

## Chapter 6 - The Sealing

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**Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.**

-Revelation 7:2-4

### Introduction to the Sealing

God showed the prophet John an interesting sight which he describes in Revelation 7. He saw an angel rising in the east who had the seal of God delaying the destruction of Earth. The angel from the east calls out to four angels who are about to harm Earth, **“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”** What does this vision mean? What is the seal of God? How does the sealing relate to the 144,000 and the salvation of man?

### The Carnal Nature

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** ( Matthew 5:8) These words are a promise. Yet, when I look around and also look within myself, I find an overwhelming amount of sin. Why is there so much degeneracy? When it comes to having a pure heart, all human beings have two problems. First, we come from the womb with a sinful nature.

Because of this, we are predisposed to rebel against authority from the moment of birth. Second, the devil understands our human predisposition toward sinning and the inherited traits that push us in that direction. Knowing this, he does everything he can to *entice* us into complete rebellion against God’s will and authority. All these factors make rebellion against God and His laws easy and submission to the will of God very difficult. In fact, *in our present state it is impossible to consistently submit to the will of God.*

When a person experiences the miracle of spiritual rebirth, God installs a second nature – a spiritual nature – that is antagonistic toward the sinful nature. As a result, every born again person lives in a continual “state of war” because these two natures are diametrically opposed. When asked about his born again experience, Martin Luther summarized the contest between these two natures by saying that even though the carnal nature remains, it does not reign.

No doubt his words were borrowed from his favorite Bible writer, the Apostle Paul. Paul reminded the Romans that the carnal nature does not have control over us *if* we allow the Holy Spirit to live in us. He wrote, **“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by**

**the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9)**

No writer in the Bible explains these two warring natures as well as the Apostle Paul. After Paul had been a born again Christian for about 25 years, he wrote, **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:16,18)**

Paul’s statement confirms the fact that after a person is born again he or she remains in a constant state of war between these two natures. Paul’s discovery about his carnal nature is something like the discovery of gravity by Sir Isaac Newton. For thousands of years no one thought it strange that objects fell in a downward direction because they had weight. Over the course of time, however, a new explanation was needed about the direction objects fall because man discovered that Earth was a large sphere spinning on its axis.

Then the question begged to be asked, why do objects fall in the direction of *down* on a rapidly spinning sphere when logic suggests they should fall in the opposite direction! Finally, the presence of gravity was discovered and Sir Isaac Newton was among the first to quantify the law of gravity. In a similar way, the Apostle Paul understood the presence of the carnal heart and he quantified the law of sin that operates upon it. Both the law of gravity and the law of sin are predictable and unchangeable.

The law of gravity and the law of sin also have one other similarity – both can be thwarted under the right circumstances. The law of gravity can be thwarted *if* a spaceship exceeds 17,000 miles per hour. At this speed, man can overcome the force of Earth’s gravity and escape this planet. Likewise, the law of sin can be overcome *if* a person chooses to obediently surrender his or her will to the Holy Spirit. In this situation, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit will enable a person to escape the control of sin.

What is the law of sin? It is a code of conduct, an inbred or inborn rebellion against authority. The law of sin has dominion over every fallen being. Paul understood that there is no escape from the law of sin except through faith in Christ. He wrote, **“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me . . . What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” (Romans 7:21,24,25)** Carefully consider the words of this reformed legalist: **“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” (Romans 7:20)**

So, this is the explanation. As hard as it may be for some of us to admit, we are sinful from within the core of our being and sooner or later our conduct will prove it!

**Somebody Help Me!**

Paul lamented the inescapable effects of the law of sin in his own life. He wrote, **“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”** (Romans 7:21) Paul's remarks in Romans 7 are very revealing because he once belonged to a religious body that believed sinlessness, purity and zeal for God were absolute mandates and Paul was as devoted to God as anyone could be. (Philippians 3:4-7) The Pharisees had meticulously defined impurity as a violation of any one of some 600 laws and Paul was zealous to observe every law. He summed up his life as a boastful Pharisee saying, **“. . . as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”** (Philippians 3:6)

Then, Paul met Jesus. Eventually he began to understand that the “righteousness” achieved by rigorous obedience and religious devotion cannot produce a pure heart. Religion had deceived Paul. As a Pharisee he was completely convinced that righteousness came through legalistic obedience – the avoidance of sin. But after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he saw how wretched and offensive he really was in God's sight. (Romans 7:24)

This remarkable change in his perspective occurred because he caught a glimpse of the righteousness that God requires and it changed everything. God requires a pure heart, but a *heart is not pure until it has absolutely no attraction for sin*. We may avoid sin, we may escape falling into certain temptations, but the avoidance of sin is not to be confused with a pure heart. When Paul met Jesus, the perfectionist discovered his imperfection. The arrogance of Saul the Pharisee was shattered. God transformed him, renamed him and called him into the service of His saints.

