," and tonight the apostle Paul answers it in writing. The group's trust in the study is built on watching it keep its promises; this is the biggest one so far.

Thread C: The Oil. The seal vocabulary tonight sits one step from chrism, and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 puts "anointed" and "sealed" in the same breath. Read it, let it ring, and connect nothing. When someone asks how exactly God seals a person, the honest answer is: hold that question with both hands; it is the last question of this study, and it gets answered in a church, not a classroom. Four more weeks.

Session Goals

1. Participants can name the four functions of an ancient seal and find each one in tonight's texts.
2. Participants can explain arrabon in their own words: a first installment of the same kind as the whole.
3. The Session 2 debt has been named and paid out loud.
4. The group has faced the eternal-security steelman at full strength and can state the Catholic both-and: indelible mark, resistible grace.
5. Each household leaves with the slow sign of the cross practice.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 1 (keep question 2), skip the Dig Deeper box on the Song of Songs, and present the steelman objection yourself in ninety seconds; tonight's steelman matters enormously in this part of the country, so shorten

it last. Never cut the four-functions teaching, the Ezekiel discovery, or the debt payment; those carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit. You are the seal of the living God: the mark of the Owner, the image of the King, the guard on the door, the first installment of everything promised. We are done being vague about what we carry. Show us tonight what it means to be Yours in writing. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win: Opening Questions

Parent and candidate pairs. Two minutes each question, then a few pairs share with the table.

1. What do you own that is marked with your name or initials, and why did you mark it?
2. Engagement rings, security deposits, pre-orders: when has a down payment made you certain of something that had not fully arrived yet?

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: The Word on the Document (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Households read Ephesians 1:3-14 at home, hunting for the word from the world of kings and contracts. Collect the hunt first: what word did people find, and what does Paul say it guarantees? Then have verses 13-14 read aloud.

Question 1. Before we touch Paul's sentence, build the background together. In a world without photo ID, passwords, or notaries, what jobs did a seal do? Think of a king's signet ring, a merchant's crate, a soldier's enlistment mark, an official letter. Build the list.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Four jobs, and get all four on paper. Ownership: the mark says whose this is; soldiers were marked at enlistment, and the mark said which king owned their service. Authentication: the signet pressed the king's own image into wax; the document was genuine because it carried his likeness, and forging a seal was a capital matter. Protection: a sealed crate, tomb, or letter was under the owner's guard; breaking a seal meant answering to whoever set it. Permanence: seals were pressed to last; wax hardens, brands stay. Now reread verse 13 with that world in view: "you... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." Paul names the sealing itself and its guarantee; the four ancient functions tell you what a sealed person in Ephesus would have HEARD in it, and the Church's teaching on the seal (CCC 1295-1296) unfolds the same associations. Owned by God, stamped with His image, under His guard, lastingly.

Question 2. Verse 14 adds the second business word: the Spirit is the GUARANTEE (*arrabon*) of our inheritance. An *arrabon* was earnest money: a first installment that binds the deal, and, note carefully, is a piece of the actual price, not a token. Modern Greek still uses a form of the word for engagement and betrothal. What is Paul claiming about the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life right now, before heaven?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

That the Christian is not living on an IOU. God has not merely promised the inheritance; He has paid the first installment into our hands, and the installment is of the same kind as the whole: the Spirit we have now is not a voucher for eternal life, He is eternal life, begun. An engagement gift is

not a certificate about a future marriage; it is gold in your hand now, and its weight is the argument. This is why Paul can be so certain: a God who has already given you His own Spirit has put too much of Himself into the deal to walk away from it. Whatever heaven is, the person with the Spirit has tasted the first course.

