**MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES**

***Perks That Are Out Of This World***

When you become a member of any organization you do so for a reason. Most join for the perks you receive with your membership. My AAA platinum premier car club membership allows me to get towed up to six times per year (remember, I live in Minne-Snow-ta, or some call it Minne-so-cold). I also get discounts at stores, hotels, car rentals, and airlines. Membership has its privileges.

Status. Prestige. Importance. Those were privileges given to everyone fortunate enough to own the American Express credit card from 1987 to 1996. The golden Roman centurion logo tells you your money is well protected, and its slogan “Membership has its privileges” tells you that you now live in the elite circles of the rich and famous. If you own this card you are somebody very, very special. Just a swipe of this plastic takes you to fancy restaurants and fabulous vacations. To have this 3¼ inch by 2 inch card elevates you to the rank of VIP. *(oh, btw, don’t worry about that 19.75 % interest rate).*

The name “Madison Avenue” is famous for its advertising agencies that use slick cliches and witty marketing to catch the eyes and ears of the buying public. Gordon Bowen’s agency is considered the greatest advertiser in the world, boasting clients like Disney, Hershey’s, Intel, Kraft, Heinz, Marriott, Proctor & Gamble, Subway, United Airlines, Verizon, Chevron and of course American Express. If you look at these brand names and think of their slogans and images, you will discover how advertising works. Bowen’s goal is to make the buyer feels he is getting quality and special treatment if he buys this product. Indeed, membership has its privileges.

I once owned the American Express card. Funny, I never went on a Mediterranean cruise to the French Riviera or dined at The French Laundry in Napa Valley, California. It didn’t make me feel special in any way (except for the extra attention I might have received from the bill collector with that 19.75 % APR balance). William Shakespeare was right when he said, “all that glitters is not gold.” It’s hard to trust anyone anymore.

Except Jesus. Every promise He ever made came true. In spades!

When He told man “*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body what you will put on … therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ … Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matt. 6:19-34).

Everyone who has ever truly become a member of God’s kingdom has received 100% satisfaction from that membership. Like David, all kingdom members can say, “*I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread*” (Psa. 37:25).

There’s an annual fee to membership in everything from credit cards to country clubs. But in Christ’s kingdom the entrance fee is free. Isaiah’s famous Messianic prophecy foretold membership in God’s kingdom. He said, *​“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk, Without money and without price”* (Isa. 55:1). While all fees were waived for you to become a member, in reality it was not free. Christ paid for your membership with His life. Paul reminds us, not once but twice, that “*you were bought at a price*” (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Any perks I receive as a member of His church are a gift from our Savior.

But like membership in any organization or club I want to know what they are. While the New Testament is full of God’s promises to all the Lord added to His church (Ac. 2:47), Paul gives a brief summary of my membership package in Ephesians 1:3-14,

*3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with* ***every spiritual blessing*** *in the heavenly places in Christ,
4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,
5 having* ***predestined us to adoption as sons*** *by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us* ***accepted in the Beloved****.
7 In Him we have* ***redemption*** *through His blood, the* ***forgiveness of sins****, according to the riches of His grace
8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,
9 having* ***made known to us the mystery of His will****, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,
10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might* ***gather together in one all things in Christ****, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.
11 In Him also we have* ***obtained an inheritance****, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.
13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were* ***sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise****,
14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until* ***the redemption of the purchased possession****, to the praise of His glory.*

There’s no fine print. No hidden fee. No gotcha. There’s only God’s promise that as long as I remain a faithful member then I will bear fruit in this life and then *“an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

You can refuse membership at American Express, Sam’s Club, Costco, Hertz, Delta and Marriott and still live a happy life, even without all those promised privileges. But one membership you dare not refuse to apply for is Christ’s kingdom. It is the only one that has perks that are out of this world. Become a member today (Acts 2:37-47). You won’t regret it.

I love you. – Rick