

SERIES: "I Am a Church Member"

"I Will Treasure My Membership as a Gift" – Ephesians 2:4-10

In my absence last week, Elder Jett, Matt & Kristin Bradley et al ably led you through a look at being a functioning church member. My thanks to all who filled in for me while I was down and out. As we have the past couple weeks, I would like to share with you some of the comments shared by you when asked to respond to..."I will seek to be a blessing to my church and serve by..."

Today, we want to spend some time talking about the Biblical understanding of our church membership. Imagine a child facing two scenarios. In the first scenario mom tells "Johnny" that he must clean his room. It must be spotless. He will probably have to put in hours into his efforts. Anything less than perfection is not acceptable. Whether he likes it or not, that room must be cleaner than it has before.

In the second scenario mom tells Johnny that someone has given him an incredible gift. It is wrapped and ready to open. She increases the excitement by letting him know this gift will be one of the greatest he has received or ever will receive. It will bring him countless hours of joy.

Okay, if Johnny has the choice of scenario one or scenario two, which one does he choose? Duh.

Ok, I know the two scenarios are unlikely. But, Pastor Rainer challenges us and proposes that every church member must decide between two distinct scenarios or options. The first option is that we approach church membership in a similar way that we approach country club membership. We are joining the church to see what we can get out of it. We will determine what we like and don't like. We are members who expect perks, privileges, and service.

Think about it: If we see our membership in the same way as joining a country club or another association, there are certain expectations and certain things that can happen.

We pay our dues and expect certain services to be included:

A building and place to come as members.

A courteous and attentive staff.

Programs and activities for us and our families.

When we view our church membership like we would a country club membership, other things may tend to happen:

Expectations that my membership will provide everything I need when I need it.

That many programs and services will be done as I prefer, the way I want it.

Paying our regular dues may become mere obligations, something that we have to do versus something we feel compelled to do out of gratitude.

The same could be said when asked to fulfill a task or responsibility.

There may be feelings that develop that make us begrudge things that are asked of us, because that's why we pay our dues, and have a staff.

The second option is the biblical option. This option views church membership as a gift. It sees membership as an opportunity to serve and give rather than the legalistic obligation to do so. Our entire attitude is different when we approach church membership in the biblical way. Church membership is a gift, not a perk. As with any gift, it is easy to take church membership for granted. In order to avoid that, we must understand the gift and how we came to get it so that we will treat it like the gift that it is. That is why we find ourselves in Ephesians chapter 2 this morning.

I. WHERE WE CAME FROM (Once were far off...)

a. In relation to God, scripture says that apart from Christ, believers were...

- i. Dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1)
- ii. Following the Devil (v. 2)
- iii. Pursuing the passions of our flesh (v. 3)
- iv. Children of wrath (v. 3)

b. I think it is good for us to be reminded from time to time from where it is we came in relation to our salvation so that we don't take it for granted.

II. WHERE CHRIST HAS BROUGHT US (Brought near...)

a. In relation to God, scripture says that through Jesus Christ, believers have been...

- i. Made alive together with Christ. (v. 4)
- ii. Saved by grace (v. 5)
- iii. Raised up with him (v. 6)
- iv. Seated with him in the heavenly places (v. 6)

b. In relation to the family of God, believers have been...

- i. Reconciled to God and the family of God (v. 16)
- ii. Granted access to the father by the Spirit (v. 18)
- iii. Made fellow citizens with the saints (v. 19)
- iv. Made members of the household of God (v. 19)

III. HOW WE GOT THERE (by the blood of Christ)

a. It is only by the shed blood of Jesus Christ that we find ourselves in this unique position. Reconciled to God in a right relationship (Oh! precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)

b. Salvation is a free gift and along with it comes the gift of church membership. When we are saved, the Spirit of God places us in the body of Christ and makes us a part of the family.

c. When someone gives you a gift, it is considered very rude to take that gift for granted. Instead, we should treasure the gifts we receive. So it is with our salvation and our church membership.

i. There are many ways in which we can take our salvation for granted.

1. Assuming that we can live any old way and still be saved. (Hear me...)
2. Fail to understand the purpose of our salvation. (Eph. 2:10)
3. Assuming that salvation is a personal matter and never sharing with others salvation.

ii. There are many more ways in which we can take our church membership for granted.

1. By becoming a CEO. (Christmas and Easter Only Christian)(Hebrews 10:25-26)
2. By sitting on the sidelines watching everyone else do the work. (11 Men on the field/40,000)
3. By failing to tithe and support the work of the church financially. (Can't? God says, "Put me to the test" Malachi 3:10)
4. By treating church membership like a country club membership.
5. By failing to express gratitude for the gift.
6. By not taking care of the gift

There are two major bodies of water in the land where Jesus walked. One is the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful lake 13 miles long and 7 miles wide filled with fish and surrounded by lush foliage.

The other body of water is the Dead Sea, 50 miles long and 11 miles wide. Its shoreline is 1300 feet below sea level. Seven million tons of water evaporates from the Dead Sea every day. The saline or salt content of the water ranges from 26-35%, making it 10 times saltier than the oceans of the world. There's no seaweed or plants of any kind in or around the water. There are no fish or any kind of swimming, squirming creatures living in or near the water.

As a matter of fact, what you'll see on the shores of the Sea is white, crystals of salt covering EVERYTHING.

According to extremescience.com, fish accidentally swimming into the waters from one of the several freshwater streams that feed the Sea are killed instantly, their bodies quickly coated with a preserving layer of salt crystals and then tossed onto shore by the wind and waves.

Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are fed by the Jordan River. There is only one difference between these two bodies of water, only one thing that causes the Sea of Galilee to be beautiful and alive while the Dead Sea is barren and lifeless. The Sea of Galilee has an outlet; the Dead Sea does not! Water flows through the Sea of Galilee. It comes in and then goes out. Water flows into the Dead Sea but not out. If we're only receiving and not giving, we become stagnant, lifeless, bitter, and caustic.

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 entitlements. It's a gift.

I invite you to treasure your membership by...

- **Praying often for Mount Olive – our mission, our members, staff and leaders.**
- **Re-committing to God's family here by signing new Member Covenant.**
- **Fully participate in next sermon series and the P.L.A.C.E. process**

Fill out cards:

I will see my membership to this church as a blessing because...

“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 NIV