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WORKSHOP ON THE BOOK:

Thom S. Rainer, *"I am A Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference."*
Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.

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Introduction

Paul declares in 1Cor. 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Church membership starts with being included in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit when a person believes in Jesus Christ as savior and receives him by placing his faith in him for salvation. This singular act and its effect points to Luke's phrase in the book of Acts 2:47, "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (ESV). The point here is that church membership begins with the Lord himself bringing addition to his body through the act of granting salvation to those who believe in Jesus. Furthermore, that which the Lord adds to his church is the same that the Holy Spirit baptizes into the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13). Therefore, it is and should also be that physical numerical addition flows from spiritual addition by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

The case of becoming an effective church member rises from the facts of the expectations that many people come with into the church. There is no overstating that many of such expectation are products of the worldly background and desires of the fallen nature. Under such a background, the undisciplined believer comes into the church with a consumer attitude.

Unfortunately, such a person is likely to quickly find people who feed this attitude, consciously or not, until it ferments and produces the undesirable results.

Reading Rainer, the aim of the study is to help accentuate and call believers into authentic lifestyle of church membership as portrayed in the Bible. It is with the same spirit that we should approach our discussions on this topic. As we give room to the Spirit of grace to help us in our quest for discovering and building the right attitudes for church membership, we should not succumb to the usual pull to be legalistic. These attitudes that we shall discover will thrive when we approach our membership of the church with hearts of gratitude to God for the privilege of being included into his body, the church. So, the real issue here is how we can become effective church members. As real men, let us go forth to look for the real solutions are proffered below.

I. HOW I CAN BECOME A FUNCTIONING CHURCH MEMBER

Church membership is first of all about what a members cheerfully contributes to the wellbeing of the entire body in order to fulfill the purpose for its existence. In other words, it is about the vital function that members owe each other in an atmosphere of grace and sincere service. Such perception that readily accepts responsibility as part and parcel of church membership is what the Bible advances. You can become a functioning church member by understanding and applying the following truths:

A. All members of the church are necessary parts of the whole. 1 Corinthians 12 -14 form the fulcrum of a functioning church member. While chapter 12 pictures the church as a body with many members, chapter 13 points to the centrality of love as the basis from which members should relate with one another. Chapter 14 applies the principles shared in chapter 12 and 13 in a

messed up church. Using the body metaphor, Paul makes the point that members are the individual parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:12).

B. We are aware of our differences but still work together. This simply means that in church membership every member has a role to play, failure of which the whole body suffers. The other side to it also is that accepting our diversity makes the church to be more dynamic through its different forms of grace in the membership. The other side of this truth is that when members do their work well, the whole body is kept healthy and rejoices (1 Cor. 12:26).

C. Everything we say and do is based on the biblical foundation of love. Imagine reading 1 Corinthians 13 in a very hot session of Church-in-Conference or some other Church Council meetings where members throw caution to the air and hurt themselves. This great chapter also reveals what biblical love, agape, excludes and includes. Love is both the fruit of the Spirit as well as the attitude that the mature church member manifests.

A functioning church member is biblically one who gives and serves and continues to do so ceaselessly with an unconditional attitude of love and gratitude to God. A sleeping or inactive church member does not, biblically speaking, exist. Every member should be a functioning member. The question you need to ask yourself is this: How can I best serve my church? Make a commitment to be a functioning church member.

II. HOW I CAN BECOME A UNIFYING CHURCH MEMBER

The desire of God is that we get along with one another. Jesus said in John 13:35 that the distinguishing factor by which the world will know that we are his disciples is our love for one another. We do violate the principle Jesus presented when we put up some “Christian behavior” that drags the image of other members to the mud. A unifying church member is one who lives by what Jesus asked us to do in the passage referred to above. Let us look a little deeper:

A. Understanding biblical unity. The word unity makes you to see the church as a sport team. Unity means team spirit. It is critical to the life of the team and to the purpose of its existence. Paul was so thankful for the church in Ephesus because of their “love for all the saints” (Eph. 1:15-16). Yet he emphasized that the same church members should ensure that they keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4:1-3). This means that every member is responsible to keep the unity of the church. This happens when members demonstrate love, which imply being willing to sacrifice their preference for the sake of the unity of the church.

B. Gossip and other negative talk. Read Romans 1:29-31. The list there does not look like something to be allowed in any decent community. Gossip and many other negative talks are some of the church-related diseases that destroy the church through breaking up the unity of the body. You will do well by not being a peddler of gossip. When someone comes to you with a gossip, do not share in it. Instead, rebuke the person in love. This will help the person and save the church from divisive spirit. 1Peter 3:10 states that, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (NIV).

C. Forgiveness and unity. Church members that forgive others are members that stay united. When members cannot forgive one another, unity cannot happen. Paul admonishes that we forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven us. Rainer powerfully puts it this way, “Church unity is torn apart when members refuse to forgive, when any member is too prideful to grant forgiveness.” Make a commitment to be a unifying church member.

III. HOW I WILL NOT LET MY CHURCH BE ABOUT MY PREFERENCES AND DESIRES

Jesus teaches on the method of becoming great in the kingdom of God, which is by becoming the servant of all (Mk. 9:35). Church membership demands that you serve others, give

of your best and to sacrifice. It means that you have to let go of your personal preferences for the common good.

