

Can We Judge Our Church

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman discusses the importance of self-examination and humility in judging our churches while addressing the decline in church attendance and commitment.

Duration: 44:16

Scripture: Matthew 7:1, Romans 14:13, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 3:13, James 4:11-12, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 4:20

Topics: "Judging Others", "Christian Love"

Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of not judging others, emphasizing the need to remove the plank from our own eye before critiquing others. It delves into the impact of critical attitudes, unrealistic expectations, and preference influencing decisions within the church. The message highlights the significance of love, grace, and encouragement in driving motives, and the need for protection against gossip and attacks, especially within the Christian community.

Transcript

Turn your Bibles, we're still on Matthew 7, 1. I can't seem to get away from this. The reason is, is my long judging sermon turned into three parts. I don't think you want to be here for two and a half hours, so I broke it up into three parts.

And this is the final part. Matthew chapter 7, verse 1. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.

And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? And let me just stop there for a minute. You know that would end a lot of arguments right there at home? Before you move the little sawdust, why don't you take the big plank out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to critique your spouse.

But what do we like to do? We want to get out the vacuum and remove all the sawdust we can get? We don't want to take any planks out of our own eyes first. But that would end a lot of arguments, that would end a lot of bickering, a lot of complaining, a lot of marital issues would be solved right here if we just followed Jesus' word. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye

when all the time there's a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite.

First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. So what got us to this point? I like this back a little further where my stage is clean. Where have we been so far the last few weeks? How do we judge? That's what we've been talking about, right? How do we judge? How do we judge? We judge patiently, we judge softly, we judge humbly, and we're not excited about it, we're not rude, and we're not mean-spirited.

And in a nutshell, we remove the plank from our eye first. And that whole concept, you're really not doing something physical, obviously. You're humbling yourself.

You're saying, let me look in the mirror, let me look in the mirror before I critique you. And you're getting your heart right. Jesus always goes after the heart, the heart of man, the hardness of your heart, the stiff-necked people, your pride is keeping you from the kingdom of God, your rejection, your pride, your arrogance, and your hard heart.

So, this is a hard issue. We need to remove these things in our own life. It's not easy.

This sermon was preached to me first before it's preached to you. This is not easy for any of us, but this is what we must do. As believers, we are called to make judgments and say this is not a good direction.

The whole purpose is to help, to encourage, and redirect people if necessary. However, the first judgment must take place in the mirror. Last week, we talked about in the essentials, there's unity.

In the non-essentials, there's liberty. In all things, there is love. And that we must weep before we whip.

Jesus wept for the city of Jerusalem before he drove out the money changers. There's a weeping, there's a brokenness, there's a humility. And then from that right attitude, then we can go and critique others if that's necessary.

Or then we can go and share things with others. Or then we might be able to offer our input or our advice once the heart is right. And that's what he's really getting at there.

So now we get into part three of removing the speck. And this is going to get a little interesting because I'm actually going to be talking about judging the church. How do we judge a church? Let me read one of the emails, just a sample of some of the emails I get.

I continue to move from church to church. I can't seem to find a place where I fit. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm the problem.

This is an honest question that deserves a closer look. Normally I wouldn't necessarily make a sermon out of this. But I think it's important because I'm following some of the trends in church planting.

And the surveys are showing that people who used to attend church three or four times a month has now dropped to one or two times a month. So our level of commitment of going to church every single weekend has now dropped to, well, if I can get in there twice a month, I'm good. And then where are we going to be in ten years? Well, once a month is pretty good.

Then we get to once a quarter. I mean, you can see basically it's a dumbing down of the culture, and the church is kind of following suit at this level of commitment. I mean, I've talked to my mom about this

numerous times.

When I grew up, and in my older generation, you guys know above 50, 60, 70, a handshake and a man's word were good enough. There was a time where commitment and perseverance and all these things held the family together. It was where you'd always be in church every weekend unless you're on vacation or sick.

But now the level of commitment has seemed to drop. You're like, well, you know, if I feel like it, I'll go. And to be honest with you, I struggle with this too.

I mean, I was just sitting in the pew three years ago. It was hard sometimes. We're having a bad morning.

