



SERMON VII.

The BELIEVER SEALED.



2 COR. i. 22.

*Who hath also sealed us, and given the
Earnest of the Spirit in our Hearts.*



HE Apostle having vindicated himself from the Charge of Lightness, or Inconstancy, in not coming to *Corinth*, as he designed, and of which he had given the Church an Intimation; takes an Occasion to mention that beautiful Consistency and Harmony which there is between the several Parts of the Gospel; the whole of which being every
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Way worthy of its glorious Author ; is wisely calculated to promote the best and noblest Purposes, whilst the Creature is stripped of all his Plumes of Pride, and laid in the Dust, and rich and sovereign Grace alone exalted, it is far from giving the least Encouragement to Sin ; but the Necessity of Holiness, as our Meetness for Heaven, equally asserted with the Importance of Christ's Righteousness, for our Justification and Acceptance in the Sight of God ; and though many and various were the Instruments who were employ'd in making known the glad Tidings of Salvation, they all agreed in determining to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified ; nor did they preach one Thing at one Time, and the contrary at another, or foolishly attempt to blend Extreams, and reconcile Inconsistencies ; but a proper Uniformity appeared through the whole of their Discourses, whilst they endeavoured to recommend themselves to God, and to every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God ; for the Truth of this, he appeals to their own Observation, who had enjoy'd the Blessing of his Ministry among them ; to which agreed the Doctrine that was preached by *Silvanus* and *Timotheus*, and all the rest of his Fellow-labourers : But lest any should charge this upon him as an Instance of Vanity and Ostentation, or mistake him, as if he judg'd himself sufficient for

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for these Things; he adds, *He that establisheth us with you, and hath anointed us, is God*; all our Abilities, as if he had said, for, and Steadiness and Faithfulness in the Discharge of our Duty, is owing to that Grace or Anointing, which we have received from God, from whom comes every good and every perfect Gift; and to this he subjoins the Words of our Text; *Who hath also sealed us, and given us the Earnest of the Spirit in our Hearts*: Not that we are to imagine this was a Privilege peculiar to the Apostles, or the first Preachers of the Gospel; for we find it affirmed of the Saints in common: Thus the Apostle writing to the Church at *Ephesus*, says, *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your Salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise*; and makes Use of this as an Argument to caution them against every Thing that might be ^a offensive or provoking to the Holy Spirit.

If it should be inquir'd by any, Whether the Apostle intends one and the same Thing by being sealed, and by having the Earnest of the Spirit in our Hearts? I humbly conceive, in the Main, he does; and that they may be, in a good Degree, exegetical, or explanatory one of the other: But as he is

^a Ephes. iv. 30.

pleased

pleased to make Use of this Variety, we may safely follow him in it; and accordingly shall,

- I. Consider the Privilege it self under this twofold Representation of *Sealing* and an *Earnest*.
- II. Endeavour to show you that it is the Work of God, and can be of no other.
- III. That it is a Blessing bestowed in a Way of meer Grace, said therefore to be *given* us. And,
- IV. Our Duty with respect to it, whether as unacquainted with, or as having the delightful Experience of it. We begin,

I. With the Privilege it self, represented by *Sealing* and an *Earnest*.

First, It is called by the Name of *Sealing*, which, in the Scripture Use of the Term, takes in the following Particulars:

1. Sometimes it denotes an Authority to execute a Commission of Moment and Importance: Thus the Credentials of Embassadors, the Instructions of Plenipotentiaries, and the Patents of chief Ministers, Judges, and great Officers of State, have usually the King's Seal affixed to them, signifying their being impowered by him, or their acting in his Name, and by his Authority: Thus *Abab's* Wife wrote Letters to the Elders and

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Nobles of the City of *Naboth*, and sealed them with the King's Seal^b. So *Haman* sealed the Letters, directed to the Governors of the Provinces, to destroy the *Jews*, and take the Spoil of them for a Prey^c. And this, I think, is evidently the Meaning of the Term, when our Lord applies it to himself; *Labour not for the Meat which perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life; which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed^d*; that is, as it is explained, the Father hath given him Power over all Flesh, that he should give eternal Life to as many as he gave him^e. Thus the Apostles were eminently sealed, or authorized and commanded by the great Redeemer, to bear Witness of him in *Judea*, and among the *Gentiles*; and the surprizing Gift of Tongues, the miraculous Power of healing Diseases, with the vast Success which attended their Ministry, was a manifest Attestation that they were the Servants of the most high God, sent to show unto Men the Way of Salvation; and, in a Sense, it is true of every Minister of the Gospel, who, having received the Grace of God himself, is called by Providence to preach the Mysteries of the Kingdom, that he has the Seal of Heaven, as it were, with him; for herein he acts by the Command

^b 1 Kings xxi. 8.
^e John xvii. 2.

