

## Imperfection of the Local Church — Part 1

There is no question that our culture has made a great impact in today's local church. At times, this impact is so pervasive one cannot tell the difference between the church and the world! This can be a real frustration to shepherds and believers who desire to obey and follow the Scripture in regard to the local church. Sometimes, in frustration, they respond by trying to change our society. Others respond by forming "special interest groups" of Christians who try to function apart from the local church. Still others pull away from both society and the local church. Such people thereby reject the local church, based on their evaluation of the imperfection of the local church, or its lack of conformity to the New Testament's standard of the local church.

Is this an appropriate (biblical) response? That is, if the visible, local manifestation of the Church is imperfect, should I abandon it altogether? Let's ask the question from a different perspective: Has any individual Christian risen so far above the sinful flesh, and become so perfect in sanctification, and so spiritually self-sufficient, that he or she is able to say of the local church, "I don't need you," because it might taint him or her? (cp. *2 Co 10:12*)

Now, we must readily agree that the today's Church is not as perfect as it ought to be. But, before you reject involvement in the local church for this reason, consider this: In the first century, was the Church all that God expected and called it to be?! Why, from the very beginning of the church (the local and visible Body of Christ), there were problems, imperfections, and people who needed to be rebuked and reprovved (see *Acts 5, 6, Galatians 2:11ff*). Warnings were *constantly* given to local churches regarding troublemakers, weak saints, and imperfect people. Goodness, look at the churches in Galatia and Corinth! (*Galatians, 1 Corinthians*) They were marked by some major problems, and received some severe rebukes! Yet, Paul does not tell the "mature believers" to abandon them!

Think about this; Do we find, *anywhere*, in *any* of the New Testament letters to the churches, *any* letter that contains *no rebuke, admonishment, warning, or exhortation*? In fact, from the very beginning of the church, the *Lord of the Church* instituted *church discipline*, warnings against *false teachers and teaching*, and warnings against the *dangers of worldliness*. Why should this be, if the church was going to be so perfect (or was so perfect in the beginning)? The answer is simple: Because none of these churches *were* perfect! And, there would be no need of such warnings, if the proper response to an imperfect church is to simply abandon it! Rather, in spite of such imperfect local churches, *nowhere* in *any* of the letters to the churches (i.e., the entire New Testament!) is a command given to "abandon the local visible church because it is not fully living up to expectations"! Instead, we see the command *not to abandon* the visible local church, but rather to encourage one another by assembling together and encouraging one another! (*He 10:25*)

Why would this be? Why would I want to "stick it out" with a group of imperfect people? For a couple of reasons. The first is the command we just mentioned: It is a command. The second reason we will take up next month, as we continue discussing this topic.