

6. The benefits of being in Christ

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When I came to the United States in May 16, 1981 with my young family, I had \$2,000 in my pocket. We used \$1,000 to buy '72 Chevy Impala that had 100,000 miles on. Because I didn't have any credit rating in this country, we had to put down \$1,000 as a deposit for our apartment. I couldn't find a job as a graphic designer.

My wife Karen informed me that I need to look for a job with employee benefits such as health, dental insurance, vacation time and so on. I worked as a part-time cashier for J C Penneys for a year until I became a self-employed graphic designer. Many of you know that being a self-employed sounds good, but it comes with a big price tag. You have to pay everything out of your own pocket. Because of that I couldn't take a vacation for eight years.

In 1990, I got a job at U S West Direct Yellow Pages as a graphic designer and started to enjoy company paid health, dental benefit and vacation for the first time. With ever increasing health care cost, good insurance plans and paid vacation are very important aspects of considerations for jobs.

Our Heavenly Father provides the best benefit package in the universe. The CEO and President of this heavenly business not only personally know each of His employees by name because He selects us individually, but also He provides the best working environment in this Father-Son-the Spirit family business with a mind blowing wage system which we get paid in advance by the Son Himself, outstanding retirement plan including a mansion in heavenly prime real estate, fool proof fire insurance, constant spiritual training courses strengthen our spiritual condition and phenomenal reward systems for all the work we do.

On top of that, this family business is so financially sound that there is absolutely no possibility of bankruptcy or fraud like Enron or MCI. The Father and the Son own everything in the universe. If they need more capitals, they can just make more.

Nobody comes close to this Employer and His benefit packages. There is one guy who thinks he is a competitor of this Heavenly Employer. But he is so corrupted that everyone who works for him feel like living in hell.

Apostle Paul shows us six different benefits out of many for being in Christ Jesus from this chapter. Let's look at them more closely.

BENEFIT #1. ETERNAL HOUSING IN HEAVEN

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

There are three popular misconceptions about death:

1) Many people believe that death is a temporary transition.

They believe that it simply moves us into a passing phase commonly called purgatory. Purgatory is "an intermediate place between heaven and hell, where the unfinished

business of earth is settled.” In this system of belief, mainly coming from Catholic realm, others can pray someone out of this place of punishment, purification and perfection.

The word purgatory comes from the root word ‘purge’. It refers to a place of spiritual purging. Those who believe in purgatory support it with the apocryphal work of 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, along with Matthew 12:31-32 and 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. However, they are taking these verses out of context. It is unbiblical.

2) Many seek release from death’s permanent grip through repeated reincarnation.

This Eastern philosophy holds that when we die, we can be born into another body. Recycling of the human spirit can go on indefinitely, bringing us to higher levels of happiness if we’ve lived a good life or lower levels of misery if we haven’t. It also is nothing more than cultic and a damnable doctrine from hell.

3) Some believe that death is the ultimate conclusion, the grand finale to life.

To them, all afterlife is nonexistent. This philosophy is what gave rise to the epicurean ethic: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Live like a dog and die like a dog. Again, it is unbiblical.

The believers of these theories may be sincere, but they are sincerely wrong.

Have you ever spent time in a tent? If so, you know that it’s a place where you’d only want to live for a short while. It’s fun to camp out in a tent, but let’s face it. You wouldn’t want to call it home! It’s hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and leaky when it rains. And the older it gets, the more it sags. Eventually, it frays and tears and rots. Our physical bodies are like these tents.

Medical doctors make their living listening to groaning tents. An orthopedic surgeon tries to keep the tent pegs from pulling loose, a dermatologist tries to keep the canvas in good shape, and general practitioners are always patching us up.

BENEFIT #2. TO INSURE THAT HOUSING WE HAVE A DEPOSIT -THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US

2 Corinthians 5:5-8 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

We groan because we are weary, rain-soaked campers longing for home. But when we loose this earthly tent from our shoulders, we will not be left naked and cold. To assure us of this, God gave us a deposit on our eternal home: the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer’s body is the “down payment” that guarantees the future inheritance, including a glorified body. In modern Greek, the word translated “*guarantee*” means “engagement ring.” The church is engaged to Jesus Christ and is waiting for the Bridegroom to come to take her to the wedding.

While we are living in our earthly tents, we cannot have tangible, visible, audible relationship with the Lord. We cannot walk by sight, so we walk by faith. But when we die, we will be at home with Him. We will hear His voice, touch His hands, see Him face to face. No wonder Paul preferred to be in heaven rather than here.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

GOAL #1. OUR GOAL IS TO PLEASE GOD

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Because he had this kind of confidence, Paul was not afraid of suffering and trials, or even of dangers. Heaven was not simply a destination for Paul. It was a motivation. Like all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, he looked for the heavenly city of which architect and the builder is God Himself.

