



## CHAPTER THREE:

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

*"I Am a Church Member", by Thom Rainer*

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting in the stands of a high school football game. Here is what you see:

The team breaks out of the huddle but instead of lining up against the opposing squad, they break into groups of two or three, arguing with each other. Soon they start shoving, and two of them actually get into a fight. One of the players storms off the field and you can hear him say, "That bunch of idiots can't agree on anything." He continues, "Those two over there are arguing over the color of the uniforms. A couple of others are fussing over the right way to kneel in the huddle. Those two guys are arguing because one believes in what he calls 'personal' football, and the other believes in 'social' football. They can't agree whether the individual or the team is more important. Some of the players say the less talented players should go play on their own field, and some of the guys don't like the music played by the band. A few are fighting over whether the other football team has more players. And I'm quitting because I can pass a lot better than that other guy, and they won't let me be the quarterback."

This situation seems absurd and yet there are times when this is exactly what happens in the local church. People, who are on the same "team," spend more time focused on their preferences and desires than playing the game.



**Can you describe a time when someone (maybe you) was more focused on their own preferences and desires than they were the best interest of the group?**

## LESSON SUMMARY

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that church members must be willing to yield their preferences and desires in order to serve others. We will encounter Jesus' challenge to his disciples to seek to serve instead of being served. Ultimately, we are called to recognize that church membership is not about our preferences and desires; it is about serving others! Rainer wrote:

*"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 your 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."*

### 1. The Call To Serve Others

Serving others is probably not something we think about often but it was at the very heart of Jesus' ministry. In fact he said that he did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). One of the clearest pictures of Jesus' servant heart can be found in John 13:1-17:

**1** Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, **4** rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord,

do you wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

**12** When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **16** Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

I'm not sure about you but feet are not my thing. In fact, I think feet are only appropriate when socks and shoes cover them! Take some time to think back to the dirtiest your feet have ever been at a particular point in time. Do you think someone would have been willing to touch your feet...much less wash them with their bare hands? Don't forget that the disciples' feet would have been absolutely disgusting. They would have been sweaty and caked with dirt. They most likely would not have smelled too good. But, Jesus took each of their feet into his hands and washed them.

Washing someone's feet back in New Testament times would have been the ultimate picture of humility and service. That is why Peter makes such a commotion about what Jesus is doing. He recognizes that his Teacher should not be doing anything close to this. This was the job of a servant, not a respected Rabbi.



**Why do you think it is so difficult to serve? How does Jesus example in this passage help you think about the call to serve others?**

Jesus was not the only person in Scripture that discussed the idea of serving others. Paul saw himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and was willing to do whatever was necessary to spread the gospel. After he became a Christian he wrote, in **Ephesians 3:7**:

*1 Of this gospel I was made a servant according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.*



**Why do you think Paul was willing to call himself a servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you have that same perspective?**

The willingness to serve others is not natural in our world and it was not natural for people in Jesus' day either. In fact, the focus on position and authority had crept into the minds of several of his disciples. Consider the ironic story in **Matthew 20:20-28**:

*20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. 21 And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." 22 Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." 24 And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your*

*servant, **27** and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, **28** even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The mother of two of Jesus' disciples (James and John) actually had the audacity to come to Jesus and ask him to show favor towards her two sons. Just imagine if your mom showed up at your place of work and asked you boss to show favoritism towards you. This may work in little league but it would most definitely not work in your career.

