

Individual responsibility in the church of the living God

(Part 2)

What is your expectation of the church? What is your expectation for this local assembly?

Each of us has some kind of expectation – even if we have never given it much thought. Even if each of us begin with a Scriptural expectation - unless we are especially vigilant, and steadily growing – we can be easily discouraged and lured into greatly lowering our expectations in regard to the church of the living God.

This is no small problem as expectation is a critical factor in walking by faith.

Faith cannot flourish in the context of contracting expectations. Our walk with the Lord will be reduced to a reaction – a reaction to personal experiences and circumstances. There will be a natural tendency to allow our experiences to shape our expectations more than the Word of God.

If faith is the victory that overcomes the world (I John 5:4), then we cannot afford to lower the expectations revealed to us from God Himself – unless we are willing to live out our brief pilgrimage on this earth in discouragement, disillusionment, and frustrating mediocrity.

It seems to me that this is a sphere in which the devil accomplishes some of his greatest victories.

The child of God who comes to embrace to an expectation that is a dismal distortion of what our heavenly Father has granted us (in His matchless grace) – is going to present to the world a very poor picture of the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes our expectation of the church has been diminished quite purposefully – so that we are not as bothered as the effectiveness of our local assembly is greatly limited by our own spiritual slothfulness.

One thing is quite certain from the New Testament – it is critical for each and every member of Christ's body to be of the same mind in expectation, and therefore functioning in a spiritual harmony and power that will be impossible for the defenses of darkness to withstand.

As we have seen – the God-given mission of the church is nothing less than remarkable.

We cannot afford to be lax, each and every one of us has an extremely important part in the task that God has ordained for us in the present time.

We cannot properly function alone – as elders, deacons, evangelists, or even zealous individuals – we are “members one of another”.

So, we are taking some time to consider our basic individual responsibilities in the body of Christ.

Every one of us is an integral part in the proper functioning of the assembly as God Himself has designed it. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Last time we began by looking at our individual responsibility not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Apart from the new birth, such an admonition is absurd. For the natural man, this is beyond the realm of any genuine understanding – much less actual experience.

As we progress, I believe that we will see that this is the fundamental foundation for all other individual responsibility in the church. A distorted view of self-importance is debilitating in the function of the body – this is so effectively illustrated for us in the function of the human body. (I Corinthians 12:14-18)

This proper view of ourselves is of such crucial importance that Paul ties it directly to the ultimate human reality of the Word condescending to become flesh. (Philippians 2:1-8)

If Christ Jesus is fully God in human form, then there is one fundamental and reasonable response that ought to come from those He came to save.

Humility is the only reasonable response to the grace of God in Christ.

Genuine humility requires sacrifice.

Spiritual humility in the church requires a determined distinctness from the world.

Spiritual humility in the assembly of saints will be obvious, and produce great blessing.

Today we will be looking at a second important responsibility for those who are members of the household of God. We will be looking at the importance of purity.

We mentioned this in passing last time as we considered the sacrificial nature of Biblical humility.

We now need to take the time to look at purity itself, and it's importance for each of us in the body of Christ.

When we consider the fact that the New Testament church is to be one of the primary ways that the world is able to see Christ in this present time – it becomes clear that the condition of the church is very important indeed.

In His infinite wisdom God has ordained that the world in the present age should see His glory in the New Testament assembly. (Ephesians 3:21)

Many people in this dying world claim that their view of Jesus Christ is formed largely by what they observe in individual believers, and in the function of the church itself. There are surely many more who would never admit it, or even realize that this is largely true of them as well.

I have heard people testify that when they first began to read the Word of God, it was the witness of His assembly that God used to help explain and verify the truth they were reading.

What should the world be impressed with when they look closely at the New Testament church?
What are they impressed with when they look closely at this local assembly?

There are several important characteristics that the world ought to be impressed with when they look closely at Christ's body – and one of these is purity – a characteristic/distinctive purity.

When the people of Palestine observed the Son of God – as they carefully considered His life and words – they could not help but be impressed with His purity. (Matthew 27:4, 19-23 Heb. 9:14)

Is His purity reflected in His church? – as a characteristic righteousness appropriate for those who are His followers? There are few things as effective in discrediting the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

than blatant and on-going impurity in those who claim the sinless Son of God as their Savior and Lord.

A local church can be heavily involved in numerous outreaches and ministry, but will never bring genuine credibility to the Lord apart from a characteristic holiness/purity.

What about us? Where do we stand – what kind of reflection are we on God’s Holy and righteous One?

*** How can we cultivate, and exhibit a characteristic purity in this assembly?

Learn to see impurity for what it is.