I just won't go to church. Do you ever wonder why some of the hard things come up right before church? I mean, I've never had any issues going to watch a movie at the cinema. Have you? I mean, well, maybe if I tire of something, but the majority of times it's difficult.

We're doing great all week as a couple, right? And then all these arguments come up an hour before church. What happens here? I think a lot of that is spiritual warfare. The enemy is not wanting you to go to church in that commitment level.

So we're seeing this across the board at churches. I've talked to pastors even at Highlands or Vineyard or Lancaster Baptist, Grace Chapel, First Assembly of God. I know a lot of these guys.

And I felt a little better because I thought, gosh, it's just here. Saturday nights must be hard. They said, no, it's across the board.

People are not coming to church as much as they used to. And actually, I've seen articles where churches are starting to downscale their buildings and their costs and things because the amount of people that used to come are just no longer coming. And what I'm also seeing, though, is there's a lot of judging in the church instead of loving.

A lot of people were judging the church a little bit prematurely. So a lot of this came out of my own personal study on judging and unity before I actually left the church and planted this church. Studying on it for a few months and just, OK, Lord, what are you saying in this area? And even here, a lot of times I've had people come up and say, we're from such and such.

We love it here. And you're preaching the word. They're not over there.

And, you know, that goes. I tell my wife, well, they'll be gone about six months. Well, how do you know? Because they brought the attitude over.

You see, I look for the heart. If they start bashing the other pastor, guess who's going to be on their hit list in about six months? Hasn't failed yet. Because they come with this pride and arrogance.

Oh, you're preaching the truth. We finally found a place. And then, well, where are they at now? Every person who's ever said that, well, not, I mean, there's some that with that attitude is not here anymore.

It's judging, and you watch the heart of a person. So what I want to do is just look, take some time. Let's look at how can we judge a church? Should we judge a church? Yes, absolutely.

You should be very concerned about the church you're attending. And I'm aware that I'm speaking to a broad audience here. This is going to go out on radio and Internet, and I want to make that clear.

But it's okay to judge your church if the heart's right. If you're removing the speck from your, the plank, actually, from your own eye, and you're saying, Lord, something's not right here. And I've also seen that that's been happening a lot.

True Bible-believing, Christ-centered, spirit-led churches are shrinking. And people are asking, I'm not being fed anymore. I'm not growing.

I'm dying on the vine. My family's not benefiting. What should I do? Those are valid questions.

So don't think I'm siding on the side of the church. I'm actually siding on the side of checking our motives. Because there are, I truly believe there are some churches in this valley you need to run for cover and never look back.

However, some people feel that, you know, maybe God wants me here for a season to pray for revival and pray that things change. And that's what happened, really, in the Roman Catholic Church. That's what sparked the Reformation.

People like Martin Luther or Calvin or Swingley or John Knox or, you know, even before them, people like John Hus or Whitecliffe, all these people, some of them were burned at the stake. Can you imagine that for challenging the truth? Challenging the church, rather, with the truth. And they thought they could stay in and serve, but then they actually got excommunicated.

Martin Luther became an outlaw of the church in the state. So sometimes you can't stay within that group that God's calling you out of. So I want to make that crystal clear.

I don't want people to think, well, gosh, now should I ever leave a church? Well, let's look at it. Let's just look at it from a biblical perspective. Number one, this is number one on the list of should I leave a church or should I stay.

Judging, removing the plank. Let's remove the plank from our own eye first. Do the leaders and the pastors view the Scriptures as an errant, the final authority? They say, not really.

We're kind of, don't even, I wouldn't even consider that place. Honestly, it's a social club. The minute I start, I say, well, I don't know.

I'm really having some second thoughts on this. I think there's some good stuff in here, but I think we kind of missed it here and there. And let me show you what I think, and here's what God's been revealing to me.

And Paul was, I think, kind of a little misled back then. They really don't understand. Homosexuality was bad back then, but I think now God's really changed his view of that.

And this was kind of written in the dark ages. They suppressed women, and they kind of run for cover or pray and wait and see what happens. But if the pastors and the leaders do not view the Scriptures as an errant, the final authority on all matters of the church, there's grounds to leave that church.

Absolutely. Because they're questioning God. They're questioning His truth.

