

KEEPER
of the
GREAT SEAL
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Sealing of the Spirit in the Life
and Thought of John Flavel

Adam Embry



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Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven

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Foreword

John Flavel (1627–1691) was a Puritan pastor-theologian who walked with God through dark and dangerous valleys. Flavel’s godly wife, Joan, died while giving birth to their first child in 1655, and the baby died as well. In 1662 Flavel was ejected from his pulpit for nonconformity to the state church. His father, Richard, arrested for nonconformity, died of the plague in 1665 while he was in prison. During this time the younger Flavel defied the law and continued to preach in secret meetings, sometimes in the woods at midnight. Once he disguised himself as a woman on horseback to reach a meeting with the persecuted church. Another time he had to ride his horse into the sea and swim away in order to escape arrest.

Flavel’s second wife, Elizabeth, died during the times of persecution. Flavel got married again, this time to Ann, a minister’s daughter. In the 1680s he sought safety in London, but even there he only barely escaped arrest when soldiers invaded a prayer meeting. In London he lost his third bride. It is hard to imagine Flavel’s grief at burying three dear wives. He married a widow named Dorothy who outlived him. He returned to his hometown of Dartmouth where a mob burned him in effigy. But he pressed on.

The years of hardship took their toll on Flavel’s body. He wrote, “We have long borne the burden and heat of the day; we are veteran soldiers almost worn out.”¹ When he was only sixty-three years old,

1. John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 4:14.

Flavel suffered a stroke and died while he was on a preaching trip to Exeter.

In the midst of these great afflictions, God blessed Flavel's ministry with much power. His preaching set forth the truth with brilliant clarity and searched the heart with piercing applications. One hearer of his sermons said, "That person must have a very soft head, or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected."² His sermons, captured on the printed page, continue to grasp minds and hearts today.

How did Flavel persevere in such boldness and power? Surely part of his secret was Romans 5:5: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." He tasted the love of God, love that is better than life, and was strengthened in the Lord. He knew God was his Father, Christ was his Lord, and the Spirit was his indwelling life.

Erasmus Middleton wrote, "He attained to a well-grounded assurance, the ravishing comforts of which were many times shed abroad in his soul. This made him a powerful and successful preacher, as one who spoke from his own heart to those of others. He preached what he felt, what he had handled, what he had seen and tasted of the word of life, and they felt it also."³ Assured of God's saving love for him and filled with God's Spirit, he walked with the boldness of a lion.

This book examines Flavel's understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in salvation, especially in assurance, which he identified with the "seal" of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The fruit of Adam Embry's scholarly labors, this volume is a welcome addition to the rather sparse academic literature on Flavel. Embry offers us both biography and historical theology, setting Flavel's life and teachings in the context of their time.

Yet the value of this book is not confined to students of history and biography. Systematic theologians and pastors will find it helpful in assessing the view of one dimension of the Spirit's seal as an experience beyond initial conversion—a view represented by figures

2. Erasmus Middleton, *Evangelical Biography* (London: W. Baynes, 1816), 4:51.

3. Middleton, *Evangelical Biography*, 4:58.

such as Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) and David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981).

Furthermore, godly Christians will be edified by Flavel’s remarkable life and reflections on the Spirit’s work, whether or not they agree with his particular flavor of the Reformed experiential tradition. It has been said that Calvin was a theologian of the Holy Spirit. Flavel stands as one among a great cloud of witnesses that Reformed theology calls people to a biblical, vital, spiritual experience of the sovereign grace of the Trinity.

—Joel R. Beeke

Preface

This book is an expansion of my master of theology thesis on John Flavel. I made no changes to the argument of the thesis, although I added more quotations from Flavel and a pastoral reflection in the final chapter that was not included in the thesis. I hope that the additional quotations from Flavel allow for a more spiritual and meditative experience for the reader. I am thankful to Reformation Heritage Books for their support, and I hope that readers will be helped by understanding what Flavel has to say. He is pastorally instructive.

