

HEBREWS 6:1-3

A DIRTY LITTLE SECRET ABOUT THE CHURCH

“Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”¹

Christians, especially newer saints, are often shocked to discover the degree of immaturity residing among the people of God. We come into the Faith with the assumption that God’s people will reflect a measure of maturity, especially if they have been in the Faith for any length of time. Preachers are just as naïve concerning the maturity of churches.

Maturity is a neglected subject among the Christians. Every member of the congregation, if he or she should actually give the matter thought, imagines he or she is mature—able to handle slights, disappointments or any problems that occur in a given relationship. However, the evidence is that a great deal of infantile behaviour is justified within the congregation because of immaturity that is unrecognised for what it is or at least not admitted.

Joe McKeever tells a story of a fellow servant of Christ who commented on one occasion, “Church is the only place on earth where people can throw hissy fits and get away with it.”² McKeever cites a minister who was serving his first church out of seminary. He continued his story by noting that he asked his friend why he would say this. The preacher had two stories—stories that are tragically similar to any tale almost any servant of Christ could tell.

In the first story, the minister told of a church member attending a class that he was teaching. She couldn’t find her workbook. The pastor told her that he had borrowed it for another class, but that she was welcome to use his. Her response was to say, “Okay, I’ll go home then.” And she stalked out of the class. The minister relating the story asked, “Would she have done that at work? At a doctor’s office? I think not.” However, she had no problem putting her immaturity on full display at a meeting of the church.

The next story was of a man who stormed out of a church leadership meeting because his idea for a fundraiser was rejected. The minister relating the story asked, “Would he have done that in a college class? At work? At home? At the store, even?” The answer is obvious. McKeever notes, “And this guy was a church leader!”

Then, McKeever makes this observation, “The church—which is the institution which we Christians should respect most—ends up being the least respected by many. And the pastor the least respected professional.” That is a stinging indictment of the modern congregation. Tragically, it is proven true in far too many instances.

This, then, is the message today. It is intended as a challenge to the people of God to think about who we are. If we understand who we are, we will realise that how we treat God’s people—the assembly of the faithful—speaks volumes of our maturity. It matters little how long we have been on the journey; what matters is how far we have come. Boasting of how long you have been a Christian is quite meaningless; it will become obvious how closely you are walking with the Lord when you are disappointed by some incident.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Joe McKeever, “The Church’s Dirty Little Secret,” <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/253999-churchs-dirty-little-secret.html>, accessed 6 July 2015

THE GOAL OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE LORD — “Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.” A primary goal for Christians is growing to maturity in Christ. To be sure, we are responsible to win the lost, defend the Faith, honour Christ the Lord through fellowship in the Word, discovering the richness of the Gospel of Christ—and we will do these things if we are actually mature in Christ. However, the stated goals are means to achieve the one major goal— each Christian is to mature in Christ, mature in the Faith. This need for maturation is not to be pursued in isolation from growing toward maturation as a church.

Look at this truth from a Pauline perspective. Writing in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says,

‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.’

“(In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:1-16].

Though perfected in Christ, the congregation of the Lord is not an assembly of perfect people. Comprising the assembly are flawed beings who struggle each day with sin—and that not always successfully. There must be a degree of humility when we scrutinise the character of fellow saints with whom we share worship. We dare not hold others to a standard of our own making lest we should subject ourselves to such a merciless standard administered by others! We must hold one another accountable to Christ’s standard, acknowledging our need for grace and for mercy. Nor should we anticipate that we will receive grace and mercy if we are not willing ourselves to be gracious and merciful. Jesus has taught His disciples, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” [LUKE 6:36]. In the Beatitudes, Jesus taught those who are His disciples, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” [MATTHEW 5:7].

Surely each believer wants to honour the Master. If we will honour the Master, the purpose of the assembly will be to move toward maturity in the Faith. This is not an esoteric longing for some mystical, unattainable plateau of spirituality; rather, this goal must be anticipated and shared by each member of the assembly. The goal of Christians must always be to build others in the Faith, to encourage others when they are beginning to flag and to console those in need of consolation. This is revealed in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians.

The congregation in Corinth was composed of people each of whom was focused on his or her personal enjoyment. Paul wrote these spiritually stunted saints a command that is ignored. “Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. *The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself*, but *the one who prophesies builds up the church*” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-4].

