immaturity? Not at all. Does this mean that Christians do not need to try to grow, that improvement is not expected out of each one of us? Of course not. Does it mean that our failures to act and speak like Christians, especially with each other, are acceptable? Not really.

Christians are committed to Jesus. Our goal is to be more and more like Him all the time, every day. We are pushing on, growing, and improving. Whether I am doing that according to my own abilities and opportunities, the Lord will judge. In the mean time, I try. The difference between me and the unbeliever is not that I am perfect and he is not. The difference between us (I hope) is that I am committed to becoming more Christ-like every day. I am dedicated to improving myself after the pattern of Jesus, because I trust that His way is the right way. That does not make me perfect, but it makes me a Christian.

The conclusion is that I need to cut the church some slack before I blame it for failing me. My fellow-Christians are, after all, just as weak and beset with problems as I am. They are not perfect, just as I am not perfect. They can, and will, help me when I need it, but I know in the end that their help will only go so far, they can only do so much. And that's okay. **"My strength comes from the Lord"** (Psa. 118.14). He will never disappoint me. What I get from my brethren is "frosting on the cake."

Focus Magazine Online, June 12, 2014
www.focusmagazine.org

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Faithful Sayings

"The Church Failed Me"
By David McClister

A handful of times in my experience, I have heard someone blame the church for the weakness or moral failings either of themselves or of family members. "I took my child to Bible classes all those years and now they're not faithful to the Lord." Or, "Brother so-and-so was a member of this church for years and then one day he left his wife for another woman." Or sometimes I have heard Christians blame the church for what seems to be their overall discontentment. "I was going through hard times and no one from the church helped me" (which often is not true, but is an exaggeration).

First please allow me to say that it is tragic when Christians do not provide each other with the support and help that they should. The Bible is clear that we are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6.2), weep with those who weep (Rom. 12.15), and show sympathy to our brethren who are going through hard times (Heb. 10.34). The Lord in His wisdom put us together in local churches so that we would not have to stand and fight against the world alone. We are together for our mutual strength and encouragement. I am sure that there have been times when a local church, as a group, did not rise to an opportunity. Some-

times we let people "fall through the cracks," and that is not a good thing at all. There is no excuse for it.

But there is another side to this. First, I think it is unhealthy to view the local church primarily in terms of "me." I am sure that this is a reflection of the culture in which we live. "Me first" is the motto of our age. We have been trained by the world around us to think first of self. "What am *I* going to get out of this?" "How will this benefit *me*?" "This isn't going to cost *me* anything, is it?" These are often the first

questions that cross our minds when faced with a decision. Have we allowed this thinking to affect our relationship with the Lord's church? I fear that it is not uncommon in places where there are several congregations within a short distance of each other for Christians to choose the congregation at which they will worship (or sometimes, whether they will join themselves to a local church at all) based on what "I" want. "I want Bible classes for my kids." "I want the preaching to be good" (whatever that means). "I want a lot of social interaction – potlucks, picnics, get-togethers for the young people," etc. "And if a church lacks one or even all of these things, I'll go find another one." I'm not saying that all Christians are like this, nor even that most Christians are like this. But a few are, and these are the ones who, in my experience, classically blame the church for whatever is not right in their lives.

But if you're going to evaluate the suitability of a local church based first on the criteria of "me," then you will not likely be happy *anywhere*. No local congregation is likely to have everything, and do everything, that "I" want. The satisfaction of "me" is a hole that can never be filled, a thirst that can never be quenched. Besides, Paul said that this is not the way a Christian ought to think. **"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"** (Phil 2.3f).

Secondly, I fear that those who blame the church for their problems may have bought into a very worldly view of the church. We hear it

all the time from unbelievers – "you people in the church are hypocrites." "You don't really love everyone." "You don't do for anything for the community." "You have a guy in your church who hasn't paid his taxes." In other words, the charge is the church is not perfect, but it ought to be. They suppose that the church is made up of sinless people ("saints" in the secular sense of that term), and when they see imperfections in the church they cry out as if some great injustice is being done.

That's the way – I fear – that some Christians think of the church. "My brethren ought to be perfect, and when they are not, I'm either going to leave or I'm going to complain about it loudly."

But I have some news. The church is not perfect. I doubt if it ever has been. I am suspicious that there has ever existed a local church that was completely pleasing to the Lord in every possible way, with no room for improvement.

The fact is that the church is made up of imperfect people. Sometimes they say things that they shouldn't. Sometimes they do things that they shouldn't. Sometimes they fail to do what they should do. Sometimes they want to help, but they don't know how, or they lack the skills or resources to accomplish it. Sometimes they don't know what to say. Sometimes they try to help, but they botch it. Sometimes they allow their emotions too much room. Sometimes they are not as spiritually mature as they could be or perhaps even should be. Every Christian

is in a process of growth and maturation. Not all of them are spiritual giants or perfect spiritual mentors. The fact is that the church is made up of people who have all the same kinds of limitations and struggle with the same kinds of flaws as everyone else (and yes, that includes the local preacher and the elders).

The church is made up of the people who have decided to follow Jesus. The gospel is the rule of life they have pledged to follow. But the great majority of them come into the church with all kinds of baggage from the world, and it takes a long time for most people to let go of it. Repentance is not just an event, it is more like a process. We are, day by day, putting off more of the old man of sin and putting on more of Jesus Christ (Eph 4.22-24). Does this mean that we should be content with spiritual