Certain Spirit-filled men deserve my gratitude for their help during this project. Dr. Shawn Wright has been a paragon not only as a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary but as a spiritual mentor. He introduced me to the writings of John Flavel in 2005. Dr. Chad Brand allowed me to explore Flavel's thoughts on the Spirit in his doctoral seminar on the Spirit. Dr. Michael Haykin and Dr. Joel Beeke recommended studying Flavel for a master's thesis. Dr. Haykin's corrections proved valuable in helping me think through the historical context of the thesis. Dr. Beeke kindly wrote the foreword and welcomed my family in Grand Rapids this summer. It has been an honor to study under and learn from these excellent scholars and godly men.

Special thanks go to Dr. Kwai Sing Chang, Ray Freeman, Guy Davies, Dr. J. Stephen Yuille, Mark Burden, and Brian Cosby for their correspondence with me concerning John Flavel. Jason Adkins dutifully proofread my thesis back in 2008. Jay Collier and Annette Gysen were extremely helpful and professional throughout the publishing

and editing process. It was a great experience working with them at Reformation Heritage Books.

My parents and grandmother consistently encouraged me and occasionally provided financial support during seminary. My pastor, Brian Croft, and fellow members at Auburndale Baptist Church took interest in my work and how I could apply it to pastoral ministry.

My gracious, godly, and gentle wife, Charlotte, deserves more thanks than I can give. Her love, support, and encouragement got me through many late nights. She is to me, as Peter described, an “heir of the grace of life.”

Adam Embry
Louisville, Kentucky
November 2011

Flavel, the Holy Spirit, and Puritanism

This book specifically examines John Flavel's (1627–1691) view of sealing of the Spirit, that is, assurance of salvation, in relation to his life and writings.¹ More generally, this book is an exercise in studying Puritan spirituality. J. I. Packer states, "Puritanism was at heart a spiritual movement, passionately concerned with God and godliness."² And again, "Puritanism was, at its heart, a movement of spiritual revival."³ R. M. Hawkes sets the broader historical context on what defined English Puritanism, while similarly noting that it was primarily a spiritual movement.

What was it that defined English Puritanism? Was it essentially a theological movement, emphasizing covenant theology, predestination, and a reformed church service? Or was the heart of the matter political, asserting the inalienable rights of conscience before God, the rule of natural law over arbitrary prerogative courts, the dependency of the king in parliament, the foundation of state authority in the people? Some modern research has pointed to a third possibility, that the essence of Puritanism was its piety, a stress on conversion, on existential, heartfelt religion.⁴

1. The seventeenth-century spelling of his name was "Flavell." This will be reflected in some of the footnotes.

2. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 28.

3. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 37.

4. R. M. Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 247. For additional resources on Puritan spirituality, see Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria,

Puritan spirituality carried on Reformed theology from Calvin to Westminster and beyond, into the latter half of the seventeenth century, the period in which Flavel ministered, refining and strengthening themes of Reformed piety.⁵ True spirituality was internal, changing the individual, bringing him into contact with divine promises and realities; it was also external, directing the faithful to live godly lives. Reformed theologians connected the doctrine of the Spirit to different doctrines such as soteriology, Christology, and ecclesiology, but since the Spirit is a person, such doctrines would be attached to heartfelt and experiential religion. This was especially the case with assurance of salvation, for, as Hawkes explains, “In English Puritan theology, the doctrine of assurance is of abiding importance.”⁶ Flavel was no exception.