When a person experiences a complete “meltdown” over long held religious beliefs, psychologists call this a paradigm shift. A paradigm shift occurs when concepts believed to be true are proven to be totally false. A paradigm shift shakes us to the core of our being and is very emotionally disturbing. When Jesus spoke to Paul, Paul was devastated to learn that his “perfect” religious life was offensive and unacceptable to God.

After Paul realized that he could not make himself pure or acceptable before God by good works, Paul had nothing more to boast about. (God sure knows how to silence legalists.) When Paul saw that he had no righteousness in God's sight, he became a meek man. In this new state of mind, he became a mighty champion of the righteousness of Christ. He wrote, **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ ”** (Romans 1:17)

When Paul finally grasped the idea that salvation requires a righteousness that man cannot produce, only then did he realize his desperate need for Jesus.

## The Nature of Sin

Since the law of sin declares that human nature remains rebellious toward God, how can any person ever become pure in heart? It is impossible through human effort. Consequently, *the carnal nature is man's greatest problem*. Our carnal nature makes us rebellious and prevents us from having faith in God or obediently submitting to His commands. We are born with a “spring

loaded” carnal nature, ready to do wrong at an early age.

Children do not have to be taught to do wrong, and adults cannot achieve the purity of heart that God requires. Since Adam and Eve’s sin, the human race has been in trouble. Yet, a miracle happens every time a person experiences a rebirth. A miraculous change occurs within the heart. Whereas the carnal heart was full of rebellion, the born again heart becomes divided. Part of the heart wants to obey God and part of it wants to remain in rebellion against God. This tremendous struggle never ends. This is why Paul, as a mature Christian lamented, “. . . **For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.**” ( Romans 7:18) Do not despair – there is good news on two fronts!

Peter demonstrated that we can walk on water through the power of Christ. Paul wrote, “**For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**” ( Romans 8:13,14)

This is the key. The presence and work of the Spirit within the heart is crucial. He brings victory to all who live by faith. The victory which the Spirit brings is not man-made and is not merely the avoidance of sin. When the Spirit brings victory, rebellion is removed. When we become no longer attracted to a specific sin, then the heart has been set free from the law of sin in this area of life. Therefore, the heart is no longer under the dominion of sin! Sometimes, the Spirit will not give us victory where we want victory the most.

Instead, the Spirit may focus on other issues that need His attention first, but you can be sure that the purifying process for each person is always controlled by the Holy Spirit. If a person is not gaining victory over sin as he or she wants, it could be the Spirit is wanting control over another aspect of this person’s life first. This requires patience and perseverance. James says, “**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**” ( James 1:2-4)

On the second front, good news comes in the assurance of forgiveness as we admit and confess our sin. John wrote, “**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**” ( 1 John 2:1)

## Can We Become Pure?

Is it possible to have a pure heart if we want one? The answer is a resounding “Yes!” But the means and timing of this event may not be what you think. A number of views exist within the Christian community about the topic of purity. At one extreme, people believe that a pure heart comes through an exhaustive struggle with self and take the responsibility for purity upon themselves. They do everything they can to shut out all worldly influences, hoping to avoid

corruption.

These people often succumb to the temptation of being legalistic about God's definition of righteousness. The concept of isolation from sin contributed to the early formation of monasteries and stems from the idea that man is inclined to be evil. Therefore, in order to be pure, a person must be physically separated from worldly influences. (The truth is, humanity is inclined to do evil because we have a carnal nature. Wherever a person goes, sin is there, for sin is within each person's heart!)

