



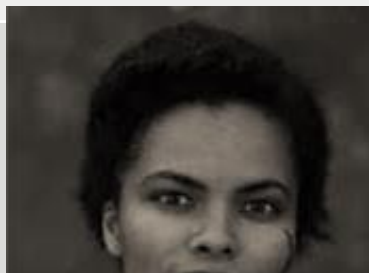
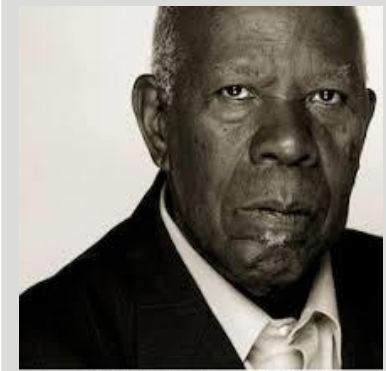
LESSON 2



I AM A CHURCH MEMBER

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A FUNCTIONING CHURCH MEMBER

One goal of this study is to **rediscover the privilege and the joy of church membership**; without getting too entangled the meaning of church membership.

Through this study we would like for all who want to see **a revival of relationship service to God** committed to carefully following six simple steps of recovery.

- Each step will require **soul-searching and prayer** followed by commitment to God

As we spark a renewed attitude about our church, do not be surprised, upset, or defeated if you who once was **first is now moved to another space** for the benefit of Kingdom advancement

- **Prayerfully our church will change**, becoming a healthier environ for all ages to serve

Rainer said: “We may just discover that the reason our nation is in such bad shape is because our churches are so unhealthy. That lack of health is evident when nine out of **ten churches are no longer reaching their communities**. But that can change. With you. Beginning now. I am a church member.”

[Thom S. Rainer. I Am a Church Member (p. 6). B&H Publishing Group]

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“I began to learn a lesson. Membership means perks. Membership means privileges. Membership means others will serve me. Just pay the going rate, and you can have others taking care of you while you enjoy a life of leisure. And, tragically, this understanding of membership is what many church members hold. “This is my church, so you have to play the music just the way I want it.”

“And, tragically, this understanding of membership is what many church members hold. “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’ve been a member of this church for over thirty years, so I have a right to get what I want.” “I don’t pay good money to this church to listen to sermons that long.”

[Thom S. Rainer. I Am a Church Member (p. 10). B&H Publishing Group]

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“What does the Bible say about church membership? There are several places in the New Testament where we can see a clear picture of church membership. One of the more voluminous sections is I Cor. 12 to 14. In **I Cor. 12**, Paul explains the metaphor of the church being a **body with many members**. In **I Cor. 13**, he established **love as the central attitude and action** all members should have. And in **I Cor. 14**, he returns to the **messed-up church at Corinth** that has the concept of membership all wrong.”

[Thom S. Rainer. I Am a Church Member (p. 11-12). B&H Publishing Group]

The early churches were characterized by the ingrafting of Judaism with pagan cultures and therefore whomever was the founding leaders, there was great influence.

- There was also the Jewish influence of signs and the Greek quest for wisdom (I Cor. 1:22)

Paul raised up the Corinthian church (Acts 18:1-17) between 50 and 52 A.D., and continued to labor in the city, laying the foundation of the church.

- No church in Paul's domain exceeded Corinth in terms of its spiritual gifts (I Cor. 1:4)

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With God's help and his labor, he got it off to a good start. But, in the presence of this abundance of spiritual gifts were also problems.

- Three to 3 1/2 years after the church began, Paul alludes to the difficulties there by writing to the church.
- This 2nd epistle further touches on the problems which were progressing (I Cor. 5:11)

Although the Church at Corinth was founded by Paul and it was afterwards instructed by Apollos, and amazingly factions started based on leadership(I Cor. 1:12—Peter, Christ)

It is also possible that resentment arose over the systematic nature of Paul's teaching in with its restrictions in contrast to the liberality enjoy in their culture.

In I Corinthians Paul spoke to **three moral issues** (a) **Incest** [5:1-13] (b) **litigation between believers** [6:1-11], and **sexual immorality with prostitutes** [6:12-20].