The issue is too important not to stress again—the goal of the congregation is maturity. We are to work together to build one another in this most holy Faith. Paul has already written the Philippian Christians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” [PHILIPPIANS 2:3, 4]. These humbling words are too readily dismissed within modern society. Unfortunately, the attitude of society has infiltrated the congregations of the faithful and we need to be reminded again of our mutual responsibility.

Years ago, William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army telegraphed his annual Christmas message to Salvationists around the world. At the time Booth sent the message, he was already quite elderly. Times were tough and money was in short supply. Communication by telegraph was the most advanced technological means of sending a message, but the message had to be paid for by the word. Booth’s message, a model of concision and frugality, was one word: “Others.” This would be an excellent motto for all Christians; we are to look out for the welfare of our fellow believers and seek the welfare of others.

I am constrained to focus attention on this concept for our mutual benefit. Consider other passages presenting this same truth in similar terms to remind yourselves of the expectations of Christ the Lord. For instance, recall how Paul instructed the Ephesian saints. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” [EPHESIANS 5:15-21].

That same Ephesian Letter presents the reminder, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3].

Count others more significant than yourselves! Look not only to your own interests, but look also to the interests of others! Our every action should drive us to consider whether we are building fellow believers. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ! Cultivate a submissive spirit to fellow believers. Bear with one another in love! Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit! These are not inconsequential expectations; neither should we expect that such commands are the natural outwork of our relationship with other saints. That we are commanded to do these things indicates that we will struggle to fulfil what is expected of us.

I do want to bring one further portion of the Word to bear in order to emphasise the importance of an attitude that exalts others. Writing the Roman Christians, Paul revealed his expectation of Christian behaviour. “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” [ROMANS 12:9-11].

The Apostle to the Gentiles frequently cited his own experience in order to instruct those to whom he wrote. At one point in his Letter to Philippian Christians, he spoke of his life. What he wrote at that time should push each of us to excel. “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made [maturity] my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” Then, Paul urged these saints, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” [**PHILIPPIANS 3:13-17**].

We who are born from above are to reach for maturity. We know that we shall be mature in the Saviour at His return. However, so long as we wear this mortal flesh, we are to make every effort to grow toward maturity. We are to do this, looking to Christ and considering the example of maturity revealed in the lives of godly men and women among the churches. We see their examples both in what they have written and through personal observation of their reactions to the challenges all people face. If you will, we are to choose our role models carefully, emulating their lives in our own response to daily challenges.

I confess my consternation at the role models chosen by many in this day. The heroes of movies and television are known for sarcasm and rudeness. They destroy others through biting remarks and caustic observations that elicit laughs from the unthinking. We delight in violence as a form of entertainment, never thinking that we are teaching those who watch that violence is the solution to all problems. Morality and ethics are so altered from what marked us as a nation during the first century and a quarter that it is doubtful that the Fathers of Confederation would recognise the nation today. Thus, we are raising a generation of inconsiderate, mean-spirited, harsh-speaking youths that are centred on their own desires—this is what how they see their parents living out their lives and it is the model provided.

Let me say this clearly so that there can be no question in the minds of the people of God. We are responsible to search out mature followers of the Christ, emulating their way of life. Listen to the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians as he draws that missive to a conclusion. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” [**HEBREWS 13:7, 8**].

As Christians, we are to aspire to mature in Christian graces and we are responsible to follow the example of those mature individuals whom Christ appoints over His congregation. Parents and grandparents should point out the godly qualities of those who lead the assemblies of the faithful, encouraging the children to follow their example. The best way to accomplish this goal is to hold mature believers in esteem and to endeavour to grow toward maturity yourself. Maturity is the neglected component of too many congregations; yet, it is our goal in this life.

A CATALOGUE OF ELEMENTARY WORKS — “Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”

Too often, the pulpit contents itself with elementary teachings. Perhaps each of us is aware of churches that teach little beyond how to be saved. The preacher calls people to faith in Christ, but those who respond to the message are unaware that salvation is a new birth into a transformative relationship with the True and Living God.

Elementary doctrines are those teachings that define us as Christian. These teachings are essential—and they are woefully neglected and even ignored among many churches so-called! I mention them often precisely because they are foundational. Christ Jesus is very God in human flesh. He presented His life as a sacrifice because of our sin. He was buried, but He conquered death by rising from the tomb. He ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. From there, He is coming again to gather His people to Himself and to judge all who have refused to receive Him as Master over life. The forgiveness of sin and a right standing with the Father are given to each individual who believes this Good News, submitting to this Risen Saviour as Master of life. The authority for these truths is the Bible, which is to be received as inerrant and infallible. To reject any of these foundational truths is to position oneself in opposition to God, calling into doubt whether that individual is a Christian.

