

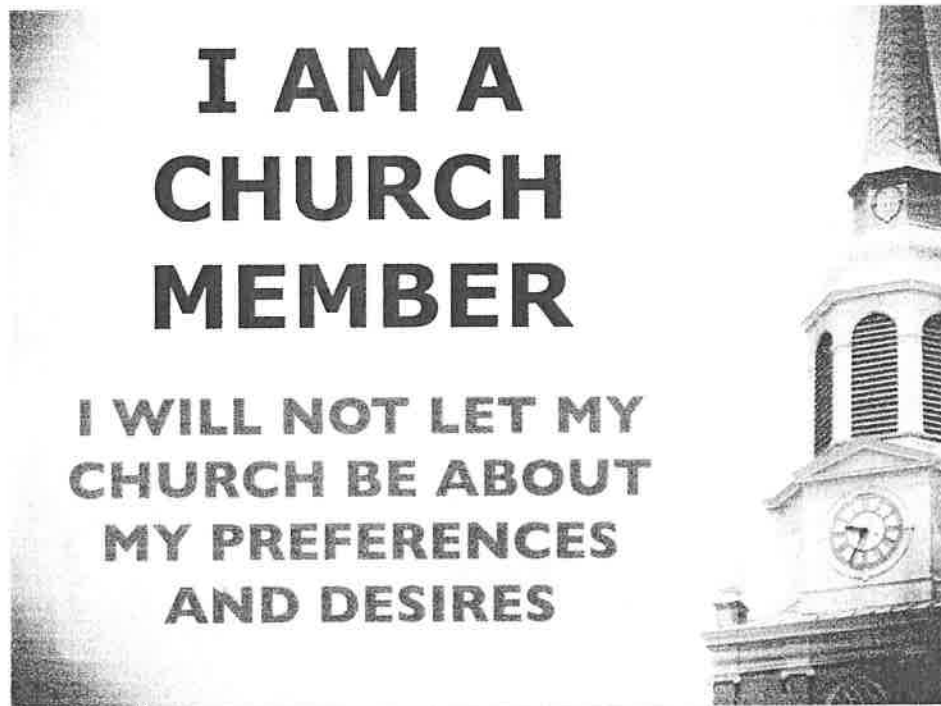
# Ridley Hill M.B. Church

## Adult Bible Study

### Lesson Three

#### I Am A Church Member

#### Series



*(Notes taken from Thom Rainer's book, I Am A Church Member)*

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## **“I Will Not Let My Church Be About My Preferences and Desires”**

**Mark 9:33-35; Philippians 2:5-11**

### **Session 3**

**Summary:** The body of Christ is not about what I want. It's about what Christ wants.

We are in the third week of our book study together. We've been studying the material in Thom Rainer's book **I Am a Church Member**.

In Chapter 1 we learned that I am to be a **Functioning** church member. In chapter 2, we learned that I am to be a **Unifying** church member.

Our chapter for today is “**I Will Not Let My Church Be about My Preferences and Desires.**”

People who always want their way are selfish. There is hardly ever any consideration for the wants and needs of others.

The dictionary defines selfishness as being “concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself; seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others.” Everything generally centers on a selfish person's wishes and favorite things. .

They can act out in a variety of ways. They can stomp and yell. They can become sullen and withdrawn. They can boohoo like nobody's business. And they can also resort to bullying other people to get what they want.

It's sad to say but Christians can sometimes act just like demanding children who want things their way. Temper tantrums in churches may not include church members lying on the floor kicking and screaming, but I've seen them come close.

The strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join. Church membership is not all about you. It's about serving \_\_\_\_\_ and serving \_\_\_\_\_.

There may be some things about our church that you might really like. But you're here to serve others. You're here to give and not just \_\_\_\_\_.

How do we keep ourselves from being selfish? How do we follow the example of Jesus who prayed in the garden the night before he went to the cross: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matt. 26:39)

The answer is simple. Instead of seeking to serve myself, I should seek to serve others. Instead of trying to be first, I should strive to come last. My motivation should not be to get my preferences moved to the top of the list. Instead, I should seek to subordinate my wants to meet the needs of others. That's easy to say but difficult to do.

## The Servant Motif

***Mark 9:33-35 – They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”***

Even Jesus' closest followers were susceptible to the pull of selfishness and pride.

The things Jesus disciples argued over were just silly. Which one of us is the best disciple? Who is the one closest to Jesus? When Jesus isn't around, who is in charge? Which one of us is top dog?

The word “servant” occurs 57 times in the New Testament. The word “serve” occurs 58 times in the New Testament. **Jesus said that we must be last of all and servant of all.**

### ➤ A Survey That Said a Lot

Rainer cites a study done by his research team on churches that are inwardly focused. They are only concerned with their preferences. They want people to join their church but only if those people will comply with what is already being done to benefit current members. There is no desire to be outwardly focused – finding ways to reach those outside of the church with the gospel of Jesus.