They're questioning His authority. And if any of you are struggling with this, I would just encourage you to start reading books like A Case for Christ, or Josh McDowell's, of course, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, apologetic books by Ravi Zacharias, books on how we got our Bible, the consistency, the archaeological accuracy, the prophetic accuracy, the scientific accuracy. There's no way this could just be written and thrown together by 40 different men for over 1,500 years on three different continents.

Just throw it all together. Let's just hope it all matches. That will ignite your faith like never before.

When I started to look at where we got our manuscripts, some from what they call the Antioch School of Manuscripts or the Alexandrian School of Manuscripts or the Kodak Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Where are these different? That's where the NIV comes from, and the New King James comes from a different one. And that's why there's a little arguing right there.

What's more valid? The majority text? King James or the older manuscripts? NIV. And in every single point of doctrinal difference, if there's any, this Scripture is not here, it's not in this one, but the early church fathers said this and this. There's nothing, no discrepancy whatsoever over essentials.

They'll say, well, this Scripture, you know, this kind does not go out except for prayer and fasting. When Jesus cast out the demons there, they'll say the majority text or vice versa doesn't include this, but this manuscript does. Or the end of Mark, when Jesus said, those who believe in me, these signs will follow.

You'll cast out demons, you'll speak in new tongues. Well, the older manuscripts or the newer. So there's a few little discrepancies, but I don't get caught up on that because if this was absolute, we would worship this.

So God used imperfect men to write perfect truth. And in that there, I don't have a problem with, you know, the King James authors. I think there went through 30 revisions in the 1611 first edition of the King James Bible.

And before that, the pilgrims brought over the Geneva study Bible written in 1599. The ref, the reformers had some notes in the margins and the King James theologian said, listen, we're not perfect. We're going to attempt to do this the best we can, because what you're doing, you're taking the Greek language, the Hebrew language, Aramaic language, and you're trying to say, okay, that means this in our culture.

And now that's why the King James, there was some revisions because I'll read it and go, well, where is he talking? We don't even use these words anymore. However, there are those who believe that it's the King James only. King James is the only way, the only truth, the only life.

No man come to the father, except through the King James Bible. I'm not, I'm not laughing. You guys are turning this sermon into a joke, but people will get mad at me for just making a joke about that.

So if you hear this later, I apologize. I understand your argument. I've read your argument.

It just doesn't carry a lot of weight because the King James Bible had to be translated and changed 30, at least 30 different times. It was actually called the wicked Bible at 1612, 1613, where they added thou shalt commit adultery. Oh, hold on.

Stop the press. Go and change that. And there are different revisions.

However, we love that language. We love the King James, but somebody is not going to be led away doctrinally if they read the ESV or the new King James or the NIV. Actually the NIV in some places translates the Greek language better, talks more about the blood of Christ.

And I have books on this. I can show you at some point, maybe we'll do a study on it. However, I don't want to argue over your favorite translation.

I love the King James. I use the new King James and I might order the ESV study Bible to just compare. However, you want to be careful with like the new living translation, the message Bible.

These are all commentaries. These are not word for word. It's what they call dynamic equivalence.

The author is taking the thought and he's putting his thought into it, so it's more like a commentary. So I wouldn't use those as study Bibles. Those are more, well, here's what Eugene Peterson wrote the message Bible.

So you'd say, well, here's what he thinks on this issue. Okay, that's a commentary. Let's look to what they call formal equivalence.

They took the word for word translations. Now, none of that was in my notes. I'm going to go back to that point.

Do the leaders and the pastors view the Scripture as inerrant, the final authority? And I'm not referring to differences over non-essential issues. I'm referring to those who disregard the clear commands of Scripture. And a lot of those guys will not talk about difficult things.

No matter how hard you press them, they're not going to talk about the fear of the Lord. I'm not going to mention the fear of the Lord. Well, the Bible talks quite a bit about the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, as the beginning of knowledge, as the beginning of understanding.

Christ said, fear the Lord. The psalmist says, oh, that we may fear you and tremble at your presence. Acts, the book of Acts, they write that the church was operating in the fear of the Lord and growing daily.

Fear of the Lord is a very healthy thing. So when they start to avoid these terms, a lot of times the reason they want to avoid those terms is so I can fill every seat in here. Right? Hey, if I can tell the masses, come listen, listen to me tell you about God and you'll never be offended.

