

## “Certificates”

There are several significant “certificates” that punctuate our lives. Each of them “certifies”- *confirms, verifies, endorses, attests, or officially states*, that some position, status, or level of achievement has been reached.

We start with a **birth** certificate that officially declares our presence on the planet. It further confirms our given name and includes our parentage, as well as the date and place of birth. The next significant certificates we usually receive attest to **levels of education we complete**. Some of these are obviously more important than others. A “Certificate of Completion” for Kindergarten doesn’t do much for a job application or resume- despite the claim by some that “Everything I needed to know in life, I learned in Kindergarten.” But High School Graduation certificates, G.E.D. certificates, College/University Graduation certificates, Trade/Vocational Graduation certificates, as well as Medical, Law, Etc. School Graduate certificates can be extremely valuable indeed as we progress through life. Then there are...

**Marriage Certificates.** That’s a BIG one! Two people choose to officially declare and state their promise to spend their lives together as husband and wife, and are therefore certified and recognized by all- God, government, and everyone else, as Mr. and Mrs. This choice, decision, and commitment is, in my opinion, one of the three most significant of our lives.

And finally, the certificate everyone gets... a **death** certificate. Although not everyone gets (or has) a certificate officially declaring them “here”, everyone pretty much gets one verifying that they’re “gone.” It’s odd, really, that we actually have next to nothing to do with achieving the certificates that mark our “beginning” and our “end.” Our parents are responsible for the *achievement* for the birth certificate, and we certainly do all we possibly can to *avoid* being certified as dead. But the certificates between these two, those are all up to us.

But what about **spiritual certification**? Though there is no Scriptural precedence for such, some are given *spiritual* “birth certificates” when they are “*born again*” through baptism into Christ (cf. John 3:3,5). And certainly, when one is “*cleansed by the washing of water with the word*,” he or she becomes part of the spiritual “bride of Christ” and becomes of “*one*” with Him, (cf. Ephesians 5:23-33; Revelation 19:7), though no official “marriage certificate” is tendered. And, I suppose, a spiritual “death” or “divorce certificate” could be associated with the “*marking*” (KJV, Romans 16:17) or taking “*of special note*” and the required refusal “*to associate with*” (NASB, 2Thessalonians 2:14) those who are unfaithful to their spiritual Husband. But what about those “certificates of completion/accomplishment,” do they have a spiritual counterpart?

Though 2Corinthians 1:22 is the right passage in these regards- *i.e.* God “*sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge*,” I’m not at all sure that we have the right concept of precisely what these things mean. Some seem to think that having the Holy Spirit in our hearts *certifies* (as a *certificate* of sorts) that we have attained eternal reward. Then too, some seem to get the notion from the word “*sealed*” that we are somehow “hermetically protected” to a degree that we cannot, after once being saved, ever become “lost” (thus having our “*sealing*” broken). Neither of these ideas is warranted by the text.

Instead, note specifically that Spirit’s presence in our *hearts* is “*as a pledge*.” A *pledge* (*arrhabon*, used only here and in 2Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:14) is a *downpayment* as a *surety* for *full-payment* at a later time. But of what is the Spirit’s presence in our hearts a *pledge/surety*?

As always, context is critical. Note 2Corinthians 1:20, *“For as many as may be the promises of God...”* Thus, the *promises* of God- specifically those pertaining to our *eternal salvation*, are *made sure* (as with a *downpayment* or *deposit*) by the Spirit’s presence. That is, we can *trust* in eternal reward *then* because of the *pledge* given *now*. But exactly what is this *pledge*? Is it some “better felt than told” *feeling* whereby we “know” the Spirit is within us? That doesn’t sound like much of a “certificate” does it?

Instead, think of the Spirit’s primary role: the *revelation* of God’s will and words (and thus also His *promises* to us). How do we know of God’s promises? By the Spirit’s *revelation*, God’s word is given to us, cf. Ephesians 3:3-5, and we take it into our hearts, cf. Romans 10:8-10,17.

Now think carefully with me: What is on each and every “certificate” ever given? Words! The words of God are *“near you, in your mouth and in your heart- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,”* Romans 10:8. It is not a nebulous physical presence of the Spirit in our hearts that “certify” that we belong to God and have “achieved” eternal life, but the WORDS that the Spirit gives- taken into and believe in our hearts, and practiced in our lives that provide the *pledge* and *surety* of God’s promises. Thus in this way, God puts His “seal” (and we are “sealed”) upon us. Need more proof?

*“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who abides in Him ought to himself walk in the same manner as He walked,”* 1John 2:3-6. And when one so *walks*- according the Spirit’s revealed word which he has taken into his heart and manifests in his life, he is: “certified” by God as His; God puts His “seal” upon him; and, the “pledge” of eternal life by the promises of God await Him.

“Certificates” are only as good as the words printed on them. And the words printed on them are only as good as the entity providing them. God knows those who are His, *“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let every one who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness,’”* 2Timothy 2:19. Now, are you sealed and certified by God as His? If you’re still not sure, then are you “*abstaining from wickedness*” and “*keeping His commandments*”? If so, you have *pledge* of God’s promises of eternal life! And if not, then opposite is also true. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))