

Expectations and Reality

I recently read about Japanese tourists and their reactions to Paris, France. Apparently, the Japanese people perceived of Paris as the “perfect city” and were terribly disappointed to find rude people and less than adequate streets. The report cited instances where as many as a dozen people a year actually seek psychiatric treatment for disappointment they feel as a reaction to visiting Paris.

I have been to Paris and can easily see how they would be less than satisfied with the character of many of the people and the quality of the city itself. But I must say I was not completely surprised by those developments, since I had been warned by friends who had traveled there. Consequently, I had more realistic expectations. (Of course, not all the people were rude and not all streets were poor in quality.)

The expectations concerning Paris remind me of some people’s expectations of the church. It appears that they believe every aspect of the church should be perfect—every service should be pleasing and beneficial to *them*; the people should be sinless; and the leaders should never make mistakes. Then, after they become Christians, they are awakened to the reality that the church is not perfect. As a result, some fall away from the faith, claiming that the church failed them. Others justify their sinful behavior by saying that the church is “full of hypocrites.”

Now before I move on, I must say that the church is a product of the mind of God (Ephesians 3:10). As such, the plan for it is perfect and without flaw. However, the church is composed of human beings—and wherever there are humans, there will be imperfection and mistakes. Just as it is possible to enjoy parts of a city like Paris without becoming totally disillusioned, it is possible to be a Christian who does not reject the church for its imperfections. With all the flaws present in human beings, the church has the potential to worship God in truth (John 4:24). And even with imperfections, it has the potential of bringing glory to God by its very existence.

We must remember that “we” are the church, and as long as we continue to be molded into the image of Christ, the church will be in the process of being molded into the image of Christ. Our expectations must be seasoned with the picture of what God wants us to be (Philippians 2:15), and tempered with the reality that human beings are not mistake-free. Let us also ponder this thought: “Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.”

—Lance Cordle