

Theology in Four Words

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman's sermon emphasizes the critical nature of Jesus' identity and the implications of His death and resurrection for believers.

Duration: 55:35

Scripture: Matthew 17:22, Matthew 18:6, Matthew 18:12-15, Matthew 18:20

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of not causing stumbling blocks for others, especially children, emphasizing the need to remove anything hindering spiritual growth. It highlights the significance of full surrender to God, urging believers to cut off sin and make necessary changes to align with God's will. The message underscores God's pursuit of the lost, encouraging repentance and a return to Him. Worship is emphasized as a time to realign hearts with God, whether in repentance, gratitude, or seeking His presence.

Transcript

Right now we're at Matthew 17, verse 22. And Jesus again predicts His death and resurrection. In the past, we've talked about in Matthew that He is predicting His death and His resurrection.

And this is where verse 22 picks up. Now, while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And the third day He will be raised up, and they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Jesus Himself is saying He'll be betrayed, He'll be killed, and He'll be raised again from the dead. And at this point, this is where C.S. Lewis would again ask you, Is He a lunatic, is He a liar, or is He the Lord? And when you talk about Jesus, those are your only three options. Is He a lunatic, is He a liar, or is He the Lord Jesus Christ? Because only a lunatic would say something like this, or a liar, if it's not true.

But because it's true, we know that it validates His claim to be Lord. He predicts His death and resurrection. Jesus is saying, I will die, and I will rise again.

But then many people say, well, well, wait a minute, this happened to me last week, an atheist said. Well, they could just make that up. They can just put that in the Bible later.

Well, it's interesting. If you read historians from maybe 100 years after Jesus, secular historians, not Christians, they talk about Jesus and followers of Christ. So if Jesus was lying, and He made this up, and He never rose from the dead, why were disciples following Him being killed? They were being killed for their faith.

We've talked about this before. This is no surprise. The followers of Jesus Christ, Matthew, Mark, Paul, and different disciples were killed for their faith.

Nobody's going to die for a lie. They're not going to say, yeah, you know, saw me in two, hang me upside down, we hid the body, it's all made up. Nobody's going to do that.

So to me, that validates His claim. And secular historians say that there was a man named Jesus Christ with followers. So from a purely historical context, we have to assume that Jesus was a real historical figure.

Now let me read a few of those. Hope I get their names right. Pliny the Younger was his name, P-L-I-N-Y.

You can look this up, read his work, Pliny the Younger. He lived around 112 AD. That would have been about 70, 80, 80 some years after Jesus was raised from the dead and resurrection, and His followers started following Him.

He was a governor in Asia Minor, and he wrote a letter regarding how to deal with Christians who worship Christ. Cornelius Tacitus, 55 AD to 117 AD. So he was born just 20 years after Jesus, and he's regarded as the greatest historian of ancient Rome.

Writing on the reign of Nero, Tacitus mentions the death of Christ and the Christians in Rome. He said this, Consequently, to get rid of the report of the city being on fire that Nero actually started, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populace. And Lucian, 120 AD to 180 AD, spoke scornfully of Christ and Christians.

The Christians worship a man to this day, the distinguished person, the distinguished personage, or personage, I'm sorry, who introduced their novel rights and was crucified on that account. You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt they have for death and the voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them. So you're reading secular historians that are talking about a Jesus who was crucified, and talking about his followers who were following him.

So this wasn't just made up. You couldn't get people to follow a lie, because they knew, they saw the risen Savior, many of these people, that died after Jesus was resurrected and taken away. They died because of their faith.

They believed it so much so, not unlike what you're seeing in the news. When people are dying for the faith that they believe in, in the Middle East. So the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact.

And if you say, and even if you say the resurrection, yeah Shane, okay, that's all Christians say, but the death and burial and existence of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. It is. So a person has to grapple with that.

Lunatic, liar, or Lord. He's not just a good teacher. I run into people a lot, even the other day, Trader Joe's, a Jewish guy, and yeah, he was a good teacher.

If that's all he was, he was a terrible teacher. He was a good teacher, but if that's all he was, he has to either be Lord or lunatic or liar. He cannot just be a good teacher.

He was the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why I titled this message, and really it's a shorter title than that. The title of the message is Theology Can Be Condensed Into Four Words.

Theology, the study of God, can be condensed into four words. And I grabbed this quote from Spurgeon. He said, my entire theology can be condensed into four words.

