




Be sealed with the Holy Spirit: Behind the metaphor in Ephesians 1:13



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Dates:

Received: 01 Aug. 2023
 Accepted: 11 Sept. 2023
 Published: 30 Nov. 2023

How to cite this article:

Chandra, R.I., Batlajery, A.M.L. & Jonch, A.C., 2023, 'Be sealed with the Holy Spirit: Behind the metaphor in Ephesians 1:13', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2), a9308. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.9308>

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This study explores the phrase 'sealed with the Holy Spirit' of Ephesians 1:13 as a metaphor, which relates the status of the recipients with the seal. Past studies view that the metaphor teaches about covenant or unity in God's protection, assurance, and ownership. This study hypothesises that the author uses metaphor to address the recipients who have a deeper sentiment with a seal meaning they are both Jewish and Gentile Christians but especially those who are slaves. The study combines the Ephesians' background, lexical, and exegetical analyses with the cognitive-linguistic metaphor exploration. The result shows that the metaphor 'seal' is closely related to the personal experience of the Gentile Christians especially the slaves more than to others as it teaches that the endowment with the Spirit makes them worthy and united in the same identity as God's chosen people.

Contribution: This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing challenges that Indonesian Christians face in manifesting their unity because of their diverse cultural or historical backgrounds as part of a formerly colonised nation especially those who are underprivileged and live in rural areas. By recognising that God has redeemed, endowed them with the Holy Spirit, and united with each other, they are free from various status bondages, especially as a minority group among the largest Muslim population in the world.

Keywords: Holy Spirit; seal; unity; metaphor; slaves; bondage.

Introduction

The Epistle to the Ephesians is one of the most significant documents ever written. As O'Brien states, according to Coleridge the Epistle is 'the most divine composition of humans', while Robinson mentions it as 'the crown of Pauline writings' (O'Brien 2004:1).

One of the teachings in the Epistle is 'seal with the Spirit'. The word 'seal' is most frequently used as a literal or legal and commercial term. However, when the term consists of 'seal' and 'Holy Spirit' the word is metaphorical in its essence and conveys embedded concepts or teachings.

Past studies show that a seal conveys the concept of ownership, protection, or assurance of authenticity. As a religious term, 'sealed with the Spirit' in Ephesians 1:13 conveys assurance about living with the Holy Spirit and indicates God's ownership, assurance of salvation in Christ, eternal inheritance, and protection. It means also that as they have the Holy Spirit in their life each day, they are united with the Spirit and each other. Scholars also mention that the recipients are either Jewish or Gentile Christians. However, this study hypothesises that the author knows that the recipients are socially, historically, and spiritually related to the concrete use of the seal in their daily lives and thus the Epistle addresses Christians in whose daily lives seals are significant and evoke a certain kind of sentiment. It is highly probable that the recipients were slaves who were often branded or wore seals at that time or the Christians who viewed baptism and circumcision as a seal of the chosen people. The teaching in the metaphor is that living with the Holy Spirit points to their worthiness after Christ has redeemed them. Thus, regardless of being new Jewish Christians or non-Jew Christians and especially being slaves or free persons, they together live and are united with the Spirit. In a world where division or separation between social class and ethnic groups even among Christians permeates life, the message in the metaphor can direct their life.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative analysis. Firstly, it explores the past studies' results concerning the nature of this Epistle including the historiography, its theme and structure, authorship, recipients, sociocultural context, and purpose.

Secondly, the study explores the meaning of 'seal' as a metaphor with the Cognitive-Linguistic Metaphor Theory as the framework, which explains that metaphor is a language form that people use to convey meanings by connecting two separate domains into one relationship. The first domain is a concrete, material, or shared experience as its foundation, while the second is an abstract concept. The metaphor's certain aspects of its concrete domain point out the main concepts in the target one. Thus, metaphor is a method to help people understand abstract ideas based on their concrete experiences. The latest studies explore the sentimental, emotional, and individual experiences that the recipients of a metaphor are familiar with. Thus, the study explores how the metaphor 'seal' gives clues of the recipients' life.