The world around us has a very subtle and deceptive way of making evil look good, and good look boring, needlessly confining, or an out-dated way of thinking steeped in ignorance.

Sometimes evil is made to look good by using progress/change as a new and improved context in which things that used to be seen as bad are now understood to be acceptable based on a progressive and enlightened way of thinking.

Sometimes evil is made to look good in relation to other – and far more serious looking evils.

Sometimes evil is made to look like a harmless bit of naughtiness, that everyone indulges in from time to time.

Many times there is an extremely appealing emphasis on the pleasures of evil – downplaying or ignoring altogether how quickly those pleasures fade away, and the severity of the consequences that are certain to follow.

Sometimes evil is legitimized by being legalized, or approved of by governments, academia, and increasingly even by those who are the leaders of organized religion.

We can begin to lose a much needed sense of alertness and shame if we subject ourselves to the kind of entertainment venues which parade evil before us endlessly and brazenly – as though it is as harmless as it is common.

We live in a culture that has become giddy with delight in impurity and the gross perversion that inevitably follows – very few restraints remain in our society – institutionally, or culturally.

It is critical therefore for God’s children to be alert and attentive to the unique insight and warnings that our heavenly Father has given us to protect us from the deception of the world concerning impurity. (Proverbs 2:11-14)

Don’t expect the world to see impurity for what it is – they are enslaved to their own lusts, and dead to righteousness

How should we - as members of the household of God - see impurity?

1. We need to see it as a manifestation of futile and stubborn ignorance. (Eph. 4:17-18)
 - sin that is tolerated in the saint's life manifests a completely inappropriate mindset
2. We need to see it as de-sensitizing and degrading selfishness. (Eph. 4:19) (Romans 12:9, 13:13)
 - impurity inflates the importance of self to the point an adult will behave like a spoiled child
3. We need to see it as the enemy of our very soul. (I Peter 2:11)
 - impurity has the potential to degrade and damage the very essence of our being
4. We need to see it as a personal rejection of God. (I Thess 4:8)
 - on-going defilement in the believer is a rebellion against the gracious desire of our perfect Father Titus 2:11-14
5. We need to see it's potential and it's serious consequences. (Acts 5, I Corinthians 5, I Peter 4:17)
 - Sin is never satisfied with one act of disobedience – a little impurity has a lot of potential!
 - Defilement is worse than radioactive contamination, or biological contagions – it is far more destructive, and much more difficult to contain.

Give Christ the preeminence in every part of life.

One of the most dangerous tendencies we face in relation to personal purity, is the tendency toward compartmentalization – the dividing of our lives into distinct and separate spheres of influence.

We may be quite willing to give the Lord the preeminence in several significant areas of our living, expecting that the Lord will then give us a little bit of spiritual slack in what we may see as a less significant area.

This is a recipe for disaster in relation to purity. All impurity is dangerous – it is pregnant with more impurity. If I take a pregnant dog in as a pet, I will soon have more dogs. Even if I try to keep the pregnant dog in a small corner of the shed out back – eventually there will be consequences affecting a larger and larger sphere of my property. Sin is never satisfied – not with one seemingly minor transgression – not with one or two minor areas of living. (And this is only one aspect of the exceeding sinfulness of sin)

All of us have a tendency to see certain areas of our lives as being much less important than other areas – especially in relation to our impact on others.

We need to be especially vigilant in this matter of compartmentalization. It can be especially subtle, and also quite difficult to deal with once it has become entrenched in our way of thinking.

We have already seen the importance of the preeminence of Christ in the function of the assembly.

We now need to look at the importance of the preeminence of Christ in relation to personal purity.

1. We need to give Christ the preeminence in our mindset and perspective.

- The way we look at life – and sin in particular – needs to be in seamless subjection to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. (example: Mt. 6:1-6, 19-21)

2. We need to give Christ the preeminence in our thought life.

- Our thoughts may seem like a small thing to us, but they are very important to the Lord
Mt. 5:21-22, 27-28 Proverbs 23:7 Philippians 4:8
- our thoughts are at the very heart of who we are Mark 7:21 II Timothy 2:8
Colossians 3:1-3

3. We need to give Christ the preeminence in our priorities.

- Give Jesus such a preeminent position in our activity, we leave no room for the flesh
Romans 13:13-14

4. We need to give Christ the preeminence in our hope for the future.

- Colossians 3:1-4 Philippians 2:20-21 I John 3:1-5 Mt. 5:8

When each of us in the body give the Lord Jesus the preeminence in every area of our living, there will be a characteristic purity that the world cannot miss.

Our perfect and loving heavenly Father will receive glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.