I AM A CHURCH MEMBER

THOM RAINER

WWW.TUREVISIONCHURCH.ORG

discovering the attitude that makes a difference
Pastoral Notes on the book & study “I Am A Church Member”

Introduction & Chapter 1 “I Will Be A Functioning Church Member”

Introduction: A Tale of Two Church Members

In the introduction of this book, Rainer, exposes of two people or families could go to the same church, hear the same messages, fellowship with the same people and have very different perspectives about the same church.

“Based on research of 557 churches from 2004 – 2010, nine out of ten churches in America are declining or growing at a pace that is slower than of their communities.” (p4)

Looking at this generationally, 2/3s of the Builder generation (born before 1946) are Christians. Only 15% of Millennials (born between 1980-2000) are Christian.

We blame secular culture, politics, hypocritical members, uncaring pastors, etc

But there is no one to blame but the church itself.

“I am proposing that we who are church members need to look in the mirror. I am suggesting that congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ” (p5)

We have the wrong expectations, we as members expect to be served, to be fed, to be cared for and we can call out the “hypocrites in the church, but we fail to see our own hypocrisies.” (p5)

“He (God) placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give and in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel” (p6)
Chapter 1 – I Will Be a Functioning Church Member

Country Club Illustration Gist – Many people join the church with a Country Club mentality of membership. To many membership means perks, privileges and others will serve them.

Listen to the language of such persons: “This is my church, so you have to play the music just the way I want it.”

“Look pastor, you need to remember who pays your salary.”

“If you don’t do this program, I’ll withhold my check to the church.”

I’m a charter member.

These statements and this kind of thinking comes from people who have an unbiblical view of church membership.

Membership Means We Are All Necessary Parts of the Whole

“In I Corinthians 12, Paul explains the metaphor of the church being a body with many members. In I Corinthians 13, he established love as the central attitude and action all members should have. And in I Corinthians 14, he returns to the messed-up church at Corinth that has the concept of member all wrong.” (p11)

Membership is not just a business or organizational concept.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. (I Cor 12:27-28)

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. (I Cor 12:12)

Membership Means We Are Different but We Still Work Together

“With a country club membership you pay others to do the work for you. With church membership, everyone has a role or function. That is why some are hands, feet, ears, or eyes. We are all different, but we are necessary parts of the whole” (p12)

“Each part therefore, has to do its work, or the whole body suffers.” (p12)

Our diversity gives us strong unity!
Membership Means Everything We Say and Do Is Based on a Biblical Foundation of Love

The original purpose of I Corinthians chapter 13 is to “demonstrate how church members relate one to another” (p13)

“If we could just abide by the principles of the love chapter, we would have completely healthy churches. It would be a revolution!” (p13)

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. (I Cor 13:4-5)

“Church membership is founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.” (p14)

Church Membership Is Functioning Membership

“Do you know how to remain a member of a country club? Pay your dues. Do that and people will be available to serve you.” (p14)

You can remain a member of a church and hardly show up, or give and not serve any role in that church but a biblical member of a church is very different.

Biblical church membership is functioning membership.

We are not just part of the body; we are functioning parts. “Everyone should be functioning; everyone should have a roll” (p16)

The First Pledge

I like the metaphor of membership. It’s not membership as in a civic organization or a country club. It’s the kind of membership given to us in I Corinthians 12: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (I Cor 12:27).

Because I am a member of the body of Christ, I must be a functioning member, whether I am an “eye,” and “ear,” or a “hand.” As a functioning member, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will evangelize. I will study. I will seek to be a blessing to others. I will remember that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (I Cor 12:26).
Chapter 2 “I Will Be a Unifying Church Member”

“God desires for Christians to get along. In fact, He is emphatic about it. Jesus was clear when He said: “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”” (John 13:35)(p21)

That Thing Called Unity

“I love team sports. I’ve seen teams with only average talents win championships. Don’t get me wrong; talent and gifted athletes are important. But what is even more important is how those athletes work together. Unity is important. Unity is critical.

The Apostle Paul had much to say about unity. Let’s look at his words to the church meeting in Ephesus.

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. (Eph 1:15-16)

4 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3)

This does not mean just your local fellowship but we are encouraged to love the church at large.

Paul also speaks to the church meeting in Colossians. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Col 3:14)

Gossip and Other Negative Talk

Few things can destroy the unity of a church like gossip. Gossip is idle talk. Often connected to rumors. It is unproven personal or private information about others.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.
How do we respond to the issue of gossip?

1. Don’t be the source of gossip.
2. Gently rebuke the gossiper.

For He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. (I Pet 3:10)

Forgiveness and Unity

Many of us probably have many stories of how people did us wrong but how many of us have stories of how we forgave the people who have wronged us?

You may have forgiveness without unity but you cannot have unity without forgiveness and the ultimate goal is not forgiveness but unity.

Everyone will be wronged, offended and hurt. Each local church is made up of imperfect members and imperfect pastors. We will make mistakes. We will all sin. Yes, we are all hypocrites.

Listen to the words of Jesus, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt 6:14-15)

12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (Col 3:12-13)

The Second Pledge

I will seek to be a source of unity in my church. I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, or other church members. But neither am I. I will not be a source of gossip or dissension. One of the greatest contributions I can make is to do all I can in God’s power to help keep the church in unity for the sake of the gospel.
Chapter 3 “I Will Not Let My Church Be about My Preferences and Desires”

Illustration about kids being selfish, wanting their way.

“Christians can sometimes act just like those demanding children who want things their way. Temper tantrums in churches may not include church members lying on the floor kicking and screaming, but some come close.”

“But the strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join. Don’t get me wrong: there may be much about our church that you like a lot. But you are there to meet the needs of others. You are there to serve others. You are there to give. You are there to sacrifice.” (p34)

Listen to Jesus break up a “me first” fight among His disciples with these words.

And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all. (Mark 9:35)

The Servant Motif

“The word servant occurs fifty-seven times in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to a person who has that official role in a household. But many times it refers to the role we are to assume as Christians. Also, serve occurs fifty-eight times in the New Testament.” (p35)

A Survey That Said a Lot

“My research team recently conducted a survey of churches that were inwardly focused. For the most part, they were not serving past their own walls and their own members. In other words, these churches were largely self-serving.” (p36)

10 Dominant Behavior Patterns of Members in Self-Serving Churches

1. Worship Wars

2. Prolonged minutia meetings

3. Facility focus

4. Program driven

5. Inwardly focused budget

6. Inordinate demands for pastoral care
The Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Keep in mind that Philippians 2 is not only a description of the obedience of Christ; it is an example for us to follow. We are to be servants.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We will not be exalted to the level of Christ nor have the name above every name but the Bible is clear that God will exalt us, vindicate us and give us a new name.

Third Pledge

I will not let my church be about my preferences and desires. That is self-serving. I am a member in this church to serve others and to serve Christ. My Savior went to a cross for me. I can deal with any inconveniences and matters that just aren’t my preference or style.