

SPECIAL BENEFITS OF THE CHURCH

Part One

From the beginning God purposed the church, the collection of His people on earth. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, *“I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”* Prior to Acts 2 the church is spoken of in the future tense, but after Acts 2, when about 3000 souls repented and were baptized for remission of their sins, the church is spoken of in the present tense. Ephesians 5:27, Colossians 1:13-14 and I Corinthians 15:24 teach us that it is the church that will ultimately be delivered up to heaven to live forever in the presence of God. So it is imperative that we be “in the church” if we are to be saved. But what are the advantages of being in the church in this life? What can we tell people that will convince them that life as a Christian has more to offer than the one they are currently experiencing and possibly enjoying immensely? I believe the Bible teaches that there are at least six benefits of the church, provided by God but expected to be understood and lived out by His people. We will have three this week and next week we will discuss the other three.

Basic Needs – *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own”* (Matthew 6:33-34). *“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever. Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God”* (II Corinthians 9:6-11) Christians should have confidence and faith that our basic physical, material needs will be met and it is up to the local congregation to make sure there is no one among its number that is suffering in this way. From the abundance of the local church we should, also, seek out needy Christians in other places who need assistance in having their basic needs provided.

Care & Protection – *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it”* (I Corinthians 10:12-13). *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge”* (II Corinthians 1:21-22). God knows those who are His and will watch over us and protect us as long as we remain faithfully obedient. Fellow Christians are to share in providing this umbrella of care and protection to one another

Friendship & Love – *“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love hath no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you*

slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have learned from My Father I have made known to you. This I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:12-15,17). “If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:1-4) Christians must develop friendships and demonstrate sincere love and concern for their brothers and sisters. If we expect people to give up their worldly habits and friends, we must show them that the friends and lifestyle they will enjoy as a Christian are much better than anything they have ever known.

-Richard Bartholomew