^c Esth. iii. 12, 13.

^d John vi. 27.

of the great King and Law-giver of the Church; who tells us, All Power in Heaven and Earth was given unto him; and therefore commands his Ministers to go and preach the Gospel, and to teach all Nations.

And as every private Believer has a Work to do for God, whilst in this World, as far as he is enabled to keep close to the Rule of his Word, he has a Warrant from Heaven for the Performance of it; and where he is hinder'd, oppos'd, or despis'd in the Discharge of what God requires, the Affront ultimately terminates on him, who hath appointed his Servants to go and bring forth Fruit to his Honour and Glory.

2. Sealing, sometimes, denotes Secresy or Concealment. Thus we seal up Records, Writings, or Papers, which are not proper to be expos'd to open or common View: And thus the Church is compar'd to a *Garden enclosed, a Spring shut up, a Fountain sealed*^f; her Privileges are peculiar to her self; her Joys and Sorrows a Stranger intermeddeth not with; and in this Sense it may be said of every particular Believer, his Life is hid with Christ in God: God sees more in his People than the World can; he hears more from them than their Fellow-creatures are sensible of; and converses

^f Cant. iv. 12.

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graciously with them, whilst the rest of the World are Strangers to this delightful Fellowship. The Believer has much to do in the Closet by himself, in communing with his own Heart, when his Spirit makes diligent Search; he is frequently pouring out his Soul to God in Secret, where no Eye sees him but that of his heavenly Father; he has his Hopes and Fears, his Trials and Temptations, his Agonies and Conflicts, his Triumphs and Exultations, of which the Wicked and Ungodly are either wholly ignorant, or very incompetent Judges.

3. A Seal is used to distinguish one Thing from another: Thus a Merchant fixes his Seal on his Lot of Goods, and the Husbandman his Mark on his Cattle, to prevent Disputes about Property. Thus when the Apostle had mentioned *Hymeneus* and *Philetus*, as Apostates from the Truth, lest it should stumble the Weak; he adds, *Nevertheless, the Foundation of God stands sure; having this Seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his*^s; the whole Election of Grace have this Seal of God upon them; he knows each and every of them, as having enrolled their Names in the Lamb's Book of Life, and predestinated them in his unchangeable Purpose and Decree, to the Adoption of Children; this

^s 2 Tim. ii. 19.

may

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may be called God's secret Seal, which becomes visible when he stamps his own Image upon them in Regeneration, whereby they are distinguished from the Ungodly in the Possession of Grace, and marked out as designed for Glory ; and though this does not equally appear to themselves, or others, at all Times, Grace being sometimes at a low Ebb in the Soul ; yet it is always discerned by him, who knows his Image wherever he sees it.

4. It sometimes is expressive of our Regard to, and value for any Thing, as well as our Property in it. Thus we seal up Jewels and Treasure, and other valuable Commodities, and so many have understood that Request of the Church, *Set me as a Seal upon thine Heart, as a Seal upon thine Arm*^h ; alluding to the Custom of Persons in the Eastern Countries, who frequently wore the Pourtrait of an esteem'd Friend engraven on a Signet, or as a Picture near their Heart, or upon their Arm ; and what favours this Interpretation is, God's Promise to *Zerubbabel*, that he would make him as a Signetⁱ ; and his threatening *Coniah*, the Son of *Jeboiakim*, King of *Judah*, that though he ware a Signet on his right Hand, yet would he pluck him thence^k. And how exceedingly affectionate is that Answer

^h Cant. viii. 6.

ⁱ Hag. ii. 23.

^k Jer. xxii. 24.

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of the Lord to the Church's Complaint, that he had forsaken and forgotten her: *Can a Woman forget her sucking Child, that she should not have Compassion on the Son of her Womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee on the Palms of my Hands; thy Walls are continually before me.* And thus Aaron was an illustrious Type of Christ, when he went into the Holy of Holies, having the Names of the twelve Tribes on his Breast-Plate; to which answers our Lord's Intercession for his People in Heaven, where he ever appears in the Presence of God for them whom he regards as his Jewels, his choice Treasure and Inheritance, not one of which will he ever suffer to be lost.

5. The most common Use of a Seal, is to ratify Covenants, or confirm Deeds: Thus the Princes, Levites, and Priests, having wrote a Covenant, set their Seal unto it, in Confirmation of it ^m. And so we read, that he who receiveth the Testimony of Christ, *both set to his Seal, that God is true* ⁿ. And this, I apprehend to be the principal Meaning of the Term in the Text, denoting the Spirit's attesting, or bearing Witness with our Spirits, that we are Children, and so Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ; and this is sometimes more immediately, by some special

^l Isa. xlix. 16, 16.