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So, while at Ephesus, Paul received reports of problems that were prevalent in the Corinthian church which were causing “divisions” in the church

People from Chloe’s house reported divisive activities among the church

- **Eris (1:11)** – contention; quarreling; wrangling; debate; strife; variance
 - ❖ Paul is the only NT writer to use this word as it speaks to disputes endangering the church
- **Phusioo (4:19)** – blowing up in the sense to inflate; make proud or haughty
 - ❖ Paul uses this term to throw light on behavior oriented to the flesh and false teachings
- **Krino (6:1)** – to condemn with the intent of punishment; sue at law
 - ❖ One third of the 114 NT appearances of this word is found in Pauline epistles
- **Hairesis (11:19)** – choosing a party bringing about disunity; forming sects
 - ❖ The main thrust of this word are dissensions based on false teaching causing disunity
- **Akatastasia (14:33)** - instability; disorder; commotion; confusion (*God not the author of*)
 - ❖ The main thrust of this word is confusion, disturbance, unrest and disorder, tumult

All these words work together to show that there was a troubled situation in the Corinthian church

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“The world will know if we are Christians or not by the way we who are believers act toward one another. Have you ever been to an ugly business meeting in a church? Do you think an outsider would have been impressed with the “Christian” behavior she witnessed? Have you ever heard Christians gossip about other Christians? Is that loving one another?

[Thom S. Rainer. I Am a Church Member (p. 21-22). B&H Publishing Group]

There may not have been a church as dysfunctional than the Corinthian Church, necessitating three letters of encouragement be written to them
Corinth was the Las Vegas, New York City, Los Angeles, and New Orleans at Madi Gras all rolled into one.

There may have no other place on earth that was so diverse with a plethora of different ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

- A perfect environ for selfishness, sexual immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, revelry, and sinful excess – **sounds like America today!**

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In I Corinthians there are **no outside opponents** such as with the Judaizers and proto-Gnostics that plagued other assemblies to whom Paul wrote.

Rather, Paul says that the **internal strife** that riddled the Corinthian church and their **disagreement with his teaching** had come from within (i.e., “*some among you*” 15:12; 4:18).

The **rival factions in the Corinthian church** are noticeable from Chapter 1 where the **wealthy patrons in the house churches** that provided support for apostolic workers began disputing amongst themselves about the validity or lack thereof of different apostolic workers such as Apollos, Cephas, and Paul (1:10-12).

Paul’s goal in writing 1st Corinthians is twofold:

- (1) He wanted to reassert his apostolic authority in a situation where it has been compromised and
- (2) He must convince them that their behavior and theology needs to be in line with what they had previously taught them (I Cor. 4:16-17).

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There also developed suspicion when an anti-Pauline faction because of his refusal to accept financial support from the wealthy (II Cor. 11:7-15)

- After all, would a man who possessed the message of divine wisdom [sophia] be performing manual labor with his own hands? (9:1-19; 4:12; Acts 18:3)

Thus the internal tensions amongst the various factions and the anti-Pauline factions, created a deteriorating relational situation.

But Paul felt that there was a spiritual glue that would help them get through these behavioral maladies and that was LOVE

Before we delve into the remedy of love juxtaposed against the factions, lets consider why factions occur:

1)Partisanship is the way of the world. At the time Paul was writing, itinerate public speakers and philosophers were known as sophists (*sophistication*). People would choose a side to support, particularly whoever supported their own particular point of view.

- And we are not devoid of our present-day partisanship (*denominations*)

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2. Factionalism makes life more interesting..

The rival groups in the church at Corinth were based the strength of as personalities and not the essentiality of fellowship.

- Emerging differences led to lively debates and animated discussion.
- There are undoubtedly Christians who enjoy intrigue, church politics and power struggles; which if not handled disrupts unity

3. Differences do exist between Christian leaders

- Leadership differences in style, personality, and inter-personal skills come into play as choices are made to which side to choose.
- Paul was highly independent and would not accept hospitality — insisting on paying his own way, while Peter was amenable to receive hospitality and monetary gifts.
- There is also the recognition of the learning styles of the students
- It is so easy to disparage a preacher or leader that you do not much like or in some way disagree with — yet we must beware of the bilateral coefficient of benevolence (Matt. 7:12)

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4. Belief in Jesus was not enough.