The author of this Hebrew Letter provides a brief catalogue of elementary teachings. These teachings are sometimes surprising to people because they are neglected and/or ignored. First, he points to “a foundation for repentance from dead works and ... faith toward God.” Christian teaching should not be required to lay the foundation and then lay it again repeatedly. Those receiving the teaching of “repentance from dead works and ... faith toward God” are responsible to communicate this truth to others so that they will hear this Good News. This is nothing less than practical demonstration of the import of the Great Commission in the life of believers. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

We preachers are not hired to fulfil the Great Commission—each believer by his or by her confession bears responsibility to tell others of Christ and His great sacrifice. The foundational teaching to which the author refers speaks of our relationship to God. If I do not *know* I have a relationship with God, if I do not *know* that He is my Father, how can I speak of the benefits of membership in the Family of God? It is an impossibility to know the deep things of God if I am uncertain of my relationship with Him. Ours is not a “hope so” salvation; the Christian Faith is a “know so” life. For this reason, Jesus stated of those who follow Him, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” [JOHN 10:28].

We rejoice when an individual comes before the congregation, confessing that she or he has believed this Gospel and is now seeking admission to the fellowship. We rejoice as those who have believed walk in confidence growing out of a vibrant relationship with the Son of God. However, we know that these precious fellow saints cannot continue their walk with the Master if they settle down at the point they began their walk. We must urge them to grow up in Christ.

The writer then speaks of “teaching about baptisms.”³ The translation in many Bibles speaks of “washings.” The Greek term our writer used is *baptismós*, usually translated “baptism.” It is apparent that the writer is speaking of immersion as an expression of one’s faith. Whilst many religious organisations have concluded that they must baptise in order to make Christians, the Word of God is quite clear that those who believe are to be baptised as an expression of their faith in the Risen Son of God. We are baptised *because* we are saved, and not in order to be saved. Among the many reasons we cannot accept the rite called baptism that is administered to infants is that there is no confession of sin because there can be no consciousness of sin; there is no faith on the part of the infant receiving the rite, thus there can be no baptism. Baptism to make one a Christian shifts faith to the rite rather than the Saviour.

³ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

There is no example in the New Testament of an individual who confessed Christ and then refused to identify with Him in baptism. Neither do we find an example of anyone who was baptised in order to become a Christian. The examples we are given demonstrate that one goes into the water as a believer and comes out as a believer. One does not dip a goat in order to make the goat a sheep.

The Great Commission assumes that disciples are baptised. Repentance always precedes baptism in the New Testament [see e.g. **ACTS 3:19; 26:20**]. Baptism pictures the transformation that has already taken place in the life of the believer [see **ROMANS 6:3-11; COLOSSIANS 2:12**]. In baptism, the believer pictures her or his confidence that Jesus died and was buried, but that He rose from the dead. The one baptised identifies himself or herself as having been dead in trespasses and sins but now is made alive in Christ. Then, the baptismal candidate speaks of her or his confidence that even should death come, that one will be raised in the image of Christ at the resurrection of the just. Thus, baptism is a powerful testimony of God's transformative power already experienced by the one being baptised. This is the message to take away—baptism is an elementary teaching. However, because of the distortion of the rite by many organisations, the assemblies are compelled to continue in immaturity as it must be taught again and again.

The writer next speaks of “the laying on of hands.” The reference appears to speak of blessings and certification that accompany setting individuals aside for particular service. Among the ancient churches, those baptised would kneel as the elders laid their hands on them, pronouncing a blessing. When the first missionaries were sent out from the Antioch congregation, the elders laid hands on them as they blessed them before their labours began [**ACTS 13:3**]. Those set apart by the Spirit of God are blessed as the elders lay hands on them, indicating that the congregation receives them as God's appointment for that service. This was demonstrated in Paul's reference to his participation in setting apart Timothy to the work of service [see **1 TIMOTHY 4:14; 2 TIMOTHY 1:6**]. It is also seen in the action of the elders when the first congregation had selected deacons to serve the assembly [**ACTS 6:6**]. Finally, when healings were performed among the earliest churches, the act was accompanied with the laying on of hands. The concept conveyed is that blessing God's people is quite elementary.

