

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that the [Sacrament of Confirmation](#) increases and perfects the graces we've already received as Christians when we come to Christ through faith and baptism (1303). It also describes the “seal,” or “spiritual mark” indelibly left upon the soul of the confirmandi:

Confirmation imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian's soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one's life. (1317)

Do we find anything akin to this in Scripture? Absolutely!

Ephesians 4:30 (cited in CCC 1296) uses the actual term—*sealed*—with regard to this great gift from our Blessed Lord:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

“But wait a minute,” some will say, “that text doesn't tell us when we actually receive this 'seal' of the Holy Spirit! How do you know that refers to your Sacrament of Confirmation?” For millions of Evangelical and Fundamentalists that seal of the Holy Spirit is received when they “accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior.” In their minds, there is no second, distinct work of grace that Catholics call “Confirmation.” And yet, in Acts 8:14-17, among other texts (Acts 2:4, 19:1-6), the word of God could hardly be clearer. When an unspecified number of Samaritans had accepted Christ and been baptized, what do we see?

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samar'ia had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

These new believers in Christ evidently still needed to be “sealed” with the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul taught in Ephesians 4:30. Sounds awfully Catholic, doesn't it?

Many Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants not only wrongly interpret Eph. 4:30 when it comes to just *when* Christians “receive the Holy Spirit,” they also interpret it to mean once we receive that “seal,” we are guaranteed heaven. This is known as the heresy of “[once saved always saved](#),” which is especially popular with Calvinists.

Yet, the Bible knows nothing of this. This “seal” of Eph. 4:30 is indelible—*for* (Greek *eis*, or “unto”) *the day of redemption*—and it helps us to cooperate with the grace it provides. But there is nothing in that text that guarantees heaven. The truth is: if we do not cooperate with the grace of the sacrament our rejection of those graces will only take us to a lower state in Hell! And this is true of all of the gifts of grace we receive this side of the veil.

This is an extremely important principle to understand. Jesus teaches it perhaps most succinctly in Luke 12:48: “... to whom much is given, much will be required.” In John 15:1-6, he adds that unless the faithful continue “abide in [him, they will be] cast forth as a branch... gathered, [and] thrown into the fire and burned.” There is nothing even close to “once saved, always saved” to be found here!

*Lumen Gentium* 14 fleshes this biblical concept out in the clearest of terms:

They are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion. He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a “bodily” manner and not “in his heart.” All the Church’s children should remember that their exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word, and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged.

Confirmation is a great gift of grace and strength given to the faithful as a bulwark against the sin and error that can keep the faithful from heaven. It is

entirely biblical. And it is necessary for salvation in the sense that it is an essential aid for Christians to “be faithful unto death” so that Jesus can justly “give [them] the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). It marks and equips, but it is no absolute guarantor of final salvation. As with all sacraments, it ordinarily requires man’s cooperation in order to bear fruit unto eternal life.