Jesus died for me. At the core of theology, at the core of what we believe, that is everything summed up in four words. Is it not? Jesus died for me.

And then from that, we can have a better understanding of correct theology. And it's interesting, the denial of Christ has very little to do with facts. If you present the facts to people, the historical facts of the Bible, the archaeological facts of the Bible, I think they just found where Goliath lived.

If you've been following some of the archaeological discoveries, and well, the skeletons of wells out in the desert. I think off of Egypt or somewhere out there. Well, how did that get there? Well, it's called a flood.

I mean, the Bible, it will show scientifically, archaeologically, historically. And Jesus, you read, I only read three of the secular historians. There's dozens who wrote about Jesus.

So it has nothing to do with facts. The reason they deny Jesus Christ is they don't like, they have issues with authority, submission, and surrender. Let's get right to the heart of this matter.

The reason that people do not bow their knee to Jesus Christ is they have issues with authority, and submission, and surrender. They don't want there to be a God. If you talk to people long enough, you'll find out they want to do what they want, when they want, to who they want, however they want.

They don't want any accountability. Can you imagine if the fear of God hit Planned Parenthood? That's why they're doing what they're doing. They have no fear of God.

The fear of the Lord has left. But it's interesting, on this note, everyone is under authority already. They just don't realize it.

They are submitting to something. They have already surrendered their soul. They just don't know it yet.

So children of God, we've surrendered to Jesus. We say, Lord, I can't win this battle. I need you.

I'm a sinner. Now I'm a saint, but I was a sinner who's confessing my sin, and I'm repenting, and I'm turning to you. I'm under your authority.

You're under your direction. I'm submitting to you. But somebody who doesn't do that, they're still under authority.

They're under the control of the enemy. They're not called a child of God. They're called a child of wrath.

They're not called the son of the Most High. They're called the son of the devil. Jesus said, you sons of the devil.

You hypocrites. And that's the interesting thing. Anytime I'm talking with people on this topic, they don't see it, but I can already see it.

They're already under submission. They're already under the control of the enemy. Their soul is lost.

They're gone. You're a pawn in Satan's army. But they often don't realize it until it's too late.

That's why you preach the gospel. That's why you preach the good news. That's why you tell people there is a hope.

Because when you unravel the onion and you get to the core of people, you find out that this is really the issue. It's one word called pride. The pride of your heart has deceived you.

Pride. It's pride. We don't want there to be a God.

Do you remember before you came to the Lord, or even in your prodigal son state, or wherever you were at, I didn't want to hear about God at all. I didn't want to hear one word. I got Waylon Jennings on the radio and a 12 pack of Budweiser, and I'm heading to Vegas, and don't mention.

Don't mention God to me. I don't want to hear anything, Mom. Don't say you're praying for me.

Nothing to do with God. Nothing. Why? We know the answer.

Because we're dead set on rebellion. The sinful heart is set on rebelling against God. So keep that in mind.

And it's a spiritual battle. There's enough facts that support that Christ lived and died and was resurrected. I truly believe.

You could show... About a month ago, I talked with an atheist for three hours. Fact, after fact, after fact, after fact, after fact. And I finally said, this is nonsense.

You can have the Bible say whatever you want. You can twist whatever you want. And the sad fact is you don't want to surrender your heart to God.

You don't want to repent of your sin. That's the bottom line. Because I was giving fact, after fact, after fact.

Don't confuse me with the facts, right? That's what he was basically saying. So you can... And that's why I often say, you can't argue somebody into heaven. You can pray them in.

And that's what apologetics is. Apologetics is to give a person the reason for the hope that's within you. That's apologetics.

You're studying the Word of God and you're able to share it with other people and convince them lovingly. It's okay to do that. And that's why you get frustrated.

You give all these facts. What's your problem? It's a problem of the heart. You can make the Bible say whatever you want.

God supports slavery and He doesn't like women and all this stuff. Whatever you want it to say. God was a mean God and vengeful and all this stuff.

And that keeps us away from God because we make the Scripture say whatever we want. And it's really Christ has come to set us free from this bondage. So people are already under bondage.

They're under the spiritual authority of the devil. And Jesus comes to set them free. That's why He came.

To set them free. And we'll read that in a little bit. The message of the cross.

The message that we're talking about tonight is very inclusive. Have you ever heard those words? Exclusive and inclusive. The media will say that a lot.

Christianity is very exclusive. Exclusive means it's very narrow. It only includes a certain amount of people.

