

Church Hopping Is Often Fueled by Commercialism

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman encourages listeners to examine their motives for leaving a church and to consider the importance of a servant mentality, solid leadership, and a love for God's Word.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:2, Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Philipians 2:3, 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

Shane Idleman addresses the issue of people switching churches and discarding relationships, emphasizing the importance of examining motives before making such decisions. He highlights the dangers of having a consumer mentality, seeking recognition, possessing a critical attitude, having unrealistic expectations, and letting personal preferences influence church choices. Idleman stresses that love and grace should be the driving force behind motives, encouraging believers to prioritize the inerrancy and authority of the Scriptures in church leadership.

Transcript

A significant number of people are switching churches and/or discarding relationships. I've found that judging instead of loving often plays a role as seen in a recent correspondence, "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. Here are a few more points to consider before leaving a church or discarding fellowship:

Do you have a consumer mentality? Another comment most have heard is, "I'm just not being fed at church!" On occasion, this is very valid, but it deserves a closer look. For example, if someone isn't growing from food, but others are, it may not be the food or the chef, so to speak. I've noticed that many leave because 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 a "servant" mentality.

Ask, "Am I seeking to be used or recognized?" Another reason people leave is because they feel that they are not being "used." Unfortunately, this can be the catalyst for resentment, bitterness, and gossip. They are, in fact, being used--that's usually not the problem. The problem often is that they are not being recognized, esteemed, or promoted. They're not being given center-stage attention. Their name is not on the PowerPoint or printed in the bulletin. For them, it's not about being used, it's about being recognized.

Ask, "Am I leaving my church simply because I'm not being recognized or getting my way? Maybe the Lord is teaching humility, patience, contentment, and servitude, or maybe He is directing you elsewhere."

Do you have a critical attitude? If you have a judgmental attitude, you've already turned a deaf ear to God's leading--it will be difficult to discern His will. Ironically, I've noticed that those highly educated in biblical doctrine can often be the most critical, cynical, and negative. We must avoid being a "divisive" person who is proud, unteachable, and eager to dispute. As we learn the Scriptures, we can become filled with pride and easily see the flaws in others. Blinded by pride and convinced that God has called us to critique others, we might think that we're more knowledgeable, holy, and in tune with the Spirit, and that God has obviously given us the "gift" of criticism, when indeed, no such "gift" exists! Be careful here--it can be a critical attitude, not God, that is leading.

Are your expectations of the church and/or the pastor realistic? Your pastor may not be a motivational speaker, the worship may not descend from the portals of heaven, and you may not be greeted with hugs and smiles from everyone, but these are not reasons to leave. As a matter of fact, we should be thankful that we live in a nation where we can worship God and faithfully preach the Word without fear of death or imprisonment (at least for now). It's not realistic to think that all of the worship services will meet our every need. As in marriage, it's vitally important that we don't enter into things with unrealistic expectations. Without humility and a teachable spirit, it's difficult, if not impossible, to truly worship God and gain discernment. However, I do believe there should be passion in a true spirit-filled church. After all, "Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire" (Lloyd-Jones). Passion and unction should resonate from the pulpit and the church.

Is preference influencing your decision? When it comes to preference, the questions are endless, "Why is the worship music so loud? Why is the worship so subdued? Why don't we sing the old hymns? Why do we sing the old hymns? Why are they sitting? Why are they standing? Why are they raising their hands? Why aren't they raising their hands? Why are they wearing suits and ties? Why aren't they wearing suits and ties? Why do we have so many guest-speakers? Why don't we have guest-speakers? Why aren't the services charismatic? Why are the services so charismatic?" The list never ends. I remember telling a pastor that I really enjoyed the worship service one morning. He smiled and said, "A few others commented just the opposite." Preference plays an enormous role in our lives, but this isn't always a bad thing. There's nothing wrong with having preferences, but there is something wrong when our preferences become the standard by which we judge others.

Love and grace should be the driving force behind motives. In closing, it may appear that I'm siding with the church on these issues...I'm not. My goal is for the reader to examine motives and make the right decision. Wayne Grudem reminds us, "There were no perfect churches at the time of the New Testament and there will be no perfect churches until Christ returns." He is referencing the Westminster Confession of Faith. This doesn't mean that we overlook the spiritual health of the church; we need wisdom.

Finally, we must ask, "Do the leaders, and the pastors, view the Scriptures as inerrant--the final authority?" This is stating the obvious, but it's worth stating: If pastors, teachers, or preachers challenge the authority or authenticity of the Word of God, they should step away from leadership. I'm not referring to differences over non-essential issues: I'm referring to those who disregard the clear commands of Scripture. Read Jeremiah 23 to gain a sense of God's thoughts toward leaders who lead the people astray. If the leadership is not solid in this area, there are biblical grounds to fellowship elsewhere. Then it may be time to leave.

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