

Ephesians 1:13,14 & Romans 8:23

Ephesians 1:13 In (Christ), 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, ¹⁴ 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.

Romans 8:23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the **first fruits** of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

In both of the above passages, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as Jesus’ gift to all who entrust themselves to Him. In the Ephesians 1 passage, God gives His Spirit to all who hear the good news about Jesus and believe in it. In the Romans 8 passage, the “we” refers to all who belong to Jesus (see Romans 1:5-7). This accords with Jesus’ universal invitation:

John 7:37 . . . “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ But this (Jesus) spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive . . .

But why does Jesus give us the Holy Spirit? What role does the Holy Spirit play in Christians’ lives? The answer to this question is multi-faceted, but Paul provides us with a very helpful basic answer when he refers to the Spirit as “a pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14) and “the first fruits” (Romans 8:23). Both terms refer to something given in the present that serves as a guarantee of a greater future gift. A “pledge” is a down-payment, the first installment of a future full inheritance.



Likewise, “first-fruits” refer to the earliest ripened fruits or vegetables, which guarantee a far greater harvest later in the year. Both pledges and first-fruits are tangible possessions that can be spent or eaten. But their primary purpose is to assure the possessor of a much greater – but later – treasure or harvest.

By referring to the Holy Spirit as a “pledge” or “first-fruits,” Paul is explaining that the Spirit provides us with a tangible assurance of the kingdom that Jesus will usher in when He returns.

- Then, we will see Jesus and His Father face-to-face and know them as fully as is humanly possible (1 Corinthians 13:12). In the meantime, through the Spirit we can be personally assured of God’s love for us as His adopted children (Romans 8:15,16).
- Then, we will experience Jesus’ ability to totally defeat Satan and fully heal sin’s damaging effects on us (Revelation 21,22). In the meantime, through the Spirit we can experience substantial victory over Satan (Ephesians 6:10-13), and substantial healing from sin and its effects (Romans 8:4-14).
- Then, we will see Jesus’ full power displayed when He transforms nature so that it radiates His glory (Philippians 3:21). In the meantime, through the Spirit our characters can be transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18) and we can be empowered to be Jesus’ witnesses in a dark and broken world (Acts 1:8).

Christian theologians say that we live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” “Already,” through the Spirit we are experiencing the beginning of Jesus’ kingdom. But our full experience of His kingdom is “not yet” – not until His bodily return at the end of this age. Understanding this “already/not yet” enables us to live with hopeful realism. We are realistic about the present age’s evil and brokenness, but we are hopeful about what God can do because He has given us His Spirit as a down-payment/first fruits of His coming kingdom.



Put differently, understanding the Spirit's role as God's down-payment/first-fruits helps us to build healthy expectations about our Christian lives:

- On the one hand, we expect the Spirit to be at work in and through us in the ways described above. We are not Christian deists – people who mentally assent that God exists, but who do not expect Him to be personally and actively involved in our lives. Neither are we spiritually stagnant or complacent or cynical. Rather, we aspire to be habitually “full of the Spirit” – people who experience and demonstrate His love and redemptive power.
- On the other hand, we are not Christian triumphalists – people who expect to “have it all” spiritually in this life. Rather, we remember that the Spirit's work in this life will always be an anticipation of the perfection with God that we will experience only in the next life. Even as we experience the Spirit's powerful work in our lives, we will acknowledge that we are still deeply fallen people who live in a deeply fallen world. There will always be sin in our hearts that is yet unconquered. There will still be dark nights of the soul when God seems absent. There will still be sickness and death, when we lament and long for Jesus' return. As Paul says, “having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for . . . the redemption of our body.”

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving us Your Spirit the moment we believe in You as our Savior. Thank You that He enables us to experience Your love and power. Thank You that He gives us a solid confidence that You will return to usher in Your perfect kingdom. In the meantime, Lord, help us today to persevere by Your Spirit as we eagerly await Your return!