But the call, the message of the Gospel is inclusive. I believe the Bible says whosoever. Whosoever will believe and repent.

Whosoever will return. From the African desert to the shores of Maine. Whosoever.

Japan, China, whosoever. That's where it's very inclusive. It includes everybody.

But then it gets exclusive because the message is narrow. The only way, the only truth, the only life. Jesus said I'm the only way, the only truth, the only life.

Nobody comes to the Father except through me. That's very narrow. Very narrow.

But you know I thought about this How exclusive is oxygen? Everybody complains that the Gospel is exclusive. Too exclusive. Well how exclusive is oxygen? When was the last time people tried to change that? Well I'm just not going to breathe today.

That's too exclusive. Hold your breath for how long? A minute maybe? Boy that's very exclusive. Yes, it's very narrow.

It operates under a certain dynamic with your lungs, with the capacity of your body to take that oxygen and breathe and live. Very, very exclusive. There's no other way to breathe.

Jump in the ocean and try breathing. Why is the ocean so exclusive? Why is oxygen? Gravity? We have no problem with natural laws. Nobody's ever come up to me and said I'm so mad at gravity.

I'm so mad at oxygen. I am teed off to $2 + 2 = 4$. It's so exclusive. What's wrong with people? Nothing.

But when it comes to moral truth, when it comes to moral compasses and saying God says we must live our life like this. This is absolute truth. That's why everybody has a problem.

Keep your religion away from me. So see, it's really not about exclusivity. We love exclusivity when it applies to us.

The world does. But when it becomes about conforming and changing. That's why Planned Parenthood, that's why they're scrambling.

That's why they're trying to say this or say this. Everybody's trying to defend them and they don't want any accountability. Nobody can just say I was sorry, I was wrong, I repent, Lord forgive me.

Very healthy words. Very, very healthy words. I was just talking to my mom this afternoon.

She does a lot of marriage counseling as many of you know. She said spouses would just say you know what, I was wrong. I'm sorry.

Will you forgive me? Can I work on that? I take full responsibility. You would end half the counseling appointments. Right there, no need.

But we want to get a referee. That's what it is. Referee.

But it's very healthy. It's very healthy to say those things. Verse 24.

When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, does your teacher not pay the temple tax? He said, yes. And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him saying, what do you think, Simon? Peter, from whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes? From their sons or from strangers? Peter said to him, from strangers. Jesus said to him, then the sons are free.

Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea and cast in a hook and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money. Take that and give it to them for me and for you.

Now this whole passage could have been another sermon on taxes. The government, submission, authority, all these things that we don't want to talk about too often. And I know there's actually Christians that I've known high up.

If I mention a few names, you probably know too. They actually went to jail for tax evasion. And they use it in this scripture.

Hey, we're free. We don't have to pay taxes. Well, if Jesus did, you might want to reconsider your view.

Now I'm not going to get on some rabbit trail, some political trail. I don't want to take too much from this. But I wanted a few things.

Jesus is saying, I believe, and this is the item in paraphrase, so obviously check everything. But there is a greater authority. Jesus is saying there is a greater authority.

We're sons of God. The government sits underneath God. There's a greater authority.

We're free. However, so we don't offend them. And that word offense there is pretty interesting.

So we don't offend them. Let's pay our taxes. Let's pay the temple tax.

We don't have to. It's my right, but I don't want to offend, so I will pay that temple tax. And that's a very good balance.

I think in our own individual lives, and to me it meant this, choose your battles carefully. Choose your battles carefully and don't seek to offend people. With Christianity, there's so many different things we can become judgmental.

Every little thing can set us off. Pick our battles carefully. Yes, that's right, but I don't have rights all the time necessarily.

I'm going to do something here that doesn't cause an offense. It doesn't cause a problem. We should be peacemakers, not religious negotiators.

We should be ones that want to have peace with the brethren, peace with the government. And so what I think he's saying here is put down your right. You don't have to pay taxes technically because we're under God's authority.

However, we don't want to offend them and tarnish the Christian character. You know, a lot of people put a little sign of the fish on their business card and then they do terrible work. Those types of things.

So choose your battles carefully. See, here's an interesting thing. I've talked about this before.

The truth offends people, doesn't it? Have you found that out yet? If you haven't, then you probably haven't been doing much because the truth offends people. But our attitude shouldn't offend them. So the truth I'm proclaiming, the truth will offend.