A. The servant pattern. The New Testament promotes serving other members of the body than self-serving. The truth remains that so long as member only seeks to go his way, there will not be joy in the person's life, but constant tension in relation to other people. Rainer conducted that shows ten dominant behavior patterns of member in the churches that are self-serving or inwardly focused. They pattern include the following: 1.) worship wars. This is where some factions in the church want the music in the church to be just what they want. 2.) Prolonged minutia meeting. It points to spending inordinate amount of time in different meetings that deal with inconsequential items. 3.) Facility focus. In this case the highest priority in the church is the procurement, preservation, and protection of church facilities. 4.) Program driven. Programs are good but when they become the goal instead of the means to greater ministry they defeat the purpose of the church. 5.) Inwardly focused budget. This happens when the best portion of the budget only serves the needs and comforts of the members. 6.) Inordinate demands for pastoral care. In this case, unreasonable expectations on pastoral care affect church membership. 7.) Attitudes of entitlement. Members with this kind of attitude are always demanding and have a sense of deserving special attention. 8.) Greater concern about change than the gospel. While some members resist change, even when it helps in proclaiming the gospel, some others desire change without seeking for ways to use the change to spread the gospel. 9.) Anger and hostility. This is where members regularly express negative emotions like anger, etc. on church staff and other members. 10.) Evangelistic apathy. This is seen when very few members share their faith regularly with the unsaved. We must note that from a biblical point of view, church membership is about serving.

B. The mind of Christ. Philippians 2:5-11 presents the example of the humility of Jesus Christ for us to learn from and follow. The church will be a place everyone would love to belong when each member lives by the mind of Christ. You can realize this in the church by making a commitment to be a servant in the church.

IV. HOW I WILL PRAY FOR MY CHURCH LEADERS

Many times we jokingly speak of the leadership of the church as a thankless work. However, while church leaders may not demand it from members of the church, there is the need to appreciate that leaders give themselves for the service of the church and scarcely do members give themselves to minister to the church leaders, especially the pastor. We all can improve in this aspect by taking up the responsibility to pray for them.

A. Pray for the pastor and other leaders. They all need prayer. God's work must be done in God's power. The pastor needs your prayer for his sermons to have the needed impact. Praying for the pastor helps to also open your heart to hear from God as the pastor preaches.

B. Pray for him and his family. This is crucial. 1 Timothy 3:5 states, "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" This is a challenging verse as the pastor's family is always under the scrutiny of members and the pastor also under immense pressure to take care of the church. Who then takes care of the family of the pastor? Pray for the pastor and family at all times.

C. Pray for his protection. From 1 Timothy 3:2-4 it is written that "The overseer must be above reproach" The qualifiers for the pastoral ministry are not easy. Pray for the protection of the pastor because the devil always seeks to bring the gospel to disrepute by getting the pastor to fall into disgrace. Understand that the pastor is a threat to the devil's own mission. Your prayers will release the power of God for protection against all the wiles and power of the devil.

D. Pray for the pastor's physical and mental health. The demands on a pastor are so great. Have you taken note that most pastors do not look healthy? This observation calls you to pray for their well being. They need wisdom in their work and for their personal lives. They also need to be physically healthy in order to carry on with the work of the ministry. Make a commitment to pray for your pastor and church leaders always.

V. HOW I WILL LEAD MY FAMILY TO BE HEALTHY CHURCH MEMBERS

Many times we forget that the church is also made up of different family units with all coming together to become one big family, the church. The truth is that every family unit has its uniqueness. However, when family units focus on finding joy in serving the church and those in the church, we become one big happy family with each part doing its work.

A. Church and family. Paul's statements in Ephesians 5:22-26 and 6:1-4 about family relationships reveal the need for sacrifice, unconditional love, and respect. The facts are that none of our family members is perfect; the same fact also applies to the church of God. Paul reveals that the case of the family can and should also be applied to Christ and the church. Therefore, as seek to be faithful to each other as members of a family, we should encourage ourselves to equally be faithful to the church.

B. Praying together as a family for the church. There are many things that the family can pray for the church when at the family altar. Some of the prayer items are found in the bulletin of the church. We can also pray for spiritual protection, protection from moral failure, for proclamation of the word, for families, etc. As we pray together for the church where God places us to be members, we teach our families to love the church.

C. Worshipping together as a family. As a church member, you are responsible for encouraging your entire family to worship together in the church. It can be lonely to be the only

believer in a family. However, another side of the same coin is to recognize that God has given you a mission field – your family.

D. Falling deeply in love with the bride of Christ. Remember that the church is the bride of Christ. That is, Jesus is the husband of the church. Your commitment should be that you love the church with an unwavering, unconditional love. This implies that you will seek to do all that you can by the power of God to bring your family with you to the church. You will worship and serve together in the church.

VI. HOW I WILL TREASURE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AS A GIFT

There is the need to always see church membership as a gift from God to you. Since it is a gift, it is something to treasure. Also since the gift is given and accepted, it calls you to the offer of an opportunity to serve the church.

A. The biblical perspective of the gift of church membership. Simply put, when a person receives the gift of salvation, the person becomes part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27-28). The gift of eternal salvation the person receives by grace through faith is a mega bundle that also includes the forgiveness of sins by the death of Christ on the cross, adoption by God the Father to be his child, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is a gift to be treasured.

B. Universal church or local church? The universal church refers to all believers everywhere for all ages. The local church is where you currently hold your membership. Note that the local church is a part of the universal church. Therefore, your commitment to the local church is your contribution to the universal church.

C. Understanding the gift. We you have received the gift of church membership, treasure this gift. Usually, true appreciation follows the reception of a treasured gift. Your appreciation to

God and his church is seen in your joyful service. Find joy, as a healthy church member, is seeking to be humble. Serve God with gratitude.

Conclusion

It is my sincere belief that when the six points discussed above are put into practice in an atmosphere of grace, gratitude and acceptance, we shall have healthy church membership. The resultant effects of this kind of membership cannot be overemphasized. I therefore urge each one of us to give the best effort necessary, by the power of God, to see that we are healthy church members and encourage others to become healthy members as well. Shalom!