I guarantee I would have 600 to 1,000 women at a weight loss conference in Sacramento talking about motivation. I could fill this whole place if we wanted to. Is that what we want to do? Just motivate, go team, go, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah.

God loves you. You just keep going in the direction you want to go and be encouraged. And that's great sometimes.

The single mom, as I've said before, needs to hear that message. Or the dad just hanging on who's doing everything he can. He needs to be encouraged.

But we also, that's why pastors should be led of the Spirit of God. They should spend time in the prayer closet. They should spend time praying, Lord, what do you want to say? Not what do you want to hear.

Because if I took a survey on what you want to hear, I would get 150 different surveys. We need to end times, brother. It's coming.

Tell us about the end times. Tell us about the temple. Tell us about the gates into the temple.

How do those parallel? And tell us about the tabernacle. Other people, tell us about the true meaning of Christmas. Can we celebrate Christmas? I don't want to celebrate Halloween, but can we celebrate Christmas? And then we have all these different things being thrown at us.

So the opinions of men must bow at the foot of the cross. And we must look to this as our only guide for truth. I better hurry.

You guys will be here until 730. Number B, is God's Spirit truly leading you to leave? Okay. Is God's Spirit truly leaving a person to leave? Because I hear this nine times out of ten.

Brother, we're just being led elsewhere. Really? Maybe you are. And I don't doubt that.

If somebody is truly in the Word of God, and God's leading them somewhere, that can absolutely be true. But I'm amazed. I'm amazed at how many people.

Let me just read it. Who don't have a servant's heart, who don't read the Word, who don't spend time in prayer, who don't display humility, and yet still think that the Spirit is leading them. Let me be clear.

God directs us to make wise decisions that correspond with His Word. Disobedience leads to disappointment. Disobedience leads to disappointment.

So many of us can say, I'm just being led of the Spirit, brother. Well, you're never in His Word. You're not humble.

You're not broken. How are you being led of the Spirit of God? You're being led by your flesh, and that's a wonderful excuse so you can get out of it. I mean, who's going to argue with that? I'm being led of the Spirit.

Okay, well, God told me. I can't say much to that. So we have to be careful there.

The conviction of the Holy Spirit is a true gift from God. Sadly, many people ignore it, yet they say that God is leading them to do this or to do that. But all too often they find that they made a very poor decision.

What happened? Many times the flesh leads us, not the Spirit of God. You've got to be very careful there. C, how will leaving affect the local body of believers? How will leaving a church affect the local body of believers? We should consider how leaving will affect others, and when possible, leave on good terms.

This is huge. Without gossiping or criticizing the leadership. This can be difficult and challenging situations because we want people to know why we left.

Our sinful tendency is to pull other people down. And I often look for this. I know there's people here.

I know it's hard to believe from other churches. They've come from other churches and they're here, and they've left here and went to other churches. But I listen to see what they say about their other church.

That's what I'm listening for. I guess I shouldn't tell you guys that. Now the cat's out of the bag.

Are they going to pull it up? I mean, are they going to pull it down? Or are they just going to say, we feel led elsewhere? And there's truth behind that. Because I believe God can lead people elsewhere if the time arises. But we have to be real careful that we don't pull people down.

We don't gossip. Because don't we want to know, here's why I left. Boy, you should watch out here.

And you just listen. We want everybody to know why we left. Instead, we should just leave quietly and not make it a big scene.

How will leaving affect your family? Your family, your personal family. If the family isn't growing at church, or if it doesn't seem to be the best environment, then fathers or single parents need to ask some hard questions. What can I do to nurture their growth? Is this partially my fault? And what am I modeling at home? See, we like to blame the church on things that we're actually causing in our own homes.

And I just share this, even though it's really not applicable. But I'm taking some of the younger guys through it. And it's a good book if you guys want to read it.

It's called Disciplines of a Godly Man by Kent Hughes. And we're going through chapter by chapter. I'm kind of just pointing out some things.

And he made a statement this week that I had to just, I read it, I had to sit down. I said, that's unbelievable. Is he right? You know when you read some of those things, it's just, man, it's unbelievable.

He said, in the course of a week, through the media, we are being exposed to more murders, adultery, and illicit sex than our grandparents ever knew in their lifetime. I put it down. I said, oh my God.