But my attitude about it shouldn't be offensive. In other words, I shouldn't go picking fights over every little thing. Picking fights on this, picking fights on this, picking fights on this.

Every little thing, just going down the line. And you become very critical, very judgmental. You're finding fault in everything.

Can you find fault in everything? Probably. Follow me around. I'll follow you around.

Look at my checkbook. Let me look at your checkbook. Look at my calendar.

Let me look at your calendar. How we do things at the church. How you would do things at the church.

We can all judge and get very critical of each other. And that's why I believe we'd rather err on the side of not causing an offense. This doesn't mean you don't stand for truth.

But it does mean that your attitude should be an attitude of humility. And not wanting to cause a brother to stumble. Not wanting to get into an argument.

There are people, and I call them heresy hunters. There are websites, they love picking fights. They'll pick a fight about everything.

Everything. They'll just critique every little nuance. Because that's what they believe God has given them the gift of criticism.

It's not in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, or 14. I've looked. I've been down that road before.

Everything is critiqued. Everything. And that's not a healthy attitude.

Because a judgmental spirit can grow. And it can grow. And it can grow.

And that's why we have to be careful in this area. So I believe, nevertheless, lest we offend them. Jesus is saying, listen, like Paul said, to the Jews I became a Jew.

To the Greek I became a Greek. You become, to that person, you don't offend them. One thing I thought of, also how we conduct ourselves.

I'm not a perfect example of this, so I don't like using my example, because I probably blow it more than I do good. But like with our neighbor, we have a neighbor up above us, and I used to park on the curb, by the curb on the street. But then he got another car, and you really couldn't park three before his driveway.

So I say, hey, no problem, let me just pull up in my driveway. Oh, you don't mind? No, no problem. So we're trying to keep a good relationship there.

But I had all the way to my property line. I know where that little property line mark is on the curb. I used to dig block wall footings.

I know exactly how that works. I know how much inches I have. That's my right.

That's my property. I don't care if you can't park. Technically, right? But, lest I offend him, let me park somewhere else.

And build that relationship. See, that's how this works. There's times we can take the lower road.

And you better get used to it. And just saying, you know, it's not worth an argument. It's not worth a fight.

That's what that means. Let's not offend them. Because did Jesus have to pay his temple tax? There's no way in the world.

He said, Peter, no way. We're not paying that pride. But he humbled himself.

And he said, let's not offend them. So there's a lot of truth to that. Nevertheless, though, he also said, let us submit to the earthly authority since we have dual citizenship.

Again, I'm paraphrasing. As a Christian, it's a very interesting thing. Do you realize you have dual citizenship? Not with here in Canada, or here in Mexico, or here.

You have dual citizenship. You are a child of God in God's kingdom, but you're also a citizen of the United States. So we have dual citizenship.

That's why Paul wrote in Romans 13, let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God. So you have to remember that.

God in his sovereignty and in his control. God is the ultimate authority. And you might say, well, how did he let that guy in North Korea go? This long.

Or Saddam Hussein. Or Iran. How? How? How? How? How? Well, you have to understand that the concept of authority is good.

The concept of government from God's perspective and ours, it's a good concept. You want to try anarchy? You want to try every man defending himself? No police force. No authorities.

No jails. No firemen. You want to live in that world? I hope not.

Because you wouldn't be here, probably. It would be survival of the fittest at its height. So God says the authority, the government is my institution.

God's institution. The whole purpose of government is to be a terror to those who do evil. But then man gets in and corrupts what God has designed to be ultimately for good.

So the concept of authority and government and governing people is not a bad concept. Actually, America, when it was first conceived, came over the pilgrims in 1620 and the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It's not really a democracy.

It's a republic. And the republic, they would vote for people in positions of leadership who held to a higher standard of integrity and feared the Lord. In some constitutions, if you can find it, you couldn't even run for office unless you profess a belief in God the Father and in His Son and the Holy Spirit.

You couldn't even run for office at all. So that's what the concept of government is. God's concept for this reason.

Again, Romans 13. For there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God.

And those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same.

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain for he is God's minister to avenge and to execute wrath on those who practice evil. That's the purpose of government.

And then you have to say, well Paul, you're writing that under the reign of Nero. Who put Christians on the street and lit them up for lights? As candles. What is going on here? You have to assume that also Nero was reading this.

Hopefully. And people in positions of leadership are reading Paul's words. He's saying, listen, you're under an authority and the whole purpose of authority, the whole purpose of government is to be a terror to those who do evil.