- The Corinthians fell into the trap that so many Christians still fall into.
- Belief in Jesus was in itself was insufficient to be a Christian in of the first rank in Corinth. It had to be Jesus and something else:
 - a) For some it was the one who baptized them
 - b) For others it was their spiritual giftedness
 - c) Finally for others it was the ability to keep rules of life they made

5. The desire to be special.

- It was not enough for the Corinthians to be Christian; they wanted to demonstrate their special gifting (I Cor. 12:27-31)
- Just as it was destructive to highlight one's connection with a particular teacher, so it is to highlight one's special giftedness (I Cor. 12:12)
- We are all special if we believe in Jesus and have received him. Our membership of God's family that is **all that matters.**

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Toward the end of his letter, Paul reminds the Corinthians of his teachings about Jesus' resurrection.

Paul taught that Jesus' resurrected body was a glorified spiritual body; but it was **also an actual body**, and not a disembodied soul.

- Since His was a bodily resurrection, so, too, will theirs be.

Moreover, Jesus' resurrection was the “**first-fruit**” of the resurrection—there is going to be a future resurrection of the dead and it is at that time that Christians will enjoy their salvation.

According to Paul, the community's problems were the consequence of the Corinthians' mistaken belief that they had already been exalted.

They **failed to take seriously the power of evil**; and their behavior caused divisions in the church and which led to a lack of concern for other members.

- To resolve this issue, he encourages **communal love**.

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G. Campbell Morgan said that examining this chapter is like dissecting a flower to understand it. If you tear it apart too much, you lose the beauty.

So let's examine I Cor 13 without removing the petals from the flower:

A. **The supremacy of love (v 1-2)** Love is superior to spiritual gifts in and of Chapter 12:27-31.

- The Corinthians were enamored with spiritual gifts, particularly **tongues**
- Paul reminds them even the gift of **tongues** is meaningless without love.
- For one to give so much emphasis to **Prophecy, knowledge, and faith** is also irrelevant apart from love and leads to missing the motive for the gifts

B. The most dramatic advancements of self are profitless without love (v 3)

- Bestow all my goods to feed the poor:** This is what Jesus told the rich young ruler to do (Matthew 16:19-23), and he refused.
- Though I give my body to be burned** means even if we lay down our lives in martyrdom, apart from love, it is of no profit.
- Elevating personal possessions or positions is arrogance

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Two descriptions of Love

- (a) **Love is longsuffering** -- If God's love is in us, we will be longsuffering to those who annoy us and hurt us (II Pet 3:9)
- (b) **Love is Kind (acts benevolently)** A wonderful measure of kindness is to see how *children* receive us. Children won't receive and respond to unkind people!

Paul then lists eight things that love is not (V 4b-6) envious, proud, arrogant, rude, cliquish, touchy, suspicious, and happy with evil.

- Envy is one of the least productive and most damaging of all sins.
 - Envy murdered Abel (Gen. 4:3-8), enslaved Joseph (Gen. 37:11, 28) and even put Jesus on the cross (Matt.27:18)
- Love in action can work anonymously. It does not have to have the limelight or the attention to do a good job
- To be **puffed up** is to be arrogant and self-focused– having a “big head.”
- Where there is love, there will be kindness and good manners.
- "Love is never satisfied except in the welfare, comfort, and salvation of *all*."
- Love does not find it easy to be **provoked** or become irritated with other

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Love ... bears all things:

"Love covers; that is, it never proclaims the errors of good men. There are busybodies abroad who never spy out a fault in a brother but they must needs hurry off to their next neighbor with the savory news, and then they run up and down the street as though they had been elected common criers. It is by no means honorable to men or women to set up to be common informers. Yet I know some who are not half so eager to publish the gospel as to publish slander. Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip." (Spurgeon)

You have a responsibility as a church member. You are to be a source of unity. You are never to be a divisive force. You are to love your fellow church members unconditionally. And while that doesn't mean you agree with everyone all the time, it does mean you are willing to sacrifice your own preferences to keep unity in your church.

[Thom S. Rainer. I Am a Church Member (p. 10). B&H Publishing Group]

STUDY AND ADVANCEMENT

1. What did Paul mean when he said in Colossians 3:14 that love is the perfect bond of unity? What does that mean for the local church today?
2. What is the best path to take if someone brings gossip to you in your church? What does the Bible say about gossip?
3. How is forgiveness related to unity in the local church? What does the Bible say about forgiving one another?

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