Thirdly, based on the two previous steps, the study continues to delve into the metaphor 'seal with the Spirit' of Ephesians 1:13. It explores the relationship of the term 'seal' and 'with the Spirit' even with other teachings of the Epistle primarily in relation to unity and the features of the diverse recipients. In particular, the study explores the life of slaves and the gentile Christians whether the metaphor 'seal' evokes a certain emotion for them. Thereafter, this study combines the results of the analyses in relation to the hypothesis.

Results

The nature of the Epistle to the Ephesians

Many studies have delved into the nature of the Epistle, its authorship, the context of the recipients, and the main messages of Ephesians. In the early church era, the Christians were familiar with this Epistle and accepted its authority as they knew the author and accepted his or her authority (Wolfe 2006). O'Brien also states that the Church Fathers such as Clement of Rome (95 CE) pointed out the writer. Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenaeus also stated that the letter is the Epistle of Paul. Even Marcion mentioned the Epistle as related to Paul, but he writes it for the Christians in Laodicea. Then, in the Canon Muratorian in 180 CE, the church leaders classified it as one of Paul's epistles (O'Brien 2004:4).

The first verse of this Epistle is *Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* [King James Version: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus] consists a word ἐν Ἐφέσῳ [meaning 'in Ephesus']. Historically, there are more than 16 textual variances in the manuscripts of Ephesians 1:1–12. The word 'in Ephesus' is absent from at least five important Alexandrian texts and the manuscripts mentioned by Origen and Basil, an issue that might cause people to doubt that the Epistle is addressed to the Christian in Ephesus. However, many experts such as Hoehner state that 'transcriptionally the omission of the phrase "in Ephesus" creates a grammatical anomaly; since the use of οὖσιν has no predicate' (Hoehner 2002:140). Wintle and Gnanakan also state that Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria regarded the letter was addressed to the Ephesian church whatever the content of its first verse (Wintle & Gnanakan 2006:2).

One probability is the recipients of the Epistle are the Christians in Ephesus who lived among the non-Christian majority of the city with their Greco-Roman culture. Paul spent 2 years ministering there and established a church after he left Troas in Asia Minor as observed in Acts 18–20. In Act 19, Paul had encounters with the Jewish as well as the Greeks after 3 months of being there. Ephesus is the second largest centre of civilisation in the Roman era and was known as one of the prominent harbours that had 2.5 million people (Mark 2009). This city is a cosmopolitan that functions as a significant trade hub, a centre of God and Goddess temples, the philosophy and culture learning destination, and a society where magic, superstition, and Gnosticism flourish (Arnold 2001:4, 167).

Other studies view that the Epistle is a circular letter, written around the same time as Colossians and Philemon for a wider group of churches probably in the vicinity of Ephesus with a possibility for they who were in the Lycus valley areas (Lightfoot 1993). Scholars also use Ephesians 6:21 to state that, it is a circular letter written by Paul for the churches in Ephesus, Laodicea, Colossians, and the surrounding regions and one of the versions of the circular especially is sent for the Christians in Ephesus who are not Jewish in their background (Conybeare & Howson 2012). Then, there is also a study that mentions that this letter is a farewell message of Paul to many Christians (Wintle & Gnanakan 2006:3).

Whatever theory is plausible, the studies agree that the author of this Epistle addresses both the Jewish as well as the Gentile Christians who lived in the middle of a gentile culture. Furthermore, the author of the Epistle also pays attention to the differences in the social classes of those Christians, such as free persons and slaves.

Since the 17th century, some scholars have been doubting the identity of Paul as the writer of this Epistle (Mollica 2007:4). They point out that the writer of the Epistles does not show any close relationship with the recipients even though he has lived in that area at least for 2 years (Conybeare & Howson 2012). Others who doubt Paul as the writer of this Epistle base their argument on four factors. Firstly, there is no word 'Ephesians' in the manuscript (Lincoln 1990). Secondly, the theological concepts do not fit with those of Paul, but more with the later writers. Thirdly, the theology is more abstract and repetitive (Wolfe 2006). Lastly, the language expression is more like the Epistle to the Colossians, which proposes a universal ecclesiology (Lincoln 1990:Lx–Lxviii).