Question 3. Have someone read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 aloud: established, ANOINTED, SEALED, given the Spirit as guarantee. Now the moment nine weeks in the making. Session 2 ended with an objection we left standing: the Spirit departed from Saul, David begged not to lose Him, and "you cannot seal the wind." With everything from Isaiah 11 to the Jordan to Pentecost to tonight on the table: answer it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Walk the whole arc, and let the group supply the steps: the old covenant's conspicuous task-endowments truly were withdrawable, Saul above all, and we conceded it without flinching. But the prophets promised a gift different in kind: within you, not upon you. At the Jordan the Spirit descended and REMAINED, the verb the Baptist was told to watch for. At Pentecost the remaining was distributed, a flame resting on each. And now Paul, writing to ordinary believers, names what the recipients of the distributed gift carry: God "has put his SEAL upon us." Saul's task-endowment could lift away; the baptized carry a seal. And keep the Catholic precision razor-sharp here, because tonight's steelman will test it: the SEAL, the sacramental character, is indelible and never comes off; sanctifying grace, the life of God in the soul, can still be forfeited by mortal sin and restored in Confession. Mark permanent; communion losable; both true at once. The objection was right about its own era and wrong about ours: the whole point of the new covenant is that God did what the objection said could not be done. He sealed the wind, by giving the gift a permanent mark. Say it formally: the debt from Session 2 is paid. Then note what 2 Corinthians put next to "sealed": "anointed." Hold that pairing with both hands, and add nothing. It is the last question of this study.

Scene Two: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue and let the tables hunt. Allow three or four minutes; if they stall, tell them it is in a prophet the group has visited twice before, then that it is near his front.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. *"The city has gone rotten, and judgment is coming. But before it falls, a man clothed in linen with a writing case at his side is sent through the streets with one job: put a mark on the foreheads of everyone who sighs and groans over the evil around them. The destroyers who follow have one absolute order: touch no one who bears the mark. Find the man with the writing case."*

When found, have the discovering table read Ezekiel 9:3-6 aloud.

Question 4. Who gets the mark in this vision, what does the mark do, and, worth noticing, what had the marked people actually done to qualify? Then one detail for the ages: the "mark" is the Hebrew letter tav, and St. Jerome observed that in the ancient script of Ezekiel's own day, tav was written as a cross shape. Sit with that.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The marked are those who "sigh and groan over all the abominations" of the city: not the powerful, not the credentialed, just the people whose hearts have not made peace with the evil around them. The mark protects absolutely; the destroyers may touch no one who bears it. Notice the mercy of the standard: the qualification is not sinlessness but grief, a heart still soft enough to mourn what God mourns; the memory-verse practice of Session 4, naming the stone moments, was training for exactly this softness. And the tav: St. Jerome, commenting on Ezekiel, observed that in the old Hebrew script the letter tav was written in a cross-like shape, and marveled at the foreshadowing; the observation is his typological reading, not a claim the verse itself makes, and it is still worth a moment of quiet. Say no more than that.

The Push-Back: Sealed Means Saved, Forever, Period

Build the objection at full strength before answering it. Ask the group to make it as strong as they can with you; many of their neighbors and classmates hold it sincerely, from these exact verses.

The objection. Take tonight's texts at face value and they prove eternal security: once saved, always saved. You were sealed "for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30): the seal's expiration date is the end of the world. The Spirit is the GUARANTEE of your inheritance: and a guarantee that can fail is not a guarantee; a refundable deposit is no arrabon at all. If a truly sealed believer could be lost, then God's seal was broken, God's earnest money was forfeited, and God's guarantee bounced, which is blasphemy to suggest. So the sealed CANNOT be lost. And the strongest defenders add the counters before you can raise them: the warnings of Scripture, they say, are God's appointed MEANS of preserving His elect, fully compatible with certain perseverance; Ephesians 5's excluded immoral man describes the unregenerate professor, never the truly sealed; and Hebrews 6's fallen were enlightened tasters who had never truly been born again. The Catholic teaching that a confirmed Christian in mortal sin has lost sanctifying grace makes God's seal weaker than a notary's. Either the seal means what seals mean, or this whole night was poetry.