Actually that's really the design of government is to be a terror to those who do evil. To protect and to defend the nation. That's why we've gotten into all kinds of trouble now with the government getting into everything.

That's not the concept. They're supposed to protect and defend. And that's the authority there.

So how does that play out? Well this could be another whole sermon in itself. But the bottom line is we are to submit to authority until that authority starts to make us go in a direction that's actually blaspheming or mocking God. For example, when the authorities in the New Testament said, don't go out and preach about Jesus anymore.

The disciples said, okay sure, whatever. I can't obey that authority. Or if the authority said, Shane, you've got to marry gay people.

I can't do that. I can't submit to that. Your authority now, you're usurping God's truth.

You're usurping His authority. You're making me do things now against God. And many times though, what they're asking us to do isn't going that dramatic or that drastic.

Parking tickets or submit to this and pay taxes. You know, there's a gray area there. But when it comes to issues that are clearly, clearly outside of God's will, and then by obeying the authorities, I would be disobeying God, that's when you have to look to the greater authority.

Fortunately in this country we've been very blessed. Very blessed. But as we all know, it's going in a very unhealthy direction quickly.

Like I often say, the Titanic has been struck. It's not going to turn around without God repairing and doing something there if that's His will. And then we get into chapter 18 of Matthew.

The beginning. Who is the greatest? Is what the title of this opening chapter is. At the time the disciples came to Jesus saying, who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Boy, you've got to love these guys.

They want to know who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set Him in the midst of them, and said, assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

And this is the scripture that is so important. I wish Christian radio, Christian television would just put this verse up on the screen for a while. Unless you are converted and become as little children.

Now it's interesting, we talked about the different versions of the Bible a few weeks ago. I'll refer you back to that if you want. The English Standard Version actually in my opinion translates this part, unless you are converted and become as little children a little bit better.

The new King James decided to use this word, convert. Convert. Convert.

In the Greek language it's stefro. And what stefro means, it doesn't mean saying a prayer, it doesn't mean raising your hand and coming forward, it doesn't mean getting baptized, it doesn't mean going to church, it doesn't mean I was raised in a good Christian home. Stefro means as the English Standard Version puts it, to turn from your sin.

To turn from your sin like a child would and turn to God. So, Jesus is saying this, unless you turn from your sin, humble yourself like this little child, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child humbles himself.

That's how you enter the kingdom of heaven. By being converted, by turning from sin and turning from God. Humble yourself.

It's interesting, there's a side effect of conversion. You know of a side effect, you say this medication has a side effect, there's a side effect of conversion it's called change. If there's no change taking place, there is no conversion.

I like what A.W. Tozer said, he said millions of professed believers talk as if Christ were real, but they act as if he were not. And our actual position should be discovered by the way we act, not by the way we talk. And this is a point you really want to drive home, because a side effect of conversion is change.

If a person truly turns and is truly converted, there is genuine fruit, there's genuine change. So when you talk to people and there's no fruit, there's nothing there. You have to wonder, were they converted? Because when I raised my hand, I said a quick prayer, I was baptized as a baby, I come to church, that doesn't matter.

None of that matters. It's good, some of it, except the baby baptism part. You can dedicate but not the baptized child, the little baby.

But none of that matters. What conversion is, that's why I don't worry too much about the eloquence of a person's prayer. You don't have to say pray after me, and you don't have to, if you do it's good, but you don't have to.

What it is, it's a person's heart breaking before God. It's a person's heart humbling themselves before God, and in their heart they're converting, they're turning from their sin, and they're turning to God. You don't even have to pray, you can just groan.

I've heard people say, oh God, they fall on their face and they're converted when they leave. What happened? They didn't pray. Wait a minute, they didn't pray and they didn't come forward.

That guy's not saved. No, what happened in his heart? Because so many people go forward sometimes and they're not saved. I used to work, I've worked down at Harvest Crusade, at Great Glory a while back, 10 years ago, down at the grass area.

You're just coming down, coming down, and I don't dismiss that. I think giving sinners the opportunity to turn to Christ and come forward and get plugged in is a great, great, great thing, if it's explained correctly, and many of those guys explain it correctly. Not a bad thing.

But it's not on them, it's on the person coming down. And I would talk to some people, some people you see crying and crying, and, oh my God, and other people are like, where's my free Bible? So you came down, yeah, she came down, she's my girlfriend, she brought me here. Followed her down here.