On the other hand, some people believe that a pure heart is not possible or necessary since Jesus paid the price on Calvary for man's salvation. Such Christians shudder at the thought of self-denial or dealing with a cross to bear. Unfortunately, these Christians often succumb to spiritual complacency. They think they are insulated from the penalty and properties of sin by religious rituals, rites and services. But none of this is true. Like the law of gravity, there is only *one way* to escape the relentless control of the law of sin. His name is Jesus – He is the Way!

No doubt our personalities, religious heritage, culture, and family traditions color our understanding on this fundamental subject. There is no purity in isolation because the carnal nature is within and there is no righteousness in religious rituals, rites or services because the carnal nature is ever present. So, what is a person to do? Before answering this question, let us level the playing field for everyone.

## **A Christian Handicap**

There is a serious handicap that can occur among those people who grow up in a Christian home. Let us suppose "Johnny" was born into a Christian home and taught to avoid certain bad habits such as gambling, drugs, smoking, drinking and pornography. Somehow, Johnny becomes an adult without getting hooked on sex, drugs, cigarettes and alcohol. Since Johnny knows nothing about drug addiction or alcohol dependency in his own body, he may conclude that he is purer than "those poor souls captured by these sinful habits." *This is not true.*

Johnny still has a carnal nature just like every prostitute and addict. Johnny was fortunate to avoid the prison of addiction and the subsequent consequences because of his good fortune (a Christian home). Johnny cannot understand the power of addiction because he has not been a slave to lust, drugs or alcohol.

But, and this is an emphatic *but*, Johnny's nature is no different from that of the worst sinner. His lifestyle may be different, but his carnal nature is the same. Johnny, just like everyone else, could have become an addict *if* his home life and parental guidance had not been as positive. As you may have heard, "But for the grace of God, there go I." Truer words have not been spoken. This illustration is given because "lifestyle" Christians sometimes get vain and self-righteous.

Just because Johnny does not have a craving addiction for something grossly evil, this does not mean he has a pure heart! It must be stated again, "Man's greatest problem is his carnal

nature.” Yes, avoiding sin is good. Yes, religious services can be beneficial. But, neither avoiding sin nor attending church is a substitute for a pure heart.

## What to do about the Power of Sin?

Suppose I want to do something that I know is sin. I have at least four options:

1. I can yield to temptation because I cannot help myself.
2. I can resist the temptation and avoid sinning as far as possible.
3. I can pray ahead for help since I know temptation is coming.
4. I can recognize the inner attraction for sin, confess it to Jesus and ask for deliverance.

Of course, all of these options are acceptable except number one. Resisting sin is an important process in character development. However, no person can resist every sin – the carnal nature will not permit it. As Paul said so well, **“What I want to do, I don’t do.”** In my estimation, option four should be our greatest focus, followed by option number three and then number two. Ask Jesus for deliverance. Ask Him to do something for you that you cannot do for yourself.

Even more, ask Him to remove the desire. This is the key. Remove the desire and the attraction is gone! Victory over sin often depends on being prepared for temptation at any given moment. When you fall into sin, quickly admit it, confess your sorrow and do not forget how it happened. The Bible says we have an Advocate who is willing to forgive us. ( 1 John 2:1,2) But the Bible also cautions that if we continue in willful rebellion against God, He will not forgive us. ( Hebrews 10:26,27; Matthew 12:31)

The process of sanctification, or the struggle between the carnal nature and the spiritual nature, does not occur without a constant connection and communion with God. Peter quickly sank into the depths of the Sea of Galilee when he took his eyes off Jesus and we will most assuredly sink into the depths of sin for the same reason.

## Why the Torture of Sanctification?

The following statements about sanctification are very important:

1. When a person is born again, a sanctifying struggle *begins*.
2. No one is granted eternal life on the basis of human perfection. Everyone who receives the assurance of eternal life must continually submit to the humiliating process of sanctification.
3. The process of sanctification ends at death or when the carnal nature is eliminated.

God watches over each one of us. Nothing is hidden from His sight. ( Ecclesiastes 12:13,14;

Luke 8:17; 2 Corinthians 5:10) God measures our love and faith for Him by what we do (or do not do). James wrote, “. . . **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**” ( James 2:17)

Sanctification is a lifelong experience under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. When the Bible says that Enoch, Noah and Abraham walked with God, the Bible does not mean that these men merely walked with God down a country road. No, it means that these men endured the humiliation of sanctification and as a result, God was pleased to visit and speak with them as friends. The carnal heart hates humiliation because it hates authority. But, Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”** ( Matthew 5:5)

Our response to the sanctification process is our way of expressing praise, honor and faith in God. God would much rather see the process of sanctification occurring in the lives of His children than to hear the praise of 10,000 choirs. ( Isaiah 1:13-18) Obedience and submission to authority is the most basic form of praise or glory that a child can produce! (Ask any parent if you do not believe me.) So remember, that (a) sanctification does not merit or bring salvation, and (b) our struggle with sanctification does not end until death or the carnal nature is eliminated.