Today, as modern studies of the Epistle point that it was composed by his friends, disciples, or collaborators, the Epistle, thus it can be called a pseudo-epigraphical-Pauline letter. However, sufficient continuity with the messages in the authentic Pauline letters is evident to warrant a conclusion that some of the followers of Paul who want to continue his work and spread the messages wrote the Epistle (Talbert 2007:11). There is also an interesting view that states the Epistle as the work of Paul together with his friends (Johnson 1999:409).

O'Brien summarises that at least there are two streams of views concerning the Epistle's purpose. The first one agrees that the writer of this Epistle provides answers to specific problem of the recipients while the second one states that the Epistle conveys no specific or single issue (O'Brien 2004:77).

In the first group, for example, a book written by Lindemann states that their main problem is persecution (Lindemann 1985). Then, Ralph Martin mentions that the recipients have to deal with the problem of interrelationship between the Gentile Christians who hate the Jewish Christians (Martin 1978:224). Weedman also mentions that the Epistle is to help the early Christians erase their view, which separates the Jewish from the Gentile Christians (Weedman 2006:81). Furthermore, Arnold states that the Epistle teaches the recipients to deal with the worldly and supernatural powers that surround them (Arnold 1989). In short, many of them might live with various feelings of insecurity as magic and witchcraft including astrology and goddess worship bother them as new Christians (Arnold 2001:188).

In the second group, the scholars agree that the Epistle does not explicitly indicate whether there is a specific or single issue. For example, Mollica with many newer scholars also points out that the Epistle deals with a general purpose such as identity formation rather than to correct or address a specific situation or problem (Talbert 2007:14).

With the two possibilities, this study delves into the structure and contents of this Epistle to obtain a coherent interpretation in the process of exploring the meaning of the metaphor 'sealed with the Spirit', its recipients, and the reason of the author to use the metaphor.

Seal as metaphor

Why does Ephesians 1:13 contain the metaphor instead of direct language? Metaphor derives from two words *meta* meaning a change and *pherein*, which means to carry or to bear. According to Aristotle, the most remarkable thing is to master metaphors. It signifies our ingenuity. Good metaphors show an intuitive perception of similarities in different things (Barnes 2009:424).

In the 20th century, Gorge Lakoff and Mark Johnson promote a new framework to understand metaphors called a Cognitive-Linguistic Metaphor Approach. It proposes that each metaphor consists of two domains. The first domain is named a concrete or source domain. It consists of something that most people know. The second domain is called the abstract or target domain. The concrete domain highlights features or aspects of the abstract domain to convey the concept emphasised by the metaphor. Thus, the concept is hidden or embedded (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

The theory also indicates that if one person uses a metaphor, the recipients have a certain space to respond to the embedded message or concept based on their own concrete experience in daily life or background. Based on the familiarity with the

recipients' concrete experience, someone purposely uses the metaphor to allow them to give a deeper response as they interpret the concept based on both their knowledge as well as feelings. Metaphor can trigger deeper understanding while at the same time, it gives space for the recipients to develop their own comprehension and emotional response. Therefore, metaphor as a communication tool is very powerful as it touches the recipients deeply both in their cognitive and affective dimensions.

The functions and the significance of metaphor shows in its capabilities. Firstly, a metaphor either isolates certain characteristics, emphasises specific features, or conceals certain aspects of something known to convey the embedded meaning to the abstract domain. (Mayer-Schoenberger & Oberlechner 2002).

Secondly, the study of Mohammad, Shutova, and Turney emphasises that metaphor has a stronger emotional impact than literal language. A word such as a metaphor carries more emotion and the literal sense of the same word (Mohammad, Shutova & Turney 2016:31). Li, Guerin, and Lin also agree with this finding (2022). Gibb also points out to the same view (Gibbs 2008). For example, a shield as a metaphor evokes more emotional response in the recipients who are soldiers as their lives are closely related to the instrument especially during battles that they are engaged in compared with the recipients who are painters. The metaphor 'shepherd' will affect the people in farming more than the urban contexts. Therefore, the metaphor indicates the author's intention and the main characteristics of the recipients' social status, psychology, or religious background.