In the course of a week. And at first I'm like, no, no, he can't be. Well, I'm thinking, how did they read about things in the newspaper? They might have heard, but they definitely, we're being exposed to more murder, illicit sex, and perversions in one week than generations ago would experience in their entire lifetime.

Is there a connection there with the fear frenzy paralyzing our nation? Is there a connection there that prescription meds are on the rise? I mean, I do research, it's like epidemic. I mean, you should buy stock in these drug companies. Everybody's a fear frenzy.

The suicide rate. Pastors committing suicide. I saw two on Christian Post in the last week and a half.

So, this is job scary. But if you're feeding your mind things all the time that we were not created nor designed to take in, there's going to be hell to pay. So, if something's happening at home, first check the obvious, check that thought life.

What's going in? Because what goes in comes out. So, if the family's dying, and I've heard this a lot too, we've got to find another church for my family. Well, let's start, instead of looking an hour and a half in your week, let's look at your whole lifestyle throughout the week at your home.

What are you modeling? What are you allowing into your home? What are you feeding into your kids? That's going to be the majority of the influence. Now, granted, we should go to churches where our family's growing and thriving and they're getting things out of it. But we don't want to take away how much influence the home has.

I mean, I couldn't believe that. We're watching more in a week than our grandparents saw in their whole lifetime? Whether it's true or not, I don't know, but he's probably spot on. So, I was thinking back with my grandpa from the farms of Oklahoma, I don't even know if they had, you know, it was TV, it was just a few stations on and this, and you go out and you work all day, no phone, got to check this, get paid, get checked.

I mean, I'm at 150 texts a day, and I've got to turn that thing off. Emails just coming in all the time, so it's inundating, it's inundating, it's inundating. Everything is, there's no rest for the mind, let alone media.

I don't know how you guys watch all this stuff, the garbage that's out there, honestly. I have a hard enough time, just the news. Baby strangled, mother killed this, this, another shooting, Colorado, this.

What's going on? All hell's breaking loose. Yet we're feeding all of these things into our homes, when home is supposed to be a safe haven and a shelter, but instead it's being a breeding ground for Satan. I don't know if that's hard for some people, but it is, that's the truth.

It's either a safe haven and a shelter, or you're fueling the very enemy we're called to flee. You're fueling the enemy. You're giving him food and ammunition.

That's why the fear and anxiety, I've heard that more now since I've been out of church, I didn't realize how many people were fearful and anxious and depressed all the time. Now granted, I understand chemical imbalances, I understand hereditary, genetic predisposition, cognitive behavioral patterns, I got it. But let's not forget about the obvious.

Check the obvious. What's going in here? For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. And it goes right back to this question.

Is your family dying on the vine? What is going on at home? What are you modeling at home? Next, do you have a consumer mentality? Do you have a consumer mentality? This is just on a personal note. I've noticed that many people leave the church, not that it's just church, I'm talking nationally, I've spoken at different events, I've talked to a lot of Christians, so I've seen this at a bigger scale. I've noticed that many people leave the church when they are not promoted or allowed to start a ministry or because they don't feel appreciated.

If we're guilty, we need to replace our consumer mentality with the servant mentality. Could you imagine if people would just come to church and say, how can I serve? How can I serve? You don't need to mention my name, you don't need to say hello, you don't need to do anything. Of course we should be a welcoming church, of course.

But we can't let these things get offended. I was just looking at stats last night on the persecuted church. I'm thinking, we are so wimpy in America, we get offended.

I think Iraq had a million Christians and now they're down to 335,000 because of all the bloodshed and the murder. There's tribes in Africa where one church each weekend is going to be hit with a suicide bomber. It's amazing.

We're upset. He didn't smile at me, he didn't shake my hand, he didn't say hello, I didn't get to start my ministry, my name's not up on the PowerPoint, it's not in the bulletin, what's going on? Consumer mentality. We just want to take it all.

That leads to the next point. Ask, am I seeking to be used or am I seeking to be recognized? Many people leave, I'm not being used. I'm not being used.

You know what the truth is? They're not being recognized. Their name's not up on the PowerPoint or in the bulletin. They're not being recognized.