## **When is the Carnal Nature Eliminated?**

By now, I am sure that you are aware that the greatest problem for an individual is the carnal nature. This pesky problem is about to come to an end! God will eliminate the carnal nature from every person who passes the test of faith that He administers during the Great Tribulation. By the time the seventh trumpet sounds ( Revelation 11:15-19), God will have placed His seal upon everyone who lives by faith. ( Revelation 10:7) The 144,000 will be the first people to experience the elimination of the carnal nature. Millions of other people will then pass through the fiery test of faith and also experience this miraculous transformation. Before we consider God's seal and the importance of the sealing, a few words about the Great Tribulation are necessary.

One of God's objectives for the Great Tribulation is to set up a global situation where His authority is diametrically opposed to man's authority. As these two authorities stand in opposition to each other, God will determine who loves Him. (See Daniel 3.) This contest is similar to the struggle that goes on within the heart of every born again person – which nature will reign? Our actions will reveal which nature we favor most.

During the Great Tribulation, the Ten Commandments will stand in clear opposition to the laws of man. In other words, the Great Tribulation involves a great controversy. The contest between God's sovereign will and the will of humanity will be an intense drama. People will be forced by dire circumstances to take sides and this is how the sheep and goats will become separated. Using His servants, the 144,000, God will send a powerful proclamation of the terms and conditions of salvation (the gospel) throughout the Earth.

If a person obeys God, he or she will have to disobey the laws of men. Conversely, if a person

obeys the laws of men he will have to rebel against God. Every person will make an informed choice. There will be no straddling the fence or middle ground. Into this intense chaos, the Antichrist (the lamb-like beast who is the devil) will eventually appear and the controversy will finally end. The people of Earth will receive either the seal of God or the mark of the beast. Each person will make an intelligent and informed decision regarding his or her allegiance.

Each person's choice will reflect the dominate influence within that person's heart. If the nature is carnal, that person will rebel against the authority of God and have no option but to accept the mark of the beast. If the nature is spiritual, that person will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to obediently submit to the commandments of God and be sealed in His righteousness.

Of course, no sane person plans to receive the mark of the beast. The same might be said about the people in Noah's day. No person planned on drowning! Isn't it interesting that almost every Christian *today* sees himself smart enough to "get in Noah's boat?" But do not forget, only eight people went into the boat. Why so few? There is only one answer: The carnal nature. Rebellion is man's greatest problem. Aware of this, God has designed a four-step process that will separate the sheep from the goats during the Great Tribulation. This process is easy to understand once the drama surrounding the sealing is understood.

## The Setting

A few days before the Great Tribulation begins, Jesus will personally select, seal and empower 144,000 ordinary people of all religious backgrounds. God will use these servants to proclaim the gospel to the world. ( Revelation 7:1-4) When the 144,000 are ready to do their work, Jesus will methodically begin to destroy the Earth with enormous manifestations of His wrath. The Book of Revelation predicts global earthquakes, meteoric showers of burning hail, asteroid impacts, darkness, sickness, death and destruction beyond our imagination.

These horrific events will affect the whole world and will suddenly cause billions of people to consider the enormity of God and His wrath for the first time. In a setting of death, confusion, conflagration and calamity, billions of people will want some answers. God's 144,000 servants will explain what God is doing and why. Currently, because of religious gridlock and religious paradigms, most people will not consider anything about God that disagrees with what they already believe.

Therefore, God will empower 144,000 people to speak for Him and after He delivers a series of fatal blows to the ecosystems of Earth, people will become more willing to consider what the 144,000 have to say. The 144,000 will proclaim three messages which are stated in Revelation 14:6-12. The three messages are condensed as follows:

1. Fear God, worship God and obey His Ten Commandments.
2. Have no part in the crisis government that will form to appease God. Reject its laws and false doctrines.

