

Imperfection of the Local Church — Part 2

It is a fact that every local church of Jesus Christ has imperfections and weaknesses. This should come as no surprise, since the church is made up of imperfect and weak people. Moreover, the local church also contains a mixture of saved and unsaved people. It is no wonder the local church will have such imperfections. Last month we considered several responses by people to this imperfection of the local church.

People respond to this imperfect state of the local church in differing ways. Our focus last month was on only one of these responses: Those who 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 response biblical? The answer is: No. We find nowhere in the New Testament, where we are told to "abandon the local visible church because it is not fully living up to expectations"! Instead, find 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 command be given to us? Why would I want to "stick it out" with a group of imperfect people? The first reason is *because God commands us to do so*. The second reason is because *it is Jesus' church, and He said He would build*. And not only this, *He chose to build His church by means of sinful and weak human beings!*

From the very start, the visible local church has *always* had a mix of people, making it an imperfect group: Some who profess to belong to and follow Christ, yet are false (cp. *Mt 7:21ff*), others who *are* truly saved, and others who are unsaved but for some reason or other, come and get involved with believers to see what it is all about (Could it be possible that they are being drawn by the Spirit?). Moreover, even among the true believers, there is always a variance of range from the mature down to brand new baby Christians. So long as we are still in these weak, imperfect, and fleshly bodies, there will always be this mix of people in the local church. There will always be those who are totally committed to Jesus, those who are saved yet struggling in their commitment, those whom the Lord is drawing but are not yet saved, and those who claim to be saved, but are just going through the motions.

Here is the thing that is hard for us to swallow: *Jesus knew* that such a group would be present in the local Body, and this is evidenced by the numerous passages telling us to reprove, rebuke, exhort, etc. Such commands presuppose this "mix" of people. Yet, some today claim that such a "mix" is a compromising of the purity of the church; and their response is to withdraw from local churches into their homes, for fear they or their families will be "tainted" by the local church. I must disagree with this response, because it is based on misapplication of Scripture, and is a weakness of sound doctrine. The presence of such a "mixed group" is not *necessarily* a sign of spiritual compromise on the part of a local church (although it *can* be a sign), but is just what the **local visible** manifestation of the Body of Christ will look like as long as the church is composed of sinners saved by grace, until Jesus comes. Granted, the "mix ratio" will vary from congregation to congregation (kind of like lawn fertilizer 25-3-3 or 14-12-10, etc), and we want that ratio to be far more committed and growing believers than unbelievers.

Our desire should be to have greater and greater purity in our local churches, as Christians in them grow. Our responsibility must be to work toward that purity and continued spiritual growth in the Body which the Bible calls for. But we must be ever mindful that as long as the church is composed of those who have not yet been completed in their glorification (I haven't met one yet!), "the mix" will be a present reality in each local church. Therefore, to abandon the local church because it still contains sinful people is arrogant, because such an action assumes that such a person is somehow superior to the rest, and need not associate with them because they are imperfect. Even worse, that person, in removing *himself* (and his family) from the local church, removes one of *the very means God has chosen to use* to sanctify and perfect that church: *imperfect people*, empowered by God's grace, whom He uses to strengthen, edify, and encourage their fellow believers in grace!

Next month, by God's grace, we will discuss how we may cure such a wrong view of the local church.