Let's be honest, Jesus was very gracious with this well-meaning mom. He does not rebuke her or chastise her. He simply says that she really doesn't comprehend the scope of what she is asking. For Jesus, this is a great opportunity to remind his disciples that they have been called to serve and not to be served. Whose example are they to follow? Jesus' example - the King of kings came "not to be served but to serve." Rainer wrote:

*"We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way. But paradoxically, we will find the greatest joy when we choose to be last. That's what Jesus meant when He said the last will be first. True joy means giving up our rights and preferences and serving everyone else. And that's what church membership means as well."*



**Why does the world view the idea of serving in such a negative light? How can we combat the prevalent ideas of being first and being served in the church?**

## **2. Serving Others Should Push Us Outside The Walls Of The Church**

I'm sure all of us have heard the church referred to as a "holy huddle," a place where believers can gather together and focus on one another. Recently, I

heard a pastor say that the only problem with this idea is that the world around us has a very different perspective of a huddle. When they see a huddle they see a bunch of backsides and the view is not pretty! The church was never called to be a holy huddle or a hotel for saints. The church and its members were called to be a hospital for sinners. To accomplish this mission we must be willing to serve someone beside ourselves. Consider the Great Commission given by Jesus in **Matthew 28:19-20**:

***19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Jesus' commission to the church and to believers is that we are to go and make disciples of all nations. We must realize that making disciples does not take place primarily within the walls of the church. In fact, the early church did not have a building where they met each week (they usually met in homes or in the temple) and most of their time was spent fulfilling their regular responsibilities. It was in fulfilling these responsibilities (work, etc.) that they were to make disciples. The same is true for us. However, we often think of making disciples only in the context of the gathering of the church. Rainer, as a result of his research, offered ten dominant behavior patterns of churches that are inward focused:

1. **Worship Wars.** One or more factions in the church want the music just the way they like it. Any deviation is met with anger and demands for change. The order of service must remain constant. Certain instrumentation is required while others are prohibited.
2. **Prolonged minutia meetings.** The church spends an inordinate amount of time in different meetings. Most of the meetings deal with the most inconsequential items, while the Great Commission and Great Commandment are rarely the topics of discussion.
3. **Facility focus.** The church facilities develop iconic status. One of the highest priorities in the church is the protection and preservation of

rooms, furniture, and other visible parts of the church's buildings and grounds.

4. **Program Driven.** Every church has programs even if they don't admit it. When we start doing a ministry a certain way, it takes on programmatic status. The problem is not with programs. The problem develops when the program becomes an end instead of a means to a greater ministry.
5. **Inwardly focused budget.** A disproportionate share of the budget is used to meet the needs and comforts of the members instead of reaching beyond the walls of the church.
6. **Inordinate demands for pastoral care.** All church members deserve care and concern, especially in times of need and crisis. Problems develop, however, when church members have unreasonable expectations for even minor matters. Some members expect the pastoral staff to visit them regularly merely because they have membership status.
7. **Attitudes of entitlement.** This issue could be a catch-all for many of the points named here. The overarching attitude is one of demanding and having a sense of deserving special treatment.
8. **Greater concern about change than the gospel.** Almost any noticeable changes in the church evoke the ire of many; but those same passions are not evident about participating in the work of the gospel to change lives.
9. **Anger and hostility.** Members are consistently angry. They regularly express hostility toward the church staff and other members.
10. **Evangelistic apathy.** Very few members share their faith on a regular basis. More are concerned about their own needs rather than the greatest eternal needs of the world and community in which they live.



**Do you think our church struggles with any of these behavior patterns? What are some ways that we can focus our attention outside the walls of the church?**

### **3. Cultivating The Mind Of Christ (“He Came To Serve”)**

As we have said before, serving others is difficult and it is not usually our natural response. Paul understood this perfectly, which is why he encouraged the believers in Philippi to cultivate the mind of Christ. Consider **Philippians 2:1-11**:

**1** So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

**8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Rainer wrote:

*“So what did Jesus do?”*

1. *He "did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage."*
2. *"He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave."*
3. *"He humbled Himself."*
4. *He became "obedient to the point of death - even to death on a 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. We are to be obedient. We are to put others first. We are to do whatever it takes to keep the unity in our church. So if we approach church membership from the perspective of entitlement, we have it upside down. You always ask first what you can do for your church."*



**Describe someone in our church that best fits the description of having the mind of Christ and a servant attitude?**

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

## **THE THIRD PLEDGE**

I am a church member.

I will not let my church be about my preferences and desire. 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.

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(Name)

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