So is that guy good? No. I mean, well, don't judge him. Okay, I won't judge.

But based on what I saw, you don't just come down and say, give me a free Bible, I'll come down with my girlfriend. Like that, that's the ticket into heaven. No, whoever humbles himself.

And actually, people who didn't even, I'm convinced there's people who didn't even come down that were saved. They stay in their chair and say, Lord, I'm a sinner. That sermon convicted me, I'm turning to you.

My heart's breaking, I'm getting, I'm searching for you with all of my heart, Lord, I'm leaving here a different person. They walk out, nobody even knows they were saved, because they didn't come down. And so that's why I want to make a distinction.

It's not raising, a person raising their hand, although they can. It's not coming forward in an altar call, although they can. It's not even saying a prayer, although they can.

Conversion is when a person turns from their sin, basically they're saying, Lord, I'm humbling myself, I need you, I'm a sinner, and I need a Savior. I'm giving my life to you, I'm turning my, that's conversion. That's when a person's converted.

And then because of that, now the Holy Spirit now comes in and resides in them, and they have to change. They say, I don't want to drink that anymore. I don't want to snort that anymore.

I don't want to hang out with that person anymore. I don't want to watch that anymore. These old CDs, I don't even like this stuff.

What's happening to me? You're changing. You're changing. So if there's no change, that's why I tell a lot of times young adults, when I used to speak at young adults conferences, if you look just like the world and there's no change in your lifestyle whatsoever, you better go do business with God.

Paul said, examine yourself. Look in the mirror. Examine yourself.

Do you not know yourself? Is Jesus Christ in you? And John even used harsher words. He said, those who say they know Him, but do not do His commandments, are a liar, and the truth is not in them. You say, boy, Shane, you're really trying to upset.

No, I'm really trying to convict. Because there's not, and this church is different, but when I used to speak at different conferences, I'd have people every single time come up and say, that's me. That's me.

I've had religion. I've been playing church. I've been playing games with God.

And it's not until you can allow God's word to penetrate their heart and examine, Paul says, examine yourself. I think it's healthy for every Christian to examine themselves. Not to say, oh, am I not saved? No, once you're a child of God, you know there's great comfort in there.

But if there's no fruit, if there's no distinction, there's no difference. Actually in Matthew, I believe chapter 7, Jesus says, many will come to me in that day. Say, Lord.

They'll say, Lord, we cast out demons in your name. We did many miracles in your name. And Jesus will say to them, depart from me.

I don't know you, you who practice lawlessness. Now, you can either quietly hop over that scripture and go to the next one. And then he says, whoever hears my sayings and does them, I will liken him to a man who built his house upon the rock.

And when the storms came, it did not fall. But the man who hears my word and does not do it is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And when the storm came, it fell, and great was its fall.

So you can get away from that fact. Now let me just throw out some encouragement too. This is never about perfection.

Never. We stumble, we fumble, we fall. But it's about where's your heart set? What direction is your heart going? It's about the direction of the heart.

Falling forward into God's arms of forgiveness. We shouldn't enjoy sin. We should make steps to get rid of the things that are wrong.

There should be a growing there, a conforming. Oh, there we go. Conforming to the image of Christ.

I think it says that somewhere in the New Testament. Paul's very clear that we should be conforming to the image of Christ. So when you meet somebody, didn't I meet you 10 years ago? Why do you look no different? You're the same grumbling, the same complaining, the same bickering.

You sound like a broken record, the same thing I heard 10 years ago. Where's the conforming to the image of Christ? Because spiritual maturity comes by obeying the Word of God. When you meet very spiritual people, very mature people in the faith, it's because they've been obeying the Word of God.

They've been falling forward, they've been making mistakes, but when the day is over, they've been obeying the Word of God, and they've matured as a result of that. Christian maturity, being conformed to the image of Christ, is always a byproduct of obedience. Always.

Trust and obey. Remember the old hymn? Trust and obey. Trust and obey.

It's very good, very important to do. Unless you humble yourself like a child and turn from your sin, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Man, isn't that so profound? That is Jesus warning people.

He goes on to say, I'm going to read in a little bit, but I think it fits here, for the Son of Man has not come for the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. That's why Jesus came. The next time they think it's just a good teacher to be an example, we have to read the Bible, the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

But when we say a person is lost without Christ, we're labeled a homophobe, a bigot, narrow-minded, arrogant, and judgmental. I've been called all that in one sentence. With big exclamation points, and the letters are in capital.