Two final items are included in this basic catalogue of elementary teachings—“the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement.” Catch this thought! Eschatology, the doctrine of last things, is an elementary truth. The teaching of things to come should be taught early in the life of a believer, but it should not be the major focus of a congregation. Churches that focus primarily, or even exclusively, on eschatological themes demonstrate their infantile nature! Do not misunderstand—the teaching of Christ's return is precious. The doctrine of the eternal judgement of the wicked and the eternal rest of the believer is vital to a healthy and theologically astute congregation. However, there must be maturation *now* in light of what is to come. If all we have is the acquisition of knowledge without understanding how to apply that knowledge in order to build others or to better ourselves, we are at best spiritually stunted.

We dare not excuse sinners by attempting to console ourselves that they are not in peril. Sinners are doomed! All who have refused to receive Christ Jesus as Master are under sentence of death. Listen to the Word of God. “Whoever believes in [the Son of God] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” [**JOHN 3:18-20**].

Again, the Evangelist has written, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36].

Likewise, we know that sinners must appear before the Great White Throne to receive what they have earned. “I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” [REVELATION 20:11-15].

Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. This is the power of the Gospel. Likewise, we comfort the believers by turning their gaze heavenward in the difficult times. What a comfort is Paul’s message to distressed saints. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18].

IMMATURITY IN THE CHURCH — Immature churches have certain unflattering characteristics. Consequently, an immature congregation is not necessarily a new congregation. Some churches have failed to mature; though they have existed for a long time they are immature. Wrong ideas will be on display in spiritually immature churches—those given to “hissy fits,” as McKeever described them. Their understanding of the Lord’s work is woefully inadequate, even distorted.

Saints have often confused longevity with maturity. Some saints are relatively young in the Faith, though they are surprisingly mature. Other saints have been in the Faith for years, and yet, they are disappointingly immature. What does immaturity in the Faith look like? Brother McKeever provides a list of characteristics demonstrated by an immature congregation.⁴ His list touches on a number of issues that are important for recognising immaturity; in fact, I’ll suggest that that his list of seven marks of immaturity is comprehensive.

Immature Christians see the church as a human institution belonging to them. “We can do anything we want.” “It’s our church.” “My daddy helped start this church.” “My mama paid for that pew.” “My grandad built that shed.” Immature Christians do not see the congregation of the faithful as holy—they do not recognise the Body of Christ. Let’s admit a truth that may make us just a bit uncomfortable—we do not build the church; Christ builds the church! This is what He said when He spoke to Peter. “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” [MATTHEW 16:18]. Immature Christians are in for a rude awakening, for “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10].

⁴ McKeever, op. cit.

Immature Christians see pastors as their employees responsible to do their bidding. Their immaturity is expressed by such foolish statements as, "We hired him; we can fire him." At other times, immature Christians will say, "If we are unhappy with him, then he has lost his effectiveness and needs to be replaced." These spiritually stunted saints do not believe that God appoints whom He wills to shepherd His churches. They will do well to remind themselves of Paul's words spoken to the elders of Ephesus. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" [ACTS 20:28]. These words are echoed by Peter, who urged elders, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly" [1 PETER 5:2]. They are in for a rude awakening when Christ judges.

Immature Christians see God's work as being restricted to professionals and their roles as volunteers when it's convenient and easy. The philosophy of these infantile Christians is, "We hired him to increase the attendance." "It's his job to visit the sick and reach the lost; that's why we pay him." They fail to realise that the command to be salt and light as well as the charge to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth was given to all the people of God, not just the apostles. They are in for a rude awakening when they stand before Jesus someday.

Immature Christians see their contributions (money, service, teaching) as their prerogative alone. "If I give my money, I expect it to be done the way I want it to." "I'm not giving my money there anymore; I don't like what the pastor is doing." Immature Christians do not see themselves as under Heaven's mandate and fully accountable to God. To be certain, we give what we determine in our own hearts, and we do so voluntarily. However, we do give! These childish Christians are in for a rude awakening when they stand before Jesus one day.

Immature Christians see their church's reputation in the community as irrelevant; unity is beside the point. "We're Baptists. Where you find two, you'll have three opinions." "I've been here the longest; I deserve to be heard." "If the community sees our church as divisive, that's their problem and they don't have to come." These sophomoric saints ignore Jesus prayer for unity. Remember that our Lord prayed, "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" [JOHN 17:21]. When the church is divided, the community wants none of what it is offering; and the Kingdom of God suffers. Such people are in for a rude awakening when they stand before Jesus one day.