Like other Puritans, Flavel frequently preached on the need for believers to have assurance of their salvation. He believed that the conscious sealing of the Spirit, an event subsequent to regeneration, gives believers assurance. He recorded his sealing experience and exhorted his congregation and readers of his works to seek the sealing of the Spirit. Flavel’s writings on the Spirit have had lasting spiritual usefulness after his death. Those who believed God’s Spirit initiated the revivals during the First and Second Great Awakenings used his sealing experience to substantiate and illustrate what they considered a legitimate work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian.⁷ His theology

1986); Charles Cohen, *God’s Caress: The Puritan Psychology of Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University, 1986); Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987); Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason, eds. *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004); Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical, 2006).

5. Dewey D. Wallace, ed., *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), xv.

6. Hawkes, “Logic of Assurance,” 248.

7. Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 4:311–12; Benjamin Cole, *Authentic Extracts from the Lives of John Flavel, and Rev. William Tennent* (Brattleborough, Vt.: Benjamin Cole, 1807), 3–5.

Others at that time found Flavel’s sealing account questionable and his writings generally unhelpful. Respectively, Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State*

even influenced the leading theology professor at America's first great theological seminary, Princeton. Popular devotional Christian literature in the nineteenth century carried his ideas to laypeople on into another century.⁸ Nevertheless, unlike other Puritans such as Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, or John Owen, whose theologies are better known today, little is known about Flavel's ministry and theology, and even less his view on assurance.⁹ Two academic works devoted to Flavel date back to the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰ Iain Murray penned two

of Religion in New England (Boston:n.p., 1743), 92; and revival enthusiast James Davenport in George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 275; and Peter S. Onuf, "New Lights in New London: A Group Portrait of the Separatists," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1980): 627–43.

8. For example, John Fawcett Jr., *An Account of the Life, Ministry, and Writings of the Late Rev. John Fawcett, D.D.* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1818), 11–12; Thomas Scott, *Devotional Exercises, Chiefly Designed for the Use of Families on the Sabbath, and Other Opportunities...to Which Is Added Meditations Selected from the Works of the Rev. John Flavel, Husbandry and Navigation Spiritualized with Abridgments and Variations* (Boston: n.p., 1820); William Haslett, *The Advices and Meditations of the Late William Haslett, Esquire; with Some Minor Pieces, and Extracts from Flavel* (Philadelphia: D. & S., 1825); Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Additional Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (London: John Johnstone, 1847), 77–78; James Hamilton, *Our Christian Classics: Reading from the Best Divines* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1857), 145–48; John Stoughton, *Ecclesiastical History of England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1874), 177–78; Andrew A. Bonar, *Diary and Letters*, ed. Marjory Bonar (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), 266, 351; Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan's Characters: Lectures Delivered in St. George's Free Church Edinburgh* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1894), 292; Josiah H. Gilbert, *Dictionary of Burning Words of Brilliant Authors: A Cyclopaedia of Quotations from the Literature of All Ages* (New York: Wilbur B. Ketcham, 1895).

9. For Sibbes, see Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 2000). For Goodwin, see Joel Beeke's introduction to *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians* by Thomas Goodwin, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Eureka, Calif.: Tanski Publications, 1996), 1:1–23. For Owen, see Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster, 1971); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), or more recently, Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate, 2007).

10. Earl T. Farrell, "The Doctrine of Man and Grace as Held by the Reverend John Flavel" (BA thesis, Duke University, 1949). Farrell's thesis is only a summary of Flavel's works *The Method of Grace* and *The Soul of Man*. Kwai Sing Chang, "John Flavel of Dartmouth, 1630–1691" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1952).

Banner of Truth articles on Flavel during the 1960s.¹¹ Only recently has Flavel received theological attention from students of Puritanism, especially J. Stephen Yuille.¹² Today, Flavel's writings are available through *Banner of Truth's* republication of the 1820 edition of *The Works of John Flavel*.¹³

Flavel on the Sealing of the Spirit

John Flavel thought the sealing of the Spirit was an experiential consciousness subsequent to conversion that assures believers of their salvation in Christ and the heavenly promises that await them.¹⁴ "The sealing of the Spirit is," Flavel describes, "his giving a sure and certain

11. Iain H. Murray, "Faithful unto Death," *Banner of Truth* 27 (1962): 1-14 and "John Flavel," *Banner of Truth* 60 (1968): 1-10.