They're being used. Oh, we can use you. Have you heard of dirty restrooms and vacuuming the church afterwards? We can use you.

So the problem is never I'm not being used. It's often I'm not being showcased and glamorized and populized. Look at promote this, promote me.

God forbid. Promotion doesn't come from the east or the west. Promotion comes from God.

God promotes a man or a woman. God promotes a ministry. And now I'm getting people, you know, they want me to endorse their books or they want me to, you know, if you could just promote this website or you could just help us.

I'm getting from halfway homes to drug rehab to battered women's shelters to food banks. You know, I'm just getting a lot of these things. It's like sometimes I go, wow, they're going to get mad at me when you say no.

And I want to tell them, listen, guys, don't worry. If God's in it, it's God's will. It's his bill.

Where he guides, he provides. If we truly believe that, you don't have to worry about jockeying for position or getting your name out there or getting a great marketing slogan or getting a great branding name and hurry, market, market, promote, promote, promote. If God's in it, he'll do it.

The early church had no advertising campaigns. Nothing. No billboards, no Facebook.

The best marketing campaign a church can have is fire in the pulpit and flames in the pew. People come and say, let me see me burn. Fill with the Holy Spirit of God, the fire of God moving in a place, convicting hearts and challenging hearts.

There's your marketing program. There's your marketing plan. That's how you promote things, being filled with the spirit of God and let him open the doors.

But I see so many people, they actually leave the church. I'm not being used. Oh, you're being used.

You're not being recognized. And Oswald Chamber said that he will bury, God will bury his men and women in the midst of paltry things. No monuments erected for them, not because they are unworthy, but because they are in a place where they cannot be seen.

See, God will put you in a place where you cannot be seen. The funny thing is, I wish he would have put me in a place where I cannot be seen. I ask my wife, I say this every week, God, just go up in the mountains and live in a cabin.

Just be, you know, just serve, and I miss those things. Now, Grant, I'm glad he's called me to do this, and I appreciate the gift, and don't get me wrong, but he will put us sometimes. And he used to put me, I remember I felt a call to preach like this.

Like, okay, Lord, bring the masses. Okay, go start at Grace Resources. There's about nine homeless people you need to speak to.

Okay, well, I didn't have that in mind, okay. And I would travel to churches, North Edwards, Theotopy, Yucca Valley. I was with an affiliation of churches that when they need a pastor, they would send me out there, and I would drive and hit all these churches.

And most of them, I mean, I'd pull up like 15, 20 people. What? Lord, I thought you put this great message in my heart, and what's going on here? Yeah. Faithful in the little things.

Faithful in the little things. And they were the most powerful services I've ever had. With small groups, because you go now, your heart's right.

Because what does God have to do? Break you, and break you, and break you. Because I won't be humble on my own. He's got to humble you.

That's how we really get humble, is God humbles you. Those who have been forgiven much, love much. Those who have been humbled much, understand humility.

And they're now broken. Okay, God, I got it. You don't need to bring that sledgehammer out again.

If there's 10 people at the memorial service, I'll be there. If there's 1,000 next week at a speaking engagement, I'll be there. But He humbles you, and He takes that, and He works on that consumer mentality, and that I need to be recognized.

And He'll just smash that down to nothing. Number G, we talked about a little bit. Do you have a critical attitude? Do you have a critical attitude? Why is this so important? Here's why.

If you have a judgmental, critical attitude, you've already turned a deaf ear to God's leading, and it will be difficult for you to discern His will. That's how important, and that's how powerful a critical attitude is. We think we're in the center of God's will? We're not.

We're way off to the left. Well, why? Because I have a critical attitude. So my critical attitude is judging everything.

We make the nonessentials the essentials, right? Critical people make the nonessentials the essentials. Shane, are you a young earth or old earth guy? Well, I don't know. I've studied it like you have.

There's some good points on each side. No, no, no, no, no. If you're not on my camp, I'm going to judge you.

Shane, the earth looks millions and millions of years old. You've got to be an old earth guy. Well, Adam looked 30 years old when he was one second old.

Uh-oh. Ooh. You think about that? When God breathed the breath of life into Adam, he became a living soul, a living nephesh, the Hebrew would call that living soulish part, a living nephesh, breath, 30, 33 years old.