^m Nehem. ix. 38.

ⁿ John iii. 33.

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Discovery of divine Love : Thus *David* says, *Thou hast put Gladness into my Heart*, when God lifted up the Light of his Countenance upon him °. Nor is it to be question'd but there are some glorious Seasons in which the Lord, the Spirit, as a Comforter, shines in upon the Understanding, enlarges the Affections, and having raised by his Power, satisfies their strong Desires with his Love ; when, in his Light, they see Light, and, comfortably beholding the Grace wherein they stand, rejoice with a Joy unspeakable and full of Glory : This is the most delightful Mercy that can be enjoy'd on this side Heaven, and is usually vouchsafed as a Preparative for some Trials, or great Temptations, or as a Cordial, to support the drooping Spirits of the fainting Saints, when his Heart is ready to be overwhelmed within him ; at other Times the Spirit is pleased to make Use of Means : Thus he enables the Soul to converse with the Promises ; and, whilst he is pondering on the Import and Meaning of them, he discovers to him the exceeding great and precious Things they contain, and enabling him to fasten on them, with some Degree of Propriety, he powerfully assures him, that God is faithful, who has promised, who also will do it ; and engages him, with Pleasure and Expectance,

° Psal. iv. 7.

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to wait for their Accomplishment: (But this will be more largely insisted on in the following Discourse.)

Thus, again, under the Preaching of the Gospel, or attending on Ordinances, especially that of the Lord's Supper, he is graciously pleased, sometimes, to seal his People unto the Day of Redemption. In the one they, sometimes, hear the Voice of the Son of God, saying, *Be of good Cheer, your Sins are forgiven*: In the other, they see the King in his Beauty, and he comes and sups with them, and they are admitted to sup with him with that Freedom and Intimacy, that they can say which the Church of old, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*; or, with the Apostle, *I know whom I have believed*; and, *he loved me, and gave himself for me*.

However, whether the Blessing be given more immediately, or in the Use of Means, it is always attended with the deepest Abasement, and the most humble Thoughts of our selves, as well as high and honourable Apprehensions of the Riches and Sovereignty of the Grace of God. We proceed,

Secondly, To consider the other Representation that we have of this Privilege as an Earnest; a Term used in Traffick or Commerce; when the Person agreeing for his Purchase, pays down a Part before hand, by which he binds the Bargain, and obliges himself

self to pay the Remainder on the Delivery of the Goods. Now, as an Earnest is a Part, and but a Part of what we design to give; and yet, how small a Part soever, obliges to the Performance; when we apply the Ideas to this Work of the Spirit, they may teach us,

1. That Communion with God here, is of the same Kind or Nature with the everlasting Fellowship we hope to enjoy with God hereafter; as the first Fruits were of the same Kind with the latter, so God sends his Spirit into the Hearts of his People, who, by his consolatory sealing Operations, is to acquaint them, in some Degree, what Heaven is before they come to it; for the Joy of the Christian in believing whilst here, differs rather in Degree than Kind, from that Fulness of Joy, and those Pleasures which will flow for ever at God's right Hand hereafter.

2. As it is a Part, so it is but a small Part, and not to be compared with that far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory and Happiness which he shall be possessed of when he comes to the full Injoyment of his Inheritance; and yet,

3. As inconsiderable a Part as it may seem to be, in the Experience of some, who but rarely enjoy it, and, at best, in a lower Degree, it is a certain Pledge of the Whole of that which is preserved for him in Reversion;

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tion ; for the Promise is most sure, being the Word of him who cannot lie ; that where God gives grace he will give Glory ; this he is not indeed obliged to from any other Necessity than that of his own sovereign Mercy, in ordaining them unto eternal Life ; nor have they the least Claim to it, otherways than as interested in the Merit of *his* Obedience and Sufferings ; who pray'd, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, to behold my Glory* ^v.

And it's worthy of our Notice, how the Blessings of Grace and Glory stand connected together in Scripture : The Account that our Lord gives of his Sheep is, that they were given to him of his Father, drawn to him by the attractive Power of Love, in Consequence of which they hear his Voice and follow him ; and that as he gave his Life for them, and has provided Pasture for them, and will be a Protection to them on Earth ; so they shall never perish, but inherit eternal Life ; and agreeable hereunto the Apostle observes, effectual Calling, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification, are linked together as so many glorious Privileges ; which, when any one of them is possessed now, shall be attended with the Injoyment of them all hereafter ; so that

^v John xvii. 24.

