

Sermon on Become a member of the Covenant Community to receive Privileges and Benefits

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Text:

Ephesians 1:13-14 ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

1 Introduction

Today, we begin a series of messages taken from Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus and to be read as a circular letter by the churches in Asia Minor. Paul wrote this letter from Rome during his imprisonment to strengthen the churches, especially the one in Ephesus where he had spent three years.

Ephesians may be divided into three parts: (1) Doctrine on the Unity in Christ, (2) Exhortation on the Walk and Service of the Believer, and (3) Conclusion.

We begin with Ephesians 1:1-14 which I have titled the Privilege and Benefits of Membership in the Covenant Community. Ephesians 1:1-14 may be viewed as three sections. The first section, contained in **verses 1-3**, includes standard letter address and greetings. The second section, contained in **verses 4-12**, tells us about how God chooses people. The third section, contained in **verses 13-14**, tells us that those whom God chooses become part of the covenant community of Christ and gives us the process for gaining membership in this community.

The benefits and privileges of becoming a member of the Covenant Community are plenty and so today I call upon you to become a member of the Covenant Community of Christ to receive those privileges and benefits. In the 1970's and 1980's American Express had a commercial that was captioned "Membership has its privileges." I submit to you that the privileges of membership in American Express are temporal and there is a cost you bare to become a member. On the other hand membership in the Covenant Community of Christ is free and the benefits are neither time-limited nor space-constrained. Contrary to some beliefs those

benefits are not only in the hereafter but also in the here and now. So, once again, I call upon you to become a member of the Covenant Community of Christ to receive those privileges and benefits.

2 How God Chooses for the Covenant Community

Let's go straight to the second section in Verses 4-12, which tell us about how God chooses people.

In some organizations you can just go and join, pay your dues and you become a member. And then you become entitled to certain benefits. An example is any ethnic cultural association such as the Ghana Association. There are no qualifying regulations. In other organizations you have to go through certain grueling qualification tests and pledging rituals and if you pass then you are admitted. Examples are college fraternities and sororities and professional associations. In other organizations you have to be invited to become a member. Without an invitation you cannot attempt to join. It is a privilege and honor to become part of such an organization. An example is The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

So how does God choose people to become members of the Covenant Community of Christ?

His method is similar to the one used by elite organizations such as the America Academy of Arts and Sciences. God chooses whom he wishes to chose. Jesus says this in the following verses: John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." John 6:37 "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

The only consideration in his choice is his grace, his pleasure, and his will. His grace is glorious and full of riches. His pleasure is good. His will is mysterious. But the purpose of his will is that all members would constitute the elements of his glory. Therefore, it is an honor and privilege to become a member of the covenant community. This honor and privilege was secured by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. God did not require wisdom, strength, beauty, royalty, nobility for membership. If that was the requirement then you and I and most people who cannot be members of the American Academy of Arts and sciences will not also be part of the Covenant Community of Christ. O, the grace of God! You who were undeserving have

received special honor of being invited to become a member of the Covenant Community of Christ!

3 Process for Gaining Membership in the Covenant Community of Christ

The third section in Verses 13-14 tells us that those whom God chooses become part of the covenant community of Christ and gives us the process for gaining membership in this community: (1) Hear the Word, (2) Believe in and act on the Word in order to receive the Mark of the Holy Spirit as a Seal, and (3) finally claim the redemption.

3.1 Hear the Word of Truth (Jesus)

If the Word of Truth is good news to you then you'll believe and become excited about it, otherwise you will not believe. For example, if President Bush makes an announcement on the Radio that there is now amnesty for Green Card, there will be different reactions: Illegal immigrants will be thrilled and apply immediately, legal immigrants will be glad but not do anything, some citizens may be ignorant of the significance of the news, others may be okay with it, but some citizens may actually be infuriated by it. So, it is how you receive the Word that will dictate your response to believe or not.

3.2 Believe in the Word.

In the covenant community of Israel membership was by birth and then later on by an extensive process of initiation which included for males, circumcision. Each member had to sustain their membership by observance of what is called the Halakha, which consist of dietary and ceremonial rules.

In the covenant community of Christ all that is required is to respond positively to the good news of Christ. You must do this as specified by Romans 10:9-10: “confess with your mouth [that] ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, [then] you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

3.2.1 Receive Mark of the Holy Spirit as a Seal

After believing, you are marked with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus had finished the work on Calvary, on the eve of his ascension he appeared to his disciples and “breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22) thus marking them with the Holy Spirit.

Why is the mark necessary?

Let us look at the example of Cain concerning marking by God as recorded in Genesis 4:11-15:

Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

In the same way we had also sinned incurring the penalty of death with Satan as the executioner looking to steal and kill and destroy. Then just as God in his inexplicable grace, showed mercy to Cain, he also showed us unmerited favor when he sent his only begotten son to die for our sins and hence put the mark on those who positively respond to Christ. Because of this mark of the Holy Spirit, Paul is assured as Cain was that, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:18) This means that no weapons formed against you shall prosper. It also means that, “The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.” (Deuteronomy 28:7)

The Holy Spirit is also a seal of your membership in the covenant community. Seal in ancient times is like a signature in our times. A seal attests that the person certifies that this transaction bears his agreement. So this says that the signature of the Holy Spirit has been placed on you. That is, the Holy Spirit has authorized your existence and that is why Paul will say, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) So your very existence is

structured by God and he orders your steps according to his mysterious will, his glorious grace, and his good purpose so that his name will receive glory. Therefore, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

3.3 Claim Redemption.

The seal is like a claim check that you use to claim your full redemption at the end of the ages. This is also referred by theologians as “already but not yet.” We have the mark of the redemption but we have yet to take complete hold of it. That is, someday, we will redeem the mark of the Holy Spirit for our place in heaven. And so we must have the attitude that Paul expressed in Philippians 3:13-14, “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

This is the believer’s hope. Everything done in this world must have this hope in purview. Anyone who wants to successfully endure all trials and tribulations must keep this hope alive in his walk.

4 Conclusion

God Chooses people to become members of the Covenant Community by His grace, which is glorious and full of riches, by His good pleasure, and by His will, which is mysterious.

On your part you can gain membership in the Covenant Community of Christ by hearing the Word of Truth, by believing in and acting on this Word in order to receive the mark of the Holy Spirit as a Seal, and finally, by claiming your redemption at the end of the ages.

If your child is accepted to a prestigious school you are glorified in the sight of people. In the same way, God is glorified when we become members of the august and special body called the Covenant Community of Christ. These are believers who have been washed by the blood of Jesus and walking in the foot steps of Christ. So God will ensure your prosperity and well-being. Become a member today of the Covenant Community of Christ and receive the benefits and privileges of membership.