He's one second old. He's one second, but he looks 33. So be careful in your arguments because people can poke holes in them.

Young earth, old earth, I don't care, really. There's some interesting things on both sides. The gap theory between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, I had a guy who wanted to debate it for two hours.

You don't know what the gap theory is? Go read Genesis 1 and then Genesis 2. Is there a gap in between there? Millions of years where the satanic realm could have fallen and the darkness could have been over the earth for millions of years. Maybe, sounds good. Let's go into Genesis 3. I mean, okay.

But why? Because pride comes in there and we want to debate. Eschatology, the rapture's coming soon? Or is there no rapture? No, we just want to debate. Gifts of the Spirit, right? Do they still exist today? Some say yes, some say no.

It's getting a big old argument about it. Heck yeah, come on, let's fight. If you're going and working on the mission field, trust me, go talk to... This is actually funny.

I know people who have smuggled Bibles into China or different places or they're actually places where there's Muslim activity taking place and Christian kind of conflict and things. And people are... You can die pretty easily if you're not careful. You think they're arguing over the five points of Calvinism? Or you think they're arguing over eschatology and when this might... I mean, they might discuss it, but they're not arguing about it.

But that's what critical people do. I've seen it. I just got a guy this week who's going to befriend me on Facebook.

Why? You want to know why? Six Christmas trees in the background. So I just sent him an excerpt of some of this. He wasn't too happy with that.

I guess you don't read the whole Word of God then, do you? Jeremiah says you should not carve a tree and you should not decorate and you should not bow down to it. Oh yes, I know that passage very well. I'm not decorating a tree and bowing down to it and worshiping it.

I'm going to cut it up and throw it under my fire. I'm going to glorify Christ and let the radiant light represent the light of Christ that came into a dark world. Where's your mind at, brother? He's telling me I guess I don't take the truth of God's Word seriously.

Oh, just pick and choose some verses then, huh? Next. I mean, do you really have time for that? You can't take me seriously because there's Christmas trees behind me? Let me just go on record now. If you have a problem with the Christmas trees in the background, you've got a critical heart.

I'm pretty sure. Unless you have a good case, let me know. Because here's the thing most people don't realize.

This isn't my building. Did I put those there? No. If I had my choice, you know what would be there? A 16 foot wide by 14 foot tall Matthew banner would be right here.

But guess who can't put that banner up until the holidays are over? Me. So do you realize that? You just kind of went on a rant. I didn't put them there.

I probably wouldn't have them there. It's not my building, not my decorations. I'm just here to preach the Word.

You can put whatever scene you want, NASA or a Starbucks label up there, whatever you want. I'm going to preach and God's put on my heart. You see, that's what happens with critical people.

They like to just tear you down. And you're the target, and they've got the bow and arrow. Everything they see.

Ah-ha. I mean, I've been derailed for not wearing suit and ties and not having a King James only, and Morgan doesn't wear dresses and she wears pants, and how can you guys even preach? How can you pastor a church? Look at how you guys are dressed. Wow.

If that's not a critical heart, I don't know what is. Don't get me started. You don't want to see some of my e-mails I get.

I start giving them now to different people. Matt, can you handle this one? TJ, can you handle this one? John Bell, can you handle this one? Laura Lee does good ones with people needing prayer. Morgan handled this one.

It's just maybe we can get to a point where nobody handles anything. Just listen to the sermon and leave it at that. The reason we check e-mails is because we want to reach out to people we're praying for and needing things a lot.

So number H, are your expectations of the church or the pastor realistic? Just like marriage, you go into something with unrealistic expectations. Oh, I'm going to get a back massage every night, hot dinner on the table by 5:30. She's going to change all the kids' diapers, and I can just go lay down at 8 o'clock and read for two hours.

That's what I thought. But on the flip side, her night on a white horse didn't come running in either. Unrealistic expectations.

The first year of marriage will wake you up. Wow, I didn't realize how selfish I am. I thought I had it down in my single years.

Wait till you have a baby. Oh, is that her at 3:30 in the morning? Go get her. Oh, man.

I start wearing earplugs now, so I don't hear it. I'm just out. But no, on that, she's wonderful with the kids.

I should be up a lot more, and I'm not. Mainly so I can preach and do this. But back to this.