Immature Christians see their childish behavior as no one's business but their own. "I'm not responsible for what others think of me." "If people make decisions about Jesus based on how I act, that's their problem." These underdeveloped believers have never really understood the Master's command, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" [MATTHEW 5:16]. According to the Word, a great deal is riding on my faithfulness. Underdeveloped saints are in for a rude awakening when they stand before Jesus one day.

Immature Christians see themselves as the center of their own universe and think everything revolves around them. "God wants me happy. I heard a television preacher say that and I believe it." "If I'm not getting anything out of the sermon, it's the preacher's fault." These puerile Christians do not see that Jesus Christ is the center of everything, and that worship is a matter of "giving to Him the glory due His name." Worshiping Him, Christians receive rich rewards from a service; however, if they go into the service to "get something," they will receive nothing from it. It's a matter of focus.

This is a stunningly accurate description of an immature congregation. Tragically, it is descriptive of too many of the churches of our Lord in this day. If we were to create a Congregational Hall of Shame, listing the features that dishonour the Lord among His churches, each of these expressions would likely be represented. Brothers and sisters, this should not be. Let us take inventory of our attitudes, divesting ourselves of all attitudes that dishonour our Master. Our goal is to become mature in Christ, honouring Him with our lives.

A MATURE ASSEMBLY — Let's admit a disquieting truth—a truly mature congregation is an impossibility. If as a congregation we are doing what is expected, we are always introducing new people into the Faith. These new believers must be trained and equipped to grow up in Christ. There will always be an influx of immature saints into the assembly. These precious believers must not be allowed to continue in their spiritual infancy. However, what should not be tolerated, though often is observed among the faithful, is an outbreak of sinful behaviour that can only be classified as immaturity.

Some may conclude that I'm disillusioned, or even disgusted with the concept of the church. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Christ loved the church, giving Himself for her. As one who follows the Master, I love what He loves. Thus, I confess my love for the church. I am admittedly in love with the congregation over which Christ has appointed me. Composed of flawed and wounded people, of whom I am one, Christ gave His life for this assembly. I seek to serve this Body with all the energy He supplies until He removes me, assigning me where He wills or calling me home.

I've quoted Brother McKeever extensively in the previous point, and I now cite him again. He provides some random comments that are appropriate in light of the message this day. Weigh his comments in light of the message that has been delivered.

- The only way Noah could stand the stink inside the ark was the storm outside.
- That churches still exist, with all their human flaws, is sufficient proof of the grace and mercy of God.
- Immature believers abound and that's all right. Babies must go through all the stages of development before they achieve maturity. However, we should never put an infant in a place of leadership. Leaders must be provided by adults in the faith if they are to be role models and examples to those coming after.
- The leader who storms out of a meeting because he/she did not get his/her way has just done the church a favor. He/she has identified himself/herself as unqualified to lead, as surely as if he/she had hung a sign around his/her neck.
- We are better off without such people representing God's church and making critical decisions. (On the other hand, if that one comes back and apologises before the entire group, that is a sign of growing maturity and they should be given every encouragement.)

The message is a call for maturity in leadership and in discipleship of the membership. As pastor, I am responsible to remind each of us that the commands of the New Testament were given to all the churches and not just the disciples who heard the Master speak. Moreover, we must remember that we shall all stand before the Lord to give account of our faithfulness.

A well-known preacher of a past generation was asked, "What is the most important thing we need to get across to the people of God today?" He answered immediately, "Our accountability to God." Surely, that is a transformative thought.

HEBREWS 6:1-3
THE CHURCH'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

A parting thought from Paul's Letter to the saints in Rome is worthy of our consideration. The Apostle writes, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.’

“So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” [**ROMANS 14:10-12**].

If we stay in the congregation of the Lord long enough, each one of us will be disappointed by some slight (real or imagined), by some statement we find offensive or by some action with which we disagree. We will be denied something we had our heart set on, or we will not be permitted to pursue some program or event or facility that is dear to us. Nothing tells the story about our maturity like the way we handle our disappointment. Let us grow up into maturity. Let us be strong in the Lord and thus be able to help others coming behind us. Let us refuse to allow the church's dirty little secret to contaminate the people of God. Amen.