The use of metaphor in the Epistle shows that the author realises that direct language is not sufficiently strong to convey the message. It might also indicate that there are many and diverse groups of recipients. As the metaphor is intended to evoke certain kinds of sentiments, with high probability, the use of it in the Epistle indicates the writer's knowledge of the recipients' stronger emotional ties to it compared with others. Who are they? To answer the question, the concrete domain and the abstract one of the metaphors 'seals' needs an analysis.

A seal as a metaphor has an embedded teaching or message based on the concrete experiences of people.

Today, in general, the concrete domain of a seal is as follows:

- A seal can be made to mark various elements or substances such as skin, paper, wood, clay, and others.
- There are various forms of seals such as circles, hexagons, or others.
- There are varieties in the colour of the seal.
- A seal is used by the owner or the representatives.
- No two seals are the same, each is unique or even exquisite.
- A seal warns people not to open a door or a territory to be entered, and the content of a bottle to be unspoiled such as in a wine. It is a protection.

Based on such a concrete domain, the abstract domain consists of:

- Regardless of the many forms and colours of the seal, all have the same embedded legal or social power.
- A seal points out the ownership of an animal, building, vehicle, territory, or slaves while the owner's view their status as a property.
- A seal indicates protection by the owner as she or he protects the asset.
- The identity of the recipients that have been marked is fixed.

The metaphor 'seal' in the Bible

In *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, the word 'seal' (חתם) is found some 42 times in the Old Testament (Clines 1996:3, 43–44). Pope states that the word is a loan from an Egyptian culture. There, a seal can take the form of a signet ring or can be worn around the neck or wrist. Seals were made of precious and semi-precious metals and stones, elaborately and exquisitely engraved and therefore, became a person's most valuable possession (Pope 1977:666). The owner used the seal to create a lasting mark on clay, skin, wax, or other substances.

One of the meanings of being sealed is in the *Book of Daniel*. The sentence in Daniel 6:17:

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles shows that Daniel's situation might not be changed. (Murphy 2008:1–2)

It indicates that 'sealed' means a way to lock or close and prevent a change from taking place (Arndt & Gingrich 1957:140). Here, sealed can mean prevention towards the cancellation of a decision.

Then, Goodwin points out that a seal often relates to inheritance as it has at least two functions. Firstly, it gives assurance that heritage is authentic and legally true. Secondly, it gives affirmation that the heritage is truly given to the person (Goodwin 1958:231).

Furthermore, Ferda states that the rabbinic literature makes clear that 'seal' was a common metaphoric description of circumcision (Ferda 2012:558). The Jews claim that they are the chosen people with circumcision as the mark or seal. Thus, for the recipients of the Epistle who are the Jewish Christians, the metaphor 'sealed' would have brought circumcision into their minds or even emotional responses such as pride and a positive self-image. Contrarily, for the Gentile Christians, as they do not experience circumcision, the metaphor might trigger dislike towards the Jewish Christians.

Another group of Christians who can have a particular response to the metaphor 'sealed' are slaves. In the Roman Empire, the slave population exploded, as Rome quickly conquered their neighbours in the Mediterranean basin

(Hopkins 1981:102). In the New Testament, the term used for slave is δούλος while for master is κύριος. These terms are used most often in the New Testament in describing the relationship of the believer to Christ and vice versa. The fact indicates that slavery was common at that time and the Christians are familiar with the presence of slaves.

If using the Cognitive Metaphor Theory analysis shows that seal indicates a property and thus slaves are viewed and treated as properties, Meltzer also states that slaves are simply properties of the owners who consider them not as fellow humans. There was no legal recourse for a slave when beaten by the owner. Furthermore, slaves could own nothing and inherit nothing. (Meltzer 1993:101). Logically, slaves know that they no longer have a future hope although abolition might take place rarely.

The identity as slaves can be recognised as in the Roman Empire inflicting marks on their bodies is a common practice (Kamen 2010). Jones describes that one of methods is branding the slave's forehead for those who tried to steal or have tried to run away (Jones 1987). Another practice is tattooing the slave's body to place a stigma on the individual and claim ownership. Lastly, slaves were forced to special collars on their necks (Thompson 2003:238). It is logical, for slaves, the metaphor seals can trigger negative feelings or hopelessness related to their identity especially if they experience cruelty of their master and, the seals are the constant reminder of their status.