These churches are largely \_\_\_\_\_-serving. This an inwardly focused church.

Rainer gives **ten** dominant behavior patterns of members of inwardly focused congregations.

The **first** listed behavior pattern is \_\_\_\_\_ wars.

**Col. 3:16 – Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs –**

that gives us quite a wide range of musical styles that God finds acceptable. If God says it's acceptable, how can we say otherwise?

The **second** thing listed is prolonged minutia\_\_\_\_\_. Minutia means small or trivial. Most of the meetings deal with the most inconsequential things while the Great Commission and Great Commandments are basically ignored.

**Third** is \_\_\_\_\_ focus. Some church members are more concerned about preserving the past than preaching the Gospel. They do not want anything in the building to change.

Number **four** is \_\_\_\_\_ driven. The problem is when we become more concerned with continuing a program past its usefulness. The program almost becomes an object of worship – an idol, you might say.

**Fifth** is inwardly focused\_\_\_\_\_. A disproportionate share of the budget is used to meet the needs and comforts of the members instead of reaching the community with the gospel.

Number **six** is inordinate \_\_\_\_\_ for pastoral care. The problem is that some church members develop unreasonable expectations for the pastoral staff and leadership. They expect pastoral visits just because they have membership status.

**Seven** is attitudes of\_\_\_\_\_. This issue is probably a catch-all for most of the issues in an inwardly focused church. You can't be an inwardly focused church unless a large number of the members have an overarching attitude that their membership status demands their preferences get met. They think they should receive special treatment.

Number **eight** is a greater concern about \_\_\_\_\_ than the gospel. Even the slightest change evokes the ire of self-serving, inwardly focused members. They're passionate about not changing pretty much anything. Sadly, while they're passionate about their preferences, there is a very noticeable lack of passion about the work of the gospel.

**Ninth** is \_\_\_\_\_ and hostility. They're almost always mad at the leaders or at other members. Usually, they use anger and hostility to try to corral others into giving into their preferences. Basically, they try to bully others into doing things their way.

Number **ten** is evangelistic\_\_\_\_\_. Very few members share their faith on a regular basis. They're more concerned about their own personal desires, preferences, and needs than

they are about the eternal needs of the people who live around them and who live across the world.

The problem with inwardly focused churches is summed up with three words: I, me, and myself. I want the music my way. I want the building my way. I'm upset because the leadership didn't spend enough time with me. They didn't do things my way or make my preferences the highest priority.

There's a very important principle in 1 Cor. 10:23-24

Church membership is about putting others first.

### ***The Mind of Christ***

At the church at Philippi, there was a problem. There was disagreement and disunity because two members of that congregation – two ladies named Euodia and Synteche – were at odds with each other. These two ladies had at one time worked together with each other and with the apostle Paul in furthering the work of the gospel but something had happened and they were having contention with each other.

As is usually the case in any congregation, I'm pretty sure that there were others in the Philippian congregation who sided with one or the other of the ladies. Along with the two chosen sides are usually those people who are just generally disturbed that there is dissension. It can divide a congregation.

**Paul writes this advice to this church in Phil. 2:1-4**

I think those are wise words for any congregation. Instead of fighting for my preferences, I should be humble, valuing others above myself. I shouldn't be just concerned with my interests but with the interests of others within the congregation.

**Paul then illustrates this idea by the example of Jesus Christ. Phil 2:5-11 – 5**

What marks the example of Jesus?

1. He did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.
2. He emptied Himself by taking on the form of a slave.
3. He humbled Himself.

4. He became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

If we approach church membership from the perspective of entitlement, we have it upside down. We're to be servants. We're to be obedient to Christ. We do whatever it takes to keep the unity in our church without compromising the principles of the word of God.

On January 21, 1961, John F. Kennedy delivered his inaugural address when he was sworn in as President of the United States. In his closing statement he spoke these famous words: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

We could state today's message in a simple idea: I should not be asking what my church can do for me. I should be asking, "What can I be doing for my church?"

The church is the body of Christ. He is the head of the church. When we serve the body, we serve the head. The body is comprised of its members. I serve the members, I serve the church. I serve the church, I serve its head – Jesus Christ. When we put Christ and others first, we find the joy that comes with being last. To sum it all up, it's not about what I get but about what I give.

## The Third Pledge:

I am a church member. 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 preferences or style. If you have made that commitment today, please sign the corresponding page in your book.

These commitments are not easy. Without God's help they are nigh unto impossible to keep.. Continue to pray for strength and wisdom. When you think you've had it with making sacrifices for others, remember the cross. As you're overwhelmed by Jesus' undeserved love for you, that caused Him to sacrifice everything—including His preferences—then you will be able to do the same for others. Christ's sacrifice puts it all into perspective.

***Mk. 10:43-45 – “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

Sign and Date \_\_\_\_\_