12. J. Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel's Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2007) and J. Stephen Yuille, ed., *Triumphing over Sinful Fear* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011). Also see the summary of Flavel's book *The Fountain of Life*, in "The Christology of John Flavel," in Brian Cosby, *Snapshots of Christian History* (Morrisville, N.C.: Lulu, 2009), 155-210. Sporadic references to Flavel are also in R. Tudor Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 186-208; Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 317-26; Mark Dever, "Christian Hedonists or Religious Prudes? The Puritans on Sex," in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005), 252-55, 262-64; Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), 81.

13. John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1997). The Banner edition had printings in 1968 and 1982. Previous editions of his collected works were *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon, in Two Volumes* (London: R. J., 1701); *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon, in Two Volumes* (London: John Nicholson, 1716); *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon, in Two Volumes* (London: Thomas Lomisden and John Robertson, 1731); *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon, in Two Volumes* (Glasgow: A. Stalker, 1754); *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon*, 8 vols. (Paisley: A. Weir and A. McLean, 1770); *The Works of Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth, Devon*, 6 vols. (London: J. Mathews, 1799); and *The Works of John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820).

14. Guy Davies noted that Flavel held the subsequent view in "Thomas Goodwin: His Life, Times and Quest for Assurance," in *Congregational Studies Conference Papers* (North Humberside, England: EFCC, 1994), 30; accessed 19 December 2007, <http://www.puritansermons.com/pdf/good04.pdf>.

testimony to the reality of that work of grace he hath wrought in our souls, and to our interest in Christ and the promises, thereby satisfying our fears and doubts about our estate and condition.”¹⁵ The goal of the Spirit’s sealing work is to confirm to believers’ souls that they are sealed to the day of redemption by giving them foretastes of heaven, “to embolden the soul to venture through death itself for the full enjoyment of those delights and pleasures.”¹⁶ According to Flavel, the sealing of the Spirit assures believers of salvation and allows them to experience a foretaste of heaven on earth.¹⁷

In explicating his view on sealing, Flavel describes how the Spirit’s sealing work in the believer is contingent upon His sealing work in Christ. The Spirit, who is “the great seal of heaven,” indwelt Christ and commissioned Him for the work of redemption.¹⁸ The Spirit, “the keeper of the great seal of heaven,” in turn, by uniting believers to Christ, assures them that Christ and heaven are theirs by enabling them to discover His indwelling and saving presence and work in their lives.¹⁹

All believers were objectively sealed, that is, elected to salvation by God, in eternity past. Flavel taught that election is a glorious truth, but how are believers to know if they were elected? Writing on 2 Timothy 1:19, Flavel anticipates how believers would ask this question: “But now what comfort is this to a poor believer, that God knows who are his? Therefore there is another sealing referring to the Spirit, as his act upon believers, to make them know that they are his. The first is general, The Lord knoweth who are his. But this is particular, The Lord knoweth thee to be his.”²⁰ This second seal is the sealing of the Spirit.

15. John Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations upon Divers Select Places of Scripture*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (London: Banner of Truth, 1997), 6:402. All quotations will be from the 1997 Banner edition.

16. John Flavel, *Pneumatologia: A Treatise of the Soul of Man*, 3:117–18.

17. Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations*, 6:407.

18. John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life Opened Up: or, A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory*, 1:87. The phrase “the great seal of heaven,” referring to Christ’s filling of the Spirit, is also found in Flavel, *The Method of Grace in the Gospel Redemption*, 2:127, 190.

19. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 1:95; Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations*, 6:402.

20. John Flavel, *England’s Duty under the Present Gospel Liberty*, 4:220. For a similar passage, see Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 6:219.