Thus far, when the use of the metaphor 'seals' indicates the intended recipients could be both slaves and the people who are familiar with circumcision practices. How does the Epistle use the metaphor?

In the New Testament, the word *sphragizo* or *sphragis* (σφραγίζω or σφραγίς) is the translation of the word 'seal'. Lampe in the Patristic Greek Lexicon states that the term *sphragizo* means 'binding' and 'stating'. Moulton points out that as a figure of speech or reality, *sphragizo* or seal can mean 'sealing' or 'covering with a seal' (Moulton 1978). To conclude, Murphy writes that the word 'be sealed' or *sphragizo* has meanings that most biblical scholars agree. Firstly, a seal is to authenticate something. Secondly, it is a sign to affirm ownership. The seal then will prevent others from stealing them. The seal is also a mark that conveys a warranty (Murphy 2008:1–2). In short, the metaphor 'seal' or 'be sealed' points out the abstract concepts, which are identification, authentication, ownership, and security, or warranty that prevents any cancellation (Philippa 2012:115).

To sum up, in relation to slaves, they have close personal experience with seals, which indicates their low social status identity and lifetime bondage. The Jewish Christians also have a concrete experience with the metaphor 'seal' in relation to circumcision as it gives a positive feeling as the metaphor strengthens their identity as God's chosen people.

Metaphor of 'sealed with the Spirit' in Ephesians 1:13

The familiarity of the early Christians with the term 'sealed with the Spirit' is evident. A Church Father, Chrysostomus who lived between 347 to 407 AD wrote many homilies that consist of the term 'sealed with the Spirit'. Ferda mentions that a cardinal of Constantinople mentions that the term 'be sealed' is related to the word 'circumcised' (Ferda 2012:557). Modern scholars such as Barth (1974:135–144) and Gnllka (1971:86) point out that the term is related to baptism. As baptism, seals indicate a public sign of one's turning point experience of receiving God's grace in Christ.

In 'sealed with the Spirit' of Ephesians 1:13, the metaphor signifies a couple of things. Firstly, the seal is related to the Holy Spirit. Then, the word 'with' instead of 'by' or 'for' is evident. Perhaps, to understand deeply the meaning, an analysis of the main theological themes and structure of this Epistle is needed.

Concerning the themes, O'Brien states that the Epistle repeatedly attracts attention to the contrasts between the former way of life of the Christians with their new life in Christ as conveyed by the author's repeated use of *once-now* forms (O'Brien 2004:2). The author describes the former condition of the new Christians by using various terms among other relating to the concept of being bondage to evil. The emphasis is on the contrast of their dark former condition and the unconditional grace of God. In Ephesians 2:4, although there is no explicit use of the word 'now', the author emphasised the contrast: 'But God who is rich in mercy' has acted decisively on behalf of those who were objects of wrath; he has made them alive with Christ, raised them up and seated them with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:5–6) (O'Brien 2023:190). Based on such analysis, O'Brien proposes that in the first half of the Epistle, it describes the solemnity and the broad sweep of God's majestic saving purposes, while chapters 4–6 as the second part give guidance to live as the true believers (O'Brien 2023:70).

Other studies show that Ephesians consists of three parts, each having its theme. Chapters 1–3 is the first and Chapters 4–6 is the second and the third part (Merida, Platt & Akin 2014). The first part consists of the teaching of God's grace in Christ. The second part teaches about the Holy Spirit in their lives. The third part is about the practice of such grace by manifesting unity in the daily life of the believers.

Then, Lau states that the Ephesians describes *ἐκκλησία* – the vehicle through which cosmic reconciliation in Christ manifested. It should appear as a body (*σῶμα*) united under Christ (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30), as a biological organism (4:16), as a unified building or temple (2:19–22), and as the bride of Christ (5:25–30). Furthermore, he mentions that the Ephesians is rich in *σύν* and *μετά* prefixed words, indicating union with Christ or other believers (Lau 2009:35–47). Thus, the main theme of this Epistle is unity with God and church unity as the result of the redemption in Christ.