Question 5. This is the strongest Protestant use of tonight's own verses, and it deserves a real answer, not a dodge. Start with what must be conceded. Then read the second half of Ephesians 4:30's own sentence-world: what is the verse actually doing there, and what do Ephesians 5:5-6 and this study's own Hebrews 6 add?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Concede the assurance, fully and gladly: these texts teach real security on God's side. God will never break His own seal, never forfeit His own deposit, never abandon what He has marked; a Catholic who thinks God's grip is nervous has not read tonight's verses. But now look at what the sealing texts themselves do next. Ephesians 4:30 is not a trophy sentence; it is a COMMAND: "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed." The command is at minimum a real warning that the sealed can truly grieve the Spirit; the Reformed reply, that warnings are God's means of preserving the elect, is genuinely coherent and deserves saying, so do not pretend this one verse alone ends the debate. One chapter later, the same letter tells the same sealed readers that no immoral or impure man has any inheritance in the kingdom, and "let no one deceive you with empty words" (5:5-6): Paul evidently thought the sealed could be deceived about exactly this. And this study's own text, Hebrews 6:4-6, describes those who were enlightened, who became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and who fell away; the eternal-security readings of that passage exist and are serious, but "partakers of the Holy Spirit" is a strange thing to say of the never-regenerate, and the

Catholic reading takes the words at face value. So hold the Catholic both-and, which is the only reading that keeps every verse: the MARK is indelible; God's side never fails; the deserter, in Augustine's image, still carries the brand, which is why he is received back without re-sealing. But the brand does not march for him; grace can be grieved, resisted, and mortally refused by the free creature God insists on having. The seal guarantees that God will never let go; it does not anesthetize the hand that can. The honest remainder, named without embarrassment: how full assurance and real warning coexist is a mystery both traditions strain against, and the Church's word for living inside it is HOPE: certain of God, unpresuming about ourselves, confident like a child holding a faithful Father's hand over a cliff edge, which is certainty of exactly the right kind.

DIG DEEPER

Song of Songs 8:6. If time allows: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death." The Bible's love poetry reaches for the same word: to be sealed on someone is to be loved with a love that does not negotiate with death. That is the register in which God says "sealed" about you.

One Last Glimpse

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 aloud yourself, without introduction.

Paul writes: to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Say only this, and then stop: sealed is who you are. But the Sealer does not mark empty crates; the mark goes on cargo. What exactly is IN a person the Spirit has sealed, what came in the package? Next week we open it.

Send: Closing Questions

1. Owned, authenticated, protected, permanent: which of the seal's four meanings do you most need to be true about you right now, and why?
2. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit" is written to sealed people. What is one concrete way you suspect you have been grieving Him lately, and what would change this week if you stopped?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. Nearly everyone in this room was signed with the cross at Baptism, many before they could talk; adult converts chose the signing with open eyes, which is its own glory. This week, once a day, make the sign of the cross SLOWLY, all four points deliberate, and as you make it, think one sentence: "I am sealed: owned, real, guarded, and the mark does not come off." (The gesture recalls the seal; the indelible character itself comes by the sacraments.) Parent and candidate, make it together once a day, even in the driveway. The oldest gesture you know is about to mean what it always meant.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Father, You marked the mourners of Jerusalem before judgment fell, You set Your signet on the men You chose, and in Christ You have sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit, the first installment of everything You intend to give. We will not grieve the Guest You gave us. Guard what You have marked, and finish what You have begun. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

***"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."
(Ephesians 4:30)***

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 10, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Ephesians 1:3-14** (read at home this week; verses 13-14 aloud in session)
- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** (Build, Scene One: anointed, sealed, guaranteed; the debt payment)
- **Ezekiel 9:3-6** (Build, Scene Two: live discovery, the mark on the foreheads)
- **Ephesians 4:30** (Push-Back and memory verse: do not grieve the Spirit)
- **Ephesians 5:5-6; Hebrews 6:4-6** (Push-Back answer: warnings addressed to the sealed)
- **Song of Songs 8:6** (Dig Deeper: a seal upon your heart)
- **1 Corinthians 12:7** (One Last Glimpse: to each is given)

Catechism: CCC 1295, 1296, 1304 (and 1305 behind the Aquinas voice).

Voices: St. Augustine of Hippo (on the sacramental character, against the Donatists); St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Ephesians); St. Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologiae III, q. 72).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 10, one per household.