

“I Will Not Let My Church Be About Me!”

If you have ever been around small children, you know that one of their favorite words to say is “mine.” Small children tend to be self-centered; they see the world from their perspective. They want things their way, and if it can’t be their way, you can be prepared for them to display their displeasure with a tantrum.

Most people are aware of this fact and are very understanding when they observe a small child throwing a tantrum. It would be very disturbing to witness an adult engaging in the same behavior because most adults understand that they can’t always have it their way. A mature adult recognizes that family and community often take precedence over our individual preferences or needs. Even more so, a mature Christian understands that he or she is a part of God’s community—the church.

In our effort to function our best in the church, we have come to understand that we, the church, are part of the *Body of Christ*. Knowing this gives us a whole new perspective. This can mean several things. First, it suggests that my body, my physical presence, thoughts, desires, and preferences are only part of the whole; the Body of Christ meaning the church. Another implication is the ‘Body’ is not solely me. It consists of a *Body of Christian believers*. That means we need to be mindful of the thoughts, wishes, and desires of others.

The most important implication is that the ‘Body’ is not mine, Susie’s, or John’s, or any church officer. It is the Body of Christ. It is holy. It is in the divine plan of God. The desired pattern or design has been set by Him. He takes preeminence over all. What He wants and desires for us individually and collectively as a whole is what really matters.

Growing up in a family, most of us have had conflicts with our siblings or parents where we want our way. Soon, we learned that for the family to function, we had to make some concessions, compromise, or conform to our parents’ expectations. What we fail to understand is that we can’t use human and worldly patterns and apply them to the Body of Christ—which is divinely ordained by God. These patterns will always fall woefully short of what God has in mind. God’s thoughts and ways are higher than man’s thoughts and ways.

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2: 3-8, (ESV Anglicized).

Philippians 2: 3-8, gives us insight into what enables us to not only live in community with each other as the church, but also actualize God’s very purpose for the church on earth. Consider the fact that when Jesus came to earth, He gave up His heavenly glory and set aside some privileges to become a servant in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5-8). Two characteristics that Jesus demonstrates in this passage are humility and servanthood. These characteristics are directly

opposite to the consumer mentality that many believers hold about church membership. As one who professes that Jesus has saved them, we must do a self-check on two levels—a heart check and a head check. A heart check, because we must always strive to grow in our relationship with Christ; a head check, because we must grow in our understanding of God’s purpose for His church.

Being a Christian requires the submission of one’s individual will to the lordship of Christ. We are either in Christ on His terms (by grace) or we aren’t. To hold the view that being part of the body of Christ involves an exchange process is an error. Being saved by grace means we had nothing to exchange for salvation; it is a gift of God (Eph. 2: 8-10).

And yet, many believers demand that the church cater to their preferences and desires BEFORE they will serve! Our serving ought to be in response to God’s mercy, grace, and love for us as demonstrated by Christ’s death on the cross. The hymn writer states, “Jesus paid it all; All to HIM I owe...” Being a functional member of the Body of Christ is not a consumer transaction.

Thom S. Rainer, states in his book, “As a Church member, my motivation should not be to get my preference to the top of the list. I am supposed to be last, not first, I am supposed to be a servant instead of seeking to be served (Thom S. Rainer, I Am A Church Member, (2013), pg. 35). Paul writes, “By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving Him by spreading this Good News” Eph. 3:7 (NLT). Rainer’s research indicates ten dominant behavior patterns are present when church members insist that a church cater to their preferences and desires. Is it the music, the worship experience, demands for pastoral attention, budget concerns, or programming that has become an issue that keeps you from serving?

Church membership from a biblical perspective is about servanthood, giving, and putting others first. Philippians 2 is not only a description of the obedience of Christ; it is also an example for us to follow.

Jesus is our model; we are here to serve! Mark 10:45, NIV tells us, “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.” We are servants of the Most High God. We must put into practice His will for our lives as individuals and as a corporate body. We cannot impact our communities and the unsaved if we fail to understand that we are servants who must relinquish our “me-ness,” so that the Body of Christ is elevated in our lives. We must be focused on serving others and putting our personal needs and wants aside.