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God has not only bound himself by the two immutable Things, his Promise and his Oath; but the very Experience of his People, as to Holiness and Comfort, is a very safe Foundation for the Conclusion, that he who hath wrought them for this self same Inheritance, and given them some Foretastes of it, will, e'er long, abundantly answer their Expectations, by fulfilling all his In-
gagements. Which leads us,

II. To consider this sealing as the Work of God, and what can be effected by no other. It is applied to the Father, in the Text, as distinguished in Personality from the Spirit, whose Agency the Father is supposed to make Use of: In other Places of Scripture it is more eminently attributed to the Lord, the Spirit, and this with a great Deal of Consistency; since whatsoever is said to be done by each of the Three Persons in the Salvation of Man, may be considered as the Work of them all who are undivided in Nature, and in all their external Operations.

That none but God can seal the Saints, is evident from its being Heart-Work; none but he who made the Heart, has access to it; nor is it in the Power of Men or Angels to bind up the broken in Heart; all attempts this way prove unsuccessful, till God speaks Pardon and Peace in the Blood
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of his Son, and sheds abroad his Love in the Heart, by the Power of the Holy Ghost; Men may hope well concerning us, heartily desire our eternal Welfare, and, in a Judgment of Charity, conclude that our State is safe, and that God is reconciled unto us; but as none but God can forgive Sin, so he only can pronounce Absolution; so as to make the Bones, which Sin has broken, to rejoice: And it is very observable, that some Saints who have walked in Darkness, perhaps, for many Years, and received little Satisfaction concerning their own State, from the most judicious, spiritual Discourses of their sympathizing Friends, have been at once raised to a full Assurance of Faith, by the consolatory Witnessings of the Spirit with their Spirits, in a Way, and to a Degree altogether unthought of and unexpected, whilst they were writing bitter Things against themselves; and that this was more than a Fancy, or warm Imagination, has been evident in their great Humility and Heavenly-mindedness, Cheerfulness under Trouble, and Vigour in running the Paths of God's Commandments; and what can this be referred to, but to his Grace, who says to the Prisoners, *Go forth?* and who, as the God of all Consolation, scatters their Clouds, answers their Doubts, and causes them to rejoice and triumph in Christ Jesus: So that we may say with *Elihu*, *When he giveth Quiet-*

Quietness, who can make Trouble? and when he hideth his Face, who can behold him? whether it be done against a Nation, or a Man only^p?

III. The Blessing, where-ever bestowed, is given in a Way of mere Grace.

This appears from the Consideration of the Mercy it self; as it is the greatest Privilege on this side Glory, so the Person who is the Author of it, is absolutely independent, and above all possible Obligation, as well as from the Circumstances of the Party who is the Subject of it, a defiled, guilty, Hell deserving Sinner, with whom there is no Merit but of eternal Death; and from the different Degree of the Experience of it, which some Saints are favoured with above others, when they are in themselves equally without Claim or Title to it, as well as from the utter Impossibility of attaining it, when God is pleased sovereignly to withhold it: Nor can it be disputed, when all is of Mercy, undeserved Mercy, the Blessings of Providence, the Gift of Grace, and the Whole of our Christian Experience, that this, which is the chiefest Part of it, is owing to the mere Favour of the Sun of Righteousness, arising and shining upon the Soul with healing in his Wings: So that

^p Job xxiv. 29.

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with the Apostle, we may justly render *Thanks to God, who, at any Time, causeth us to triumph in Christ* ⁹. Which leads us,

IV. and *Lastly*, To consider the Duty of those who are either wholly unacquainted with it, or of such who have had the delightful Experience of it.

I. Of those who are, as yet, unacquainted with it ; and they are either Sinners, who live without God, and without Christ, and without Hope in the World ; these call loudly for our Pity, as Strangers to the pure, spiritual, refreshing, and entertaining Joys of the Christian ; What is all their Mirth, but Folly and Vanity ! their Laughter little better than Madness ; their Satisfactions, how empty, fading, and transitory ! how frequently interrupted by the Throws and Pangs of a guilty Conscience ! and how soon will they exchange them for the dreadful Agonies of that Worm that dieth not : Could they be persuaded to believe the Peace and Consolation which the Saints enjoy, how readily would they quit the vain and short lived Pleasures arising from Sense and Sin, for that Peace of Conscience, which the Believer, when sprinkled with the Blood of Jesus, has the comfortable Experience of. But besides these, there are others who are

⁹ 2 Cor. ii. 14.