Flavel's views on the sealing of the Spirit place him alongside other Puritans who taught that sealing was a subsequent work. There was, however, modification in how he understood the immediate witness of the Spirit from 1667 to 1690. Yet Puritans who held to a subsequent sealing disagreed as to whether the Spirit's sealing work was *with* the Word and the believer's spirit or *to* the believer's spirit immediately.²¹ As it turns out, there was a change in Flavel's thinking. This development can be traced by dating Flavel's writings using two sources: the earliest publication dates found on *Early English Books Online* and Edward Windeatt's 1911 bibliography of Flavel's works.²² In 1667, 1679, and 1681, Flavel stated that the immediate witness of the Spirit had ceased and was not the way the Spirit assured, and then in 1685, he affirmed that the immediate witness could occur. By 1690 he cautiously acknowledged the legitimacy of the immediate witness but said if it occurred at all, it was extraordinary and rare.

The historical context of the reemergence of apparently antinomian publications in 1690 could explain why Flavel retracted his confidence in the validity of an immediate sealing.²³ The republication of Tobias Crisp's writings caused uproar because they revealed a slant toward antinomian doctrine with their "unguarded, even extreme, statements about the one-sidedness of the freeness of sovereign grace that understandably provoked other divines to write and

21. Beeke, introduction to *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:19.

22. Edward Windeatt, "John Flavel: A Notable Dartmouth Puritan and His Bibliography," in *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, 43 (1911): 172–89.

23. For an overview of Flavel and the antinomian controversy during this time, see Chang, "John Flavel," 101–16. For further historical background, see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Uitgeverij Boekencentrum: Zoetermeer, 1993), 61–65; Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2001), 170–83; Barry H. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions: The Question of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599–1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 102–14; J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 413–14; Martin Sutherland, *Peace, Toleration and Decay: The Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 127–29.

preach against him.”²⁴ In relation to the work of the Spirit and assurance, Peter Toon notes what doctrinal antinomianism taught: “The only sure way for a Christian to know he was elect was the voice of the Spirit within his soul saying, ‘You are elect.’”²⁵ Crisp did affirm “that it is the Spirit of Christ, and the faith of the believer only, that immediately call the soul, and testify to it its interest in Christ, and so give sufficient evidence of it.”²⁶

Whether Flavel retracted his view on immediate sealing in 1690 due to the reemergence of antinomianism alone is unknown. It was quite clear though that if Flavel’s view on assurance was similar to the antinomian position of the Spirit’s immediate witness apart from any evidence of sanctification, it could call into question the frequency of his pastoral exhortation throughout his ministry for believers to be sealed through the ordinary way of examination. It could also call into question his experience. Even he stated that those who rely on “extraordinary revelations, visions, and voices from heaven,” were enthusiasts and false teachers.²⁷ He argued, however, that his “extraordinary” sealing experience came when the Spirit gave him assurance through “the ordinary way and method of faith and meditation.”²⁸ The presence of the Word makes all the difference, because “Scripture-light is a safe and sure light, a pleasant and sufficient light.”²⁹

His final position on immediate sealing in 1690 was this: “If such a thing be at all, it is but rare and extraordinary.”³⁰ Flavel instructs Christians to “examine their interest in Christ, by the graces of his Spirit in them,”³¹ a teaching that is again reaffirmed in his 1691 remark, “The examination of our justification by our sanctification, is

24. Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 167. For Crisp, see Roger Pooley, “Tobias Crisp,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14:213–14.

25. Toon, *Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 28. Toon listed Flavel’s ten errors against antinomianism on page 28.

26. As quoted in Toon, *Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 62.

27. Flavel, *Succinct and Seasonable Discourse*, 3:481.

28. Flavel, *Soul of Man*, 3:58.

29. Flavel, *Succinct and Seasonable Discourse*, 3:483.

30. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis et Foederis*, 6:354–55.

31. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis et Foederis*, 6:354–55.

not only a lawful, and possible, but a very excellent work and duty.”³² According to Flavel, passages such as 2 Corinthians 13:5, 2 Peter 1:10, and 2 John 8 demand self-examination so that it is “an unquestionable duty.”³³ Some of his final words on the subject of assurance conclude with these pastoral observations.

[God’s people] find cause enough to suspect their own sincerity, doubt the truth of their faith, and of their graces; and are therefore frequent and serious in the trial and examination of their own states by scripture marks and signs. They urge the commands and threatenings, as well as the promises, upon their own hearts to promote sanctification; excite themselves to duty and watchfulness against sin; they also encourage themselves by the rewards of obedience, knowing their labour is not in vain in the Lord: and all this while they look not for that in themselves, which is only to be found in Christ.³⁴

As an experienced pastor who observed his people, Flavel remarked, “For my own part, I verily believe, that the sweetest hours Christians enjoy in this world, are when they retire into their closets, and sit there concealed from all eyes, but him that made them; looking now into the bible, then into their own hearts, and then up to God; closely following the grand debate about their interest in Christ, till they have brought it to the happy desired issue.”³⁵

Any openness Flavel had to the immediate sealing in *The Soul of Man* in 1685 must be understood in light of his final position as seen in his writings against antinomianism. The ordinary way of sealing is most effective and most likely to be expected in the life of the Christian. It is extremely rare if the Spirit immediately seals believers without using Scripture and self-examination. Flavel’s writings at the end of his life express reservation concerning the immediate sealing position.

Flavel’s final position on a subsequent sealing of the Spirit placed him in theological agreement with other Puritans such as Jeremiah

32. Flavel, *Rise and Growth of Antinomianism*, 3:590.

33. Flavel, *Rise and Growth of Antinomianism*, 3:368.

34. Flavel, *Rise and Growth of Antinomianism*, 3:558.

35. Flavel, *Rise and Growth of Antinomianism*, 3:591.

Burroughs, Anthony Burgess, Thomas Goodwin, and Samuel Rutherford.³⁶ Flavel's belief that the Spirit's direct testimony is *with* believers through the written Word placed him more in line with Burroughs and Burgess, as opposed to Rutherford and Goodwin.³⁷ Unlike Goodwin, Flavel was more guarded as to the plausibility and practical necessity of a direct testimony in the life of the Christian. Furthermore, as opposed to Goodwin, Flavel believed the Spirit's testimony was not independent of the syllogism but "superadded" to it.³⁸ Overall, Flavel's position on sealing of the Spirit coincided with the Westminster Confession, but in the end he had reservations about the immediate view.

Flavel's teaching on sealing meant believers could find assurance in Christ and their heavenly inheritance because "the same spirit of holiness which dwells in Christ without measure, is communicated by him to the saints in measure.... And as Christ communicates his Spirit to the saints, so he communicates the glory of heaven to them."³⁹ Consequently, Flavel concluded that the Holy Spirit is "the keeper of the great seal of heaven."⁴⁰

The Puritans on the Spirit's Sealing

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit and assurance in Puritan literature has received significant attention from modern church historians and theologians.⁴¹ Geoffrey Nuttall notes that the Puritans gave more

36. Beeke, introduction to *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:19–20.

37. Beeke, introduction to *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:19.

38. Beeke, introduction to *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:20–21; John Flavel, *Preparations for Suffering, or The Best Work in the Worst Times*, 6:38.

39. Flavel, *England's Duty*, 4:237.

40. Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations*, 6:402.

41. For background to the Puritans and assurance, see John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34 (1965): 195–203; Andrew A. Davies, "The Holy Spirit and the Direct Operations of the Holy Spirit," in *Faith and Ferment: Papers Read at the 1982 Westminster Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1982), 18–31; Hawkes, "Logic of Assurance," 247–61; Joel R. Beeke, "Personal Assurance of Faith: The Puritans and Chapter 18.2 of the Westminster Confession," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 1–30; Joel Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999).