3. Do not submit to the Antichrist or receive his mark. If you do, God will severely punish you.

The 144,000 will present these three messages within the context of fierce opposition. The call to worship God and obey His Ten Commandments will collide “head on” with the religions of the world. The demands of God’s Law will be contrary to the laws and demands of the crisis government that will form. This predicament will produce some very tough choices. (See Daniel 3 for an Old Testament parallel to this story.)

These three messages contain the “saving” elements of the everlasting gospel, and as surprising as it may seem, will completely separate the people of Earth. People who allow their carnal nature to reign will reject God’s authority, just as people who allow the Holy Spirit to reign will submit to God’s authority. It is this simple. Notice the four step process that God has predetermined for the gospel during the Tribulation:

1. Everyone must hear the gospel.
2. Everyone must decide for or against the gospel.
3. Everyone must be tested in their decision (faith tested).
4. Depending on the outcome choice, everyone will either receive the seal of God or the mark of the beast.

The first step in the testing process is the **proclamation** of the terms and conditions of the gospel. The second step is the **decision** phase. The honest in heart will make the right choices as the Holy Spirit and the Bible directs them, even though they will be threatened with persecution and death. The point is that everyone will make an informed decision about the will of God because the 144,000 will complete their preaching assignments.

Everyone will either submit to the gospel or rebel against it. The third step will be the **testing** phase. This phase will confirm whether our faith in God is firm and loyal. Last, God will remove the carnal nature and **seal** those who pass the test of faith with a spiritual nature that has no propensity toward sin! God will give the sinless nature He originally gave to Adam to the people who pass this test of faith.

### ***What is the Seal of God?***

How can we conclude from Scripture that the sealing process described in Revelation 7 is the change that takes place within the heart when God removes our propensity to sin? There are four steps:

1. The doctrine of justification and its supporting texts (discussed in Chapter 4), describes a process whereby the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to everyone who becomes willing to submit to the dominion of the Holy Spirit. ( John 3:16) Because of imputed righteousness, a sinner *appears* righteous in God’s sight even though he is not righteous in reality. ( Ephesians 2:8,9) In other words, when the righteous life of Jesus covers the life of a sinner, God sees the

sinner as though he or she never sinned. The imputing of Christ's righteousness (justification) is God's gift of grace to every born again person. This is our all important "ticket" to Heaven which Jesus paid. ( Romans 8:1-9)

2. The doctrine of sanctification and its supporting texts (discussed earlier in this chapter), describe a process that every born again person must submit to. ( 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14) Sanctification is the process of submitting our will to God's will every day of our lives. Sanctification requires patience and perseverance because the law of sin is relentless. Justification is our "title" to Heaven and sanctification is our "preparation" for Heaven. God has made a way to get man to Heaven through justification and He has made a way to put Heaven's government within the heart of man through sanctification.

3. The sealing of the 144,000 occurs shortly before the Great Tribulation begins. ( Revelation 7:1-4) The 144,000 are the firstfruits of the great harvest of souls that will come out of the Great Tribulation! ( Revelation 14:4; 7:9-14) This means the 144,000 are examples of what the harvest will produce. Because they are the firstfruits, the 144,000 are sealed first. Believers who receive their testimony and pass the test of faith will be sealed as the 144,000 were sealed during the time-period of the seven trumpets. (The time-period of the seven trumpets is 1,260 days in length.)

4. The mystery of God is finished by the time of the seventh trumpet. **"But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."** ( Revelation 10:7)

What is the mystery of God? The mystery of God that is completed during the Great Tribulation is His plan to transform the carnal nature of every willing sinner into a pure heart! God has not seen a sinner that He did not love. God has not seen a sinner that He could not forgive and God has not seen a problem He cannot solve. The mystery of God that will be announced by His 144,000 servants is God's generous offer to remove each man's greatest problem: man's sinful nature.

Notice how various mysteries of God unfold over time: Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, **"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may**

**approach God with freedom and confidence.”** ( Ephesians 3:2-12)

Now, examine these words by Paul to the church at Colosse: **“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”** ( Colossians 1:24-29)

Paul told the Ephesians that the union of Gentiles and Jews into one body of people had been part of God’s plan from the beginning. But, this part of salvation for the human race (the mystery that had been kept secret from ages past) had not been revealed until now.