truly gracious, who may not have arrived to the full Injoyment of the Blessing contained in the Text, they have a Hope, a good Hope through Grace, but accompanied with many Fears; to such as these it may be said,

(1.) That Assurance is not of the Essence of Faith; so that they are not presently to conclude, because they have not the same Degrees of Joy, holy Boldness, and spiritual Confidence towards God, that therefore they are not in the Family; for God has Children of various Ages, and different Stature, Babes as well as strong Men; and the good Shepherd has promised, that he will carry the Lambs in his Arms, as well as lead his Sheep into green Pastures, and beside the still Waters; he will not break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoking Flax, but bring forth Judgment unto Victory; nor does he despise the Day of small Things; it is one Thing to be a Child of God, and another to know it; the former is sufficient to ascertain our Happiness, the latter is the Foundation of our Triumph.

(2.) These are to be directed to bless God for the little they have, and importunately to plead, that in his own Time and Way he would lead them into more intimate Communion with himself and his Son, till they are comfortably sealed by the Spirit of Promise. Ingratitude for past Mercies may
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justly provoke God to withhold those which are future ; and a repining, fretful Frame, under lesser Attainments, is not likely to be owned with farther Communications : Remember, no Part of the Christian Experience can be called little, when we have deserved to be left in the State of fallen Angels ; and especially as Glory stands as much connected with Grace, though but as a Grain of Mustard-Seed, as it does with the richest Experiences, and the most exalted Joys, which have at any Time been found with the Redeemed of the Lord. And, would you find the Blessing ? seek it where it has usually been met with : The Christian who lives the most with God in private, bids the fairest for the Experience of it ; nor can you justly expect it, whilst your Hearts are too much in the World, and your Affections divided between Christ and other Objects ; it's little less than Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, to talk of being sealed by the Spirit, whilst pursuing the Paths of Sin ; if corrupt Communication proceeds out of your Mouths, if Bitterness, Wrath, Anger, Clamour, Evil-speaking, and Malice, attend you, the Spirit is grieved, and will suspend his consolatory Influences ; you may judge where he is most likely to Seal, or bear Witness in our Favour by the Fruits of the Spirit ; which are Love, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance,

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rance, where these Things are in you and abound, it will not be long before they shall be accompanied with Joy, another Fruit of the same Spirit, even that Joy which a Stranger intermeddleth not with.

(2.) Have we, at any Time, had the sweet Experience of this Mercy? Has God established our Faith, enlarged our Peace, raised our Hope, by the inward Witnessings of his own Spirit? How should we blush to think that we have valued the Mercy no more, and made so little an Improvement of it! What is the Meaning of that Carnality, Carelessness, Coldness, and Indifferency, which hath since overtaken us? How illy have we requited him? who, according to his Promise, when parting with his Disciples, hath sent the Comforter into our Hearts? May he not justly upbraid us with the most heinous and provoking Disingenuity, for our Omission of Duty, or the superficial Manner of its Performance, for our Treachery and Proneness to backslide; and say, Is this the Return which I have for loving you, and leaving my Father's Bosom, for living a Life of Poverty and Contempt, and dying the cursed Death of the Cross; and after I had gained you by the Power of my Arm, as well as redeemed you by the Price of my Blood, How have I spoke Peace to your troubled Consciences? What were your Engagements to me in the

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Morning of your Espoufals? And have I not sometimes taken you into the Secret of my Presence, and shown you my Covenant, and held you, for a Time, to the believing View of the Glories of the invisible World? and, after all, to offend, dishonour, and wound me! How unworthy! How disingenuous! Sin is an abominable Evil in God's Sight, where-ever he beholds it; but the Sins of his People have the additional Aggravation of being committed against the richest Displays of Grace; and for this God sometimes hides his Face; so that those who could once say, This God is our God, and will be so for ever and ever, are suffer'd to go mourning, and dejected with Sorrow, to their Graves.

And this should teach the Saint to whom to apply for this desirable Mercy, and where to render his Thanks for it: The Lord, the Spirit, is the Guide and Sanctifier, and Comforter of *Sion*; to whom should we go then, but to him, for Wisdom, Holiness, and Joy: And whilst we adore the Father for his Love, the Son for his Merit, we have equal Reason to give Glory to the Holy Ghost; who works all our Works in us, preparing us for, and giving us Foretastes of the heavenly Inheritance. And how should the comfortable Sense of our being Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ, under the Witnessings of this Spirit, reconcile us to all Afflictions

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fiCTIONS by the Way, and make us long to pass over *Jordan*, to take Possession of the promised Land; where our everlasting Doxology will be to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, Father, Son, and Spirit, be Glory, and Honour, and Praise, for ever. *Amen.*