“thorough and detailed consideration” to the doctrine of the Spirit than anyone else in Christian history.⁴² J. I. Packer, notable Puritan scholar, concludes that “the work of the Holy Spirit is the field in which the Puritans’ most valuable contributions to the church’s theological heritage were made.”⁴³ The sealing of the Spirit was a significant aspect of the Puritans’ heritage, and its development has been traced by several historians.⁴⁴ Puritan historian Dewey Wallace has noted that Calvinistic devotional writings after 1660, the time period in which Flavel ministered, are distinctly characterized by the recurring theme of how the Spirit works in believers’ lives.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Wallace observes, “‘Heavenly mindedness’ was one of the most prominent themes of Puritan spirituality during this era. Perhaps it was a more important theme than in earlier Puritan piety as a result of the dashing of the Restoration of so many Puritan hopes for the reconstruction of the world.... Neither heavenly mindedness nor union with Christ should be considered apart from the Puritan view of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶

Yet Flavel’s thoughts on the Spirit, and specifically the sealing of the Spirit, have not been explored even though his writings later influenced the writings of Jonathan Edwards, Archibald Alexander, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones.⁴⁷ In 1959 John E. Smith, editor of Edwards’s Yale University works, commented on the paucity of scholarship on

42. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xxviii.

43. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 179.

44. For example, Garth B. Wilson, “The Puritan Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Critical Investigation of a Crucial Chapter in the History of Protestant Theology” (PhD diss., Toronto School of Theology, Knox College, 1978), 223–51; Ferguson, *John Owen*, 116–24; Michael A. Eaton, *Baptism with the Spirit: The Teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity, 1989); Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 179–89; Beeke, introduction to *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:4–22.

45. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 185.

46. Wallace, *Spirituality of Later English Puritans*, xvii–vxxiii.

47. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in vol. 2 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith, 60–62; Archibald Alexander, *Practical Truths* (New York: American Tract Society, 1857), 75–78. Hodge, “Memoir of Archibald Alexander,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 27 (1855): 145–46; Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, 38–39; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5–17, The Sons of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 315–16; Eaton, *Baptism with the Spirit*, 125–248.

Flavel and the lack of study concerning his influence on others in the Reformed tradition: “The words of Shepard and Flavel, Preston and Perkins, stand as silent witnesses lending their own weight to the definition of Edwards’ final position on the topic of conversion. All writers cited, with the possible exception of Flavel and [Jeremiah] Jones are well known to the students of Puritanism. It seems likely, however, that their contribution to the formation of Edwards’ thought has been underestimated.”⁴⁸

Outline of Book

This book fills the void that Smith noted by presenting Flavel’s understanding on the person and work of the Spirit in relation to the sealing of the Spirit in his own life and doctrine. Then Flavel’s influence on others in the Reformed tradition will be examined. Chapter 2 sketches an outline of Flavel’s life and gives attention to two prominent and related themes in his pastoral ministry: heavenly mindedness and the work of the Holy Spirit. The historical overview of his life will be divided into three main areas: his youth and ministry before 1662, his life during the period of persecution from the 1660s to the 1687 Declaration of Indulgence, and his ministry after religious toleration in 1687–1688 until his death in 1691. Chapter 3 chronologically evaluates Flavel’s doctrine of the Spirit in all of his published writings. Chapter 4 explains Flavel’s view on sealing of the Spirit and compares him within his theological-historical context with other contemporary Puritans, such as Thomas Goodwin, who held the immediate view, and John Owen, who rejected that the sealing of the Spirit was experienced after regeneration. Chapter 5 shows the significance of Flavel’s theology of the Spirit in the American Great Awakenings, an evaluation of his exegesis relating to the sealing of the Spirit, and a concluding pastoral reflection.

48. John E. Smith, editor’s introduction to *Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:52.