The main goal in our lives should not be being successful in one's business or healthy. It should be, without any doubt, pleasing our God.

Matt. 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

There is an ambition that is selfish and worldly, but there is also a holy ambition that honors the Lord. Paul's great ambition was to be well-pleasing to Jesus Christ. A man-pleasing ministry is a carnal, compromising ministry and God cannot bless it.

BENEFIT #3. REWARDS ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE DONE ON EARTH

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

The Corinthian believers well understood the concept of a "judgement seat," or 'bema', in Greek which was a platform. Paul himself had stood before the judgment seat of the Roman governor Gallio Years before when hostile Jews accused the apostle of violating their religious laws in Acts 18:12-17.

The bema of Christ, however, is different. This "judgment seat" must not be confused with the Great White Throne from which Christ will judge the wicked according to Rev. 20:11-15. Because of the gracious work of Christ on the cross, believers will not face their sins. But we will have to give an account of our works and service for the Lord.

As we live and work here on earth, it is relatively easy for us to hide things and pretend. But the true character of our works will be exposed before the searching eyes of the Savior. He will reveal whether our works have been good or bad. The character of our service will be revealed as well as the motives that impelled us according to 1 Cor. 3-4. It is about quality over quantity and it is about motive over result.

BENEFIT #4. ALL OF OUR DEBTS WERE CANCELLED BY JESUS

2 Corinthians 5:12-15 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Non-believers think everyone should live life the way they want to-married or divorced, homosexual heterosexual, religious or not religious. As long as they're not hurting

anybody, we're told we should accept people as they are and leave them alone including the concept of God. It is a flat out wrong way to live.

If we live only for the praise of men, we will not win the praise of God at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To live for man's praise is to exalt reputation over character, and it is character that will count when we see Christ.

BENEFIT #5. WE ARE NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:16-19 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

The world judges people according to how they look and what they have. But as believers, we must see others through Christ's eyes. Instead of evaluating them by their appearances, we should see their hearts. We are drawn to them by their need for the Savior.

The word 'creation' comes from the Greek word 'ktisis' the root of which means "the act of creation" or 'that which is created.' When Christ comes into a person's life, He performs an act of creation. He brings into being something new. Before, our spirit was dead, now it is alive. And once this new life is born, it transforms us from the inside out, changing our priorities, our relationships and our actions. Only God can do this work in us, but once He has done it, He gives us the responsibility of sharing Him with others.

God has commissioned us to show others that Jesus' death on the cross appeased God's anger toward sin and replaced it with His acceptance of sinners. Humans keep a running tab of sin, but Christ paid the debt and wiped the slate clean.

The word 'imputation' is a word borrowed from banking. It simply means "to put to one's account." When you deposit money in the bank, the computer puts that amount to your account, or to your credit. When Jesus died on the cross, all of our sins were imputed to Him – put to His account. He was treated by God as though He had actually committed those sins.

The result? All of those sins have been paid for and God no longer holds them against us, because we have trusted Christ as our Saviour. But even more, God has put to our account the very righteousness of Christ!

Reconciliation is based on imputation. Because the demands of God's holy law have been fully met on the cross, God can be reconciled to sinners. Those who believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior will never have their sins imputed against them again. As far as their records are concerned, they share the righteousness of Jesus Christ!

BENEFIT #6. WE ARE THE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:20-21 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

We serve an authority the world doesn't see. In many ways, we're like ambassadors to a foreign country, living among the citizens of the land but obeying a different ruler. We speak a different language. We have different customs, traditions, cultures, and life styles. We feel a bit like strangers, even though we've made this place our home for a short while. And, like ambassadors, our purpose is to help bridge the gap between our home and theirs.

Our true home is heaven. Our true authority is the Lord. And we represent Him to those around us even though they don't acknowledge Him as the King of kings.

The primary message He wants His ambassadors to spread is in v21. This is the heart and soul of the Gospel. Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, was made a sin offering on our behalf, just as Isaiah had prophesied in Isa 53:10.

Is. 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

APPLICATIONS

1) We need to use God given opportunities that are limited to life.

Though life is short, it is eternally significant. There are no second chances once we die. There is no purgatory, no reincarnation. Let others know that there is no options after they die.

Not only that, but also we need to maximize our God given opportunities to please our Lord

2) We need to maintain God's perspective in our point of view.

It's easy to be fooled by a flawless exterior, but no matter how successful and "together" some may appear on the surface, everybody needs the Lord. When we see through God's lenses, we look past the face to the heart.