



CHAPTER SIX:

I Will Treasure Church Membership As A Gift

"I Am a Church Member", by Thom Rainer

INTRODUCTION

During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton was overseeing the work of the Red Cross in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her; he wanted to buy food for his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him any. Roosevelt was perplexed. His men needed the help and he was prepared to pay out of his own funds. When he asked someone why he could not buy the supplies, he was told, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood--the provisions were not for sale. All he had to do was simply ask and they would be given freely (*Our Daily Bread*, October 11, 1992).

For all of us who are in Christ, we too have received a gift - the free gift of salvation. This free gift was costly; it cost Jesus his very life. Yet, it did not cost us anything!



Why is the free gift of salvation such a precious gift? What did you do to receive this gift?

LESSON SUMMARY

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that church membership is also a precious gift that should be treasured. When we treasure this gift, it will greatly affect the way we love, serve, give, and pray for our local church.

Rainer noted the two very different perspectives of church membership:

OPTION 1

"In the first option we approach church membership similar to country club membership noted in chapter one. We are joining the church to see what we can get out of it. The pastor is to feed us through his sermons. We have specified an acceptable range for the length of the sermon. The music is to fit our style exactly. Any deviations are not acceptable. The programs and ministries are for our benefit. We will determine what we like and don't like. We are members who expect perks, privileges, and service."

OPTION 2

"But there is a second option to church membership. It's the biblical option that sees membership as a gift, something to be treasured. Membership means we have the opportunity to serve and give rather than the legalistic option to do so. Our entire attitude is different when we approach membership the biblical way."



What is the greatest gift (outside of salvation) that you have received? Why do you consider it such a great gift?

1. Church Membership Is A Gift

Scripture is clear that salvation (the prerequisite for church membership) is a gift. Numerous verses give evidence of this truth and we are going to take some time to consider several of these verses:

Romans 3:21-26

21 *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* **22** *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the*

glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Acts 3:18-21

18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21** whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Ephesians 2:1-9

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Even though we were dead in our sins, we were made alive in Jesus Christ. He paid our sin debt and made it possible for us to have a right relationship with God. This is a priceless gift! It is important for us to recognize that our salvation means that we are part of the body of Christ. The free gift of salvation affords us another gift - being part of the body of Christ. Rainer explained:

“Do you see what’s taking place? You received a gift, the free gift of eternal salvation. That gift includes eternal salvation. It includes forgiveness of sins by Christ’s death on the cross. It includes adoption by God the Father. It includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And it includes becoming a part of the body of Christ. That’s right: membership in the body of Christ, the church, is a gift from God. It’s not a legalistic obligation. It’s not country club perks. It’s not a license for entitlement. It’s a gift. A gift from God. A gift that we should treasure with great joy and anticipation.”



Do you pray regularly with your family specifically for the church and its leaders? If not, what practical steps can you take to begin doing this?

2. The Universal Church vs. The Local Church

Throughout the New Testament, the term “church” is used in two ways. One way the term is used is to describe the universal church - that is “all believers everywhere for all ages.” Consider these passages that talk about the universal church:

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:22-33

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. **25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Another way the term is used is to describe the local church - that is a specific group of gathered believers in a specific place at a specific time. Consider these passages that talk about the local church:

Galatians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— **2** and all the brothers who are with me.

Ephesians 1:1

***1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:*

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

***1** Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, **2** To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Notice the reference to the universal church in verse 2 - "all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ")*



Explain how Christians are in both the universal church and in the local church?

It is important to recognize that the New Testament knows nothing of a person who is in the universal church and not a local church. Local church membership is vital to the growth of believers. It is the place where they are able to serve and use their gifts as well as the place they are held accountable. Some believers have attempted to say that their inclusion in the universal church is sufficient but this is problematic. Rainer stressed this when he wrote:

"It's a lame and invalid excuse to say you will limit your involvement to the universal church. The Bible is clear that we are to be connected to a specific church in a specific context."



Why is it so important to be a member of a local church? Why do you think some people do not see this as important?

3. Understanding & Cherishing The Gift Of Church Membership

How do you usually respond when you receive a gift that you absolutely love? You likely respond with sincere gratitude to the giver. Rainer wrote:

"Church membership is a gift. A gift must be treasured. It should not be taken for granted or considered lightly. Because it is a gift, we must always be thankful for it. And when we are thankful for something, we have less time and energy to be negative. When we receive a gift with true appreciation, we naturally want to respond to the Giver. We, therefore, see service to God as a natural outflow of the joy of our salvation and the consequent joy of our church membership. We consider it a privilege to serve the King, so we look for those opportunities at the church where we serve."



How should we respond to God knowing how precious the gift of salvation is that we have received?

When we receive the gift of salvation and church membership with a grateful heart, we will naturally desire to serve within the body of Christ. We will recognize that our local church is composed of people just like us - sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. They were once enemies of

God but have now become his sons and daughters. When we have this mindset, we will seek to love, serve, and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.



Read the entire story of Jesus rebuking His disciples in Matthew 20:28. How could that story relate to church membership?

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

THE SIXTH PLEDGE

I am a church member.

This membership is a gift. When I received the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, I became a part of the body of Christ. I soon thereafter identified with a local body and was baptized. And now I am humbled and honored to serve and to love others in our church. I pray that I will never take my membership for granted, but see it as a gift and an opportunity to serve others and to be a part of something so much greater than any one person or member.

(Name)

(Date)



For your last question, look at each part of the entire membership covenant you have reviewed to this point. As you look at the entire covenant, what areas will be your greatest challenge? In what areas can you make immediate changes?