Are your expectations of the church and or the pastor realistic? Do you realize that the worship is not going to descend from the portals of heaven every Saturday? You might have a bad Saturday. It must not lift you up. Oh, great, nobody gave me a hug, and Shane's sermon was dead, and I could have fell asleep, and I see people yawning.

Unrealistic expectations. Only God we can really trust in. Church and other people, we can't.

And that's why I tell people all the time, look to Christ. Man will fail you every single opportunity they can. Christ will not.

He's the only sure foundation. So make sure your expectations are realistic. However, I do believe that there should be passion in a true spirit-filled church.

After all, preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire for God. Passion and unction should resonate from the pulpit and the pew. So don't misunderstand me.

I think there should be heartfelt passion and worship and prayer. The next point. Is preference influencing your decision? We talked about this last week briefly, right? Is preference influencing your decision? You know, why are they sitting? Why are they standing? Why is it PowerPoint, no hymnals? Why is he dressed up? Why is he dressed down? Why are they raising their hands? Why aren't they raising their hands? You know, the whole thing.

Is preference influencing my decision? And sometimes preference can be good. J. Love and grace should be the driving force behind motives. Love and grace should be the driving force behind motives.

How many times have we heard that in the church? Every single week, I'm getting tired of it. Love and grace, love and grace, love and grace. Well, when are we going to apply it? It reminds me of the young man who came to Charles Spurgeon and said, When are you going to stop speaking about repentance? And he looked at the young man and he said, When do you repent? So as soon as I feel we are a joy-filled, humble, broken church, I'll stop talking about those things and I'll move on to the next thing.

But right now, is love and grace truly driving us, driving our motives? Wayne Grudem said, and it's on your bulletin, There were no perfect churches at the time of the New Testament, and there will be no perfect churches until Christ returns. This doesn't mean that we overlook spiritual health of the church. We need wisdom.

Grudem concludes, but we must realize that not all churches will respond well to influences that would bring them to a greater purity. Sometimes, in spite of a few faithful Christians within a church, its dominant direction will be set by others who are determined to lead it in another course. Unless God graciously intervenes to bring reformation, some of these churches will become cults and others will just die and close their doors.

But more commonly, these churches will simply drift into liberal Protestantism. Then it may be time to leave. And I just want to leave you guys with this thought.

When was the last time you encouraged and protected others? When was the last time we encouraged and protected others? When the gossip arrows are flinging, are we protecting others? Or are we opening the door for that? And sadly, the majority of the mean emails I get are from Christians. The majority of the attacks that we deal with are from Christians. That blows my mind, honestly.

I think, man, I'm going to be getting it from the Atheist Board, from the Homosexual Agenda, from all these different groups. But it's mainly Christians because the plank is so big in their eye, and probably they're hurting. A lot of those people are hurting.

They've been hurt by the church. And I just want to use this opportunity to just have a time of healing tonight. Just a time of crying out to God, saying, Lord, I want that critical spirit to end.

If I've been hurt by churches, I've been hurt by pastors, I've been hurt by this church. Whatever it is, God wants us to come back to Him where He's at. It doesn't mean you go back to your church, necessarily.

It just means, though, that the heart is right, and the repentance takes place in humility and grace and love. Because, trust me, when you're full of grace and love, it's hard to be mad at people. It's hard to be

upset.

You overlook things much easier. You're not upset in traffic. Everything seems to go smoother because love and grace are driving your motives.

And that's really the core behind this whole message on judging. Let's close in prayer. Lord, I thank You so much, Lord, for sending Your Son.

I thank You for Your Word. Lord, we are so blessed in this nation to be able to preach Your Word, and to read Your Word, and to study Your Word, to proclaim Your Word. Lord, I pray that You would keep those freedoms open, and come against any movement, any government affiliation, anything that's trying to stop Your truth from getting out.

Lord, would You open the floodgates of truth. Lord, begin just in the media, Facebook, whatever it is. Open the gates of truth.

Bring revival to these churches and to our communities. Lord, we need You like never before. Lord, we're not giving up.

We're pressing in. We're seeking You with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our strength. Lord, we want You to move in this place in a mighty way.

Lord, wilt Thou not revive Thy people again so that we may rejoice in You? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/WqY-wT0h1W0.mp4>
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