Now that the appointed time had come for this to take place, this mystery was exposed and Paul was empowered to announce this bold new revelation to the world. If you would like to enjoy the fullness of this revelation, read all of Ephesians 2 and 3 from your Bible and reflect on Paul’s commission to reveal this “previously unheard” doctrine.

Likewise, Paul told the Colossians that he had become a servant of the gospel, by the commission of God, to present a mystery which had been kept hidden for ages and generations, but was now revealed to the saints. This mystery is that Jesus lives within the hearts of His followers, “Christ *in* you, the hope of glory.”

The mystery which the 144,000 will proclaim has been hidden from previous generations. This mystery is that Jesus will remove the carnal heart with its propensity for sin and He will replace it with a pure heart that has no attraction for sin. *If* sinners will put their faith in Christ and obediently submit to the gospel call which the Holy Spirit is pressing upon their hearts, Jesus will generously grant this miracle.

## **A Pure Heart**

The sealing described in Revelation 7 is the gift of a pure heart. God has promised this gift to the human race for almost 3,000 years! God promised His people while in Babylonian exile, **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”** ( Ezekiel 36:26,27)

Unfortunately, the people of Israel failed to follow the Holy Spirit. Israel went astray again and again. Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah and the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36 was delayed. But, it is still coming! Six hundred years after Ezekiel’s day, Paul declared this promise again, **“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will**

**put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."** ( Hebrews 8:10-13)

These two texts, one by Ezekiel and the other by Paul, speak about the powerful transformation God has planned. No doubt, both prophets anticipated the fulfillment of this promise in their day, but the mystery is not fulfilled until we reach the Great Tribulation. For thousands of years God has looked forward to the day when He can remove our carnal heart and give us a pure heart. He longs for the day when rebellion will no longer be within His children!

His children also long for this to happen because they are sick and tired of having to deal with the law of sin. ( Romans 7:23-25) Yes, both Ezekiel and Paul knew that this transformation was coming, but they did not know its appointed time. The saints who live during the Great Tribulation will understand the timing and they will see and experience this transformation with their own eyes!

God removes the sinful nature during the Great Tribulation because the intercession of Jesus on behalf of sinners comes to a close at the time of the seventh trumpet. For thousands of years, the righteousness of Christ has been *imputed*. During the 1,260 days of sealing, the righteousness of Christ will be *imparted* to every sinner who passes the test of faith. No longer will the saints be reckoned as sinful, for they will be pure!

As individuals pass their personal test of faith, God will do something He has not done since sin began. He will replace the carnal nature of every "faith-filled" saint with a pure heart and *seal* it within him or her. Therefore, the struggle with sin and the rebellion it causes *from within* will be finished for all saints by the time the seventh trumpet sounds!

## **Summary**

It is very important that we learn now to recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He often puts us in difficult situations so that we can see the mighty hand of God move within our lives. We need to experience lessons of faith in the school of sanctification right now in order to prepare for the coming test of faith. Jesus is anxious to prepare us for what lies ahead. Our lack of faith, our failure to do right, our rebellion against God's will, our selfishness and stubbornness are all due to our carnal nature, but this will not be the case forever.

Think of it! A time is coming when God's children will no longer have a carnal nature. This is what John means when he wrote, "**Dear friends, now [in our present condition] we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.**" ( 1 John 3:2,3, insertion and italics mine.) Did you notice that John said, "**We shall be like Him?**" Talk about a promise! Remember the words of Jesus: "**Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.**" The

saints are going to be pure in heart.

The Great Tribulation will be a great testing time. It will also be a time of revelation and reward for those who pass the test of faith! The saints will be rewarded with pure hearts and then they will see the grandest revelation to ever take place, Jesus appearing in all His glory!

So, do not give up! If you are struggling with sanctification, persevere – pray without ceasing and ask for God’s grace and strength to overcome. People who learn to depend on God’s strength today will not fail during the persecution that lies ahead. Why not learn to walk by faith now?

Everyone who walks with God lives in a constant purification process – this can be compared to washing our dirty clothes each day. Every day, God is working on the stain of sin that is within us. One day soon, at the appointed time, the mystery of God will be revealed. Jesus will eliminate the carnal nature within every saint. This is what the Bible means when it says of the redeemed, **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** ( Revelation 7:14)