Concerning specifically the metaphor 'be sealed with the Holy Spirit', other scholars such as Nyamiwa point out that Ephesians 1:1–12 can convey a perspective that gives a backbone to the whole Ephesians (Nyamiwa 2016:1).

As a benediction or *berakhah* the beginning is as follow:

Verse 1: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πίστοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, King James Version with Strong's translation is: Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Verse 2: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to Greever, after the opening of the Epistle, three sections follow it. The first which is verse 4–6 emphasises the electing love and grace of God through or in Christ. From the eternity past, God chose to set Divine's covenant affection on believers. The description of verse 4 indicates that the election grants holiness and blamelessness in the believers, which will find its completion in the presence of God at the last day. Verses 11–14 as the final section of Ephesians 1 speak about the assurance or the inheritance believers enjoy, which the Spirit's presence guarantees. However, in this part, there is a second person pronoun in Greek *ὑμεῖς*, which means 'you also'. Why does the author use the word 'also' here (Greever 2014:75)?

Weedman states that although the recipients of the Epistle are the Gentile Christians, the word 'us or our', refers to the recipients who are the Jew and Jewish Christians. When he states about God's choice for us, the statement echoes the Jewish background of the author (Weedman 2006:83). Then, the word 'you also are sealed with the Holy Spirit', is addressed to the Gentile Christians. It is a rhetorical surprise that the author places at the end of a greeting. The recipients, mainly Gentile Christians are led to understand that while they live in God's grace because of Jesus Christ, however they do so by standing on the shoulders of Israel (Weedman 2006:88). This finding is parallel with the probability that the author uses metaphor as the recipients have personal experience or even certain kinds of sentiment with circumcision.

Relating with such a background as mentioned here, it means 'have been sealed' is also a freedom from the past identity. Then, if this verse is related to Ephesians 6:8 *εἰδότες ὅτι ἕκαστος ἐάν τι ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο κομίζεται παρὰ κυρίου εἴτε δούλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος* (King James version: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive from the Lord, whether he be bond or free), it might indicate that the metaphor is conveyed also for the *doulos* or slaves. They also need to be freed (*ἐλεύθερος*) from the identity that becomes bondage and receive a freedom to enter a new life with the Spirit who unites them. The baptism that they have received also points to the same concept. It is their

inheritance from God. In the present time the inheritance has not been manifested thoroughly but in the future its manifestation will complete.

Another term in Ephesians 1:14, which is *arrabōn* supports the view. *Arrabōn* can mean earnest money, a deposit of future purchases, or a down payment. Thus, the author of the Epistle refers to 'sealed with the Holy Spirit' as a future completion, a sign of commitment, or assurance, and spiritual inheritance (Woodcock 1996:150). The Jewish Christians have had the inheritance all along as the covenant people and the Gentile believers have also received the down payment of it and along with the original inheritors.

Thus, to conclude, the author distinguishes two groups, the Jewish and Gentile Christians by clarifying the role of the Jews and the covenant in bringing the Gentiles into a relationship with God. The author does not look down on the Israelites and their law (Weedman 2006:84). Furthermore, the author might relate the metaphor to the status of slaves as they are parts of the church. However, it means that freedom from status for them is not immediately manifested in their world at that time, but in their soul. Therefore, the author also gives guidance about the slaves' conduct in their master's house.

Overall, Murdy states that at the beginning of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the author teaches about forgiveness from sin, redemption in the blood of Christ, and the richness of His gifts. It is part of God's plan that has begun in the past and will be completed in the future (Murdy 2008:1). The term 'be sealed with the Holy Spirit' indicates that the Holy Spirit who dwells in us is the assurance of God's grace. Thus, being sealed with the Spirit also means being freed from the bondage of sin and various social or historical bondages.

Based on the combination of such interpretation with the Cognitive Metaphor Theory in analysing the contents of the concrete domain, an analysis of the concepts in the abstract domain will point out the embedded message:

- The seal that represents the identity of God as the owner of the Christians, either they are the Jewish Christians or the Gentile Christians, and either they are free person or the slaves.
- Being 'sealed with the Spirit' means that the recipients no longer live alone but with the Holy Spirit, which means they will have protection and guarantee of their special identity.
- Legally a seal has a spiritual impact for each recipient.
- 'Sealed with the Spirit' means that transformation becomes part of the recipient's life, especially they need to leave their identities that are or were based on historical or social status.

Discussion

The use of metaphor helps to ease the understanding of the teachings and concepts presented in the Epistle especially for slaves or people who are new believers. The metaphor provides vivid imagery that helps the recipients

to visualise the teachings, especially it connects with their personal social status and concrete experience or even can trigger emotional responses. The metaphor also reinforces key themes in the Epistle, such as the unity of the church and the new identity of believers in Christ. For the slaves, 'sealed with the Spirit' means that although in the world they are still slaves, in their spirit, they are free persons. For the non-Jewish Christians, although they do not undergo circumcision as their fellow Jewish Christian, their status and identity as the chosen people is equal. The Jewish Christians view the seal metaphor as the assurance of their continuing role as God's elect. Together the new believers learn about their roles and place as the united chosen people in their society.

Thus, with high probability the writer chooses such a metaphor as it affects the recipients both in their mind as well as in heart as the metaphor roots in their concrete life. Although the metaphor 'seal' is known by many Gentiles and the Jewish Christians, the author purposely also uses it to address the slaves who are more emotionally or deeply touched by the word 'seal or being sealed'.

This study can contribute significant meaning and implications for Indonesian Christians. In the past, European missionaries managed to introduce the Gospel to many tribes. However, they separated each of the newly converted tribes. In a certain case, in a city where a Christian Church was developed and consisted of more than one tribe, the missionary persuaded the church leaders to separate them based on their tribal backgrounds. Such an approach causes many churches to distance themselves from each other as their tribes are very different from each other. Understanding and feeling secure based on this metaphor can provide spiritual encouragement, guidance, and a unique perspective for their daily lives and mutual appreciation among fellow Christians in society.

Many large churches in Indonesia minister in urban settings while others in rural contexts. The differences in access to good education, health, and economic life between the contexts are quite evident. Denominational origins added to tribal-cultural background and the differences in the social status of the members create many difficulties in uniting them. For example, at the national organisational level instead of having one Church body, besides the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, which is the largest, there are the Fellowship of Chinese Church which consists of the Indonesian Chinese Christians, the Fellowship of the Pentecostal Churches in Indonesia, and the Fellowship of the Evangelical Churches and Organisation. All together are members of a minority group.

Being 'sealed with the Spirit' serves as a reminder of their same and equal identity as children of God regardless of the differences in size, wealth, and heritage. Such a view is especially needed by small, rural, and poor churches to assure their worthiness.

The metaphor also underscores the importance of their roles in the pluralistic society with the largest Muslim population in the world. They should engage the other religious adherents peacefully while inspiring them by living as a united minority who feel secure in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Analyses based on the exegesis of the Ephesians and the Cognitive Metaphor Analysis show how the embedded teaching of the metaphor signifies the worthiness of the ones who are sealed. Being 'sealed with the Spirit' means that the diversified believers are united in the Spirit to undergo transformation and continue sharing God's love and grace. The hypothesis of this study proves that the use of the metaphor 'seal with the Spirit' indicates that the author knows that recipients' experiences are closely related to 'seal' at a personal level as slaves who at that time were branded or as the Christians who were familiar with circumcision. The embedded teaching in the metaphor is then, that living with the Holy Spirit means the recipients are united and assured of their worthiness as Christ has liberated them from various social or historical bondages which are divisive. This study can contribute to the Christians who live in the Indonesian pluralistic society today as a minority group and are still captured in the bondage of their past tribal, denominational, and social status, which prevents them from manifesting an inspiring Christian unity.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

R.I.C. and A.M.L.B. initiated the idea. R.I.C. conceptualised and wrote the draft after researching the previous studies. A.C.J. rewrote the analyses and added more. Afterwards the three authors discussed the work and completed it together.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions written in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors and the publisher.

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