But Jesus said it. Why can't we say you're lost without Christ? He said it. He said it.

Verse 6, chapter 18, verse 6, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me, a little, picture here now, these little kids come running up to Jesus, four, five, six, seven years old. They're here with Jesus. He says, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned into the depths of the sea.

Now folks, what do you do with that scripture? That tells me if I'm doing something that's causing a little child to sin, I'm in big trouble. It's better for me if I've never even been born or have a millstone hung around my neck than to cause a little child to sin. Why is that? Because you can talk about the age of accountability, you can talk about whatever, but in a little child, there's innocence.

I'm enjoying it right now with the kids little. There's innocence there. There's purity.

Like my daughters would come and say, Daddy, I'm so sorry. You know they mean it. There's a humility.

There's a genuineness. There's a picture there of beauty and of purity and of innocence. And God loves that.

That's what he's drawn to. But woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses, meaning sin, must come.

But woe to the man by whom the offense comes. Here's an interesting verse. If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you.

It's better for you to enter into life lame or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It's better for you to enter into life with one eye rather than having two eyes and to be cast into hell fire.

So it begs the question, does removing a hand or foot save a person? So if a person goes out and cuts off their hand, this hand's causing me, actually both hands are causing me to sin. Let me cut them both off. Are they good with God? Is that what he's saying? No.

The answer is no. What he's saying there is the action, the action of this person cutting off, he's using the most dramatic language you could use. Can we all agree on that? The action that you take will validate the sincerity of your commitment to Christ.

If a person isn't willing to cut things out of their life, then their heart is not right. If they're not going to cut out the sin, if they're not going to, the severity of what they're doing is so bad, they're not going to remove those things, then you have to wonder where's their heart? It would be like this practical example. I am cutting off my pride.

I'm getting help. I'm cutting off pride. I'm cutting off pride.

I'm getting help. Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes, I'm getting help.

And people, I get emails every week now when I mention there's accountability software on your computers. There's actually a better one. It's called Covenant Eyes.

It'll send every search you do, every website you visit, every Facebook page to your accountability partner. Everything. Full transparency.

And I know many guys right now, I've told that to, and guess how many of them have hooked it up. And I think of this verse every single time. You don't want it bad enough.

You're not willing. I mean, this is dramatic language. You say, if something is tearing your family apart, if something is tearing your marriage apart, and the majority of kids find porn through their parents' computers.

And the software also blocks questionable sites. And they don't want to do what it takes. They don't want to do what it takes to remove this from their life.

I'm cutting off all relationships and media venues that are hurting me or my family. That's what else this looks like. I talk to people, especially people who are addicted.

If they've got a problem with alcohol or drugs or different things. And their Facebook page. And I used to, I mean, you guys know, we lost two young adults from this congregation about two years ago, a year and a half ago, to heroin overdose.

And I talked to both of them. We're at this church. Both of them.

And in all cases, I say, if I were you, I would eliminate Facebook. I would eliminate your, go throw the phone in the aqueduct. Okay? Get a phone from your parents, just your number.

Nobody wants to take radical steps. I mean, you couldn't be more clear than this. Cut off your foot if it's causing you to sin.

But see, we hold on to the very things that Jesus says, release. And two funerals within two months, I've got a problem with that. They don't want to eradicate these things.

And you know what, they'll, here's the exact wording, I don't want to do that. They're my friends. Really? Those are your friends? They're leading you in a direction you don't want to go.

They're pulling you down. You better reassess the definition of friends. And when you get to the core of it, you get to the core of it, this is the shoot you straight part of the sermon, when you get to the core of it, they enjoy their sin more than wanting to remove it.

That's why people continue in it. There's still that ... But I love that ecstasy. I love that oxy.

I love that crystal. I love that you fill in the blank. They don't want to fully turn.

So Jesus says, I don't believe it's a works-based thing he's saying here, do this and you'll enter heaven. He's saying you've got to move, you've got to get to the point you realize how bad sin is and you're going to do whatever it takes to get that out of your life and turn to God. That's why I talk about full surrender.

That's what this is dealing with. And it's interesting, a word for sin, many of you know it means to miss the mark and actually use the different word here. Scandaliso.

Whoever believes, he who causes one of these little ones in me to scandaliso would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck. Does that word sound like our English word? Scandal? That's where it comes from. That's where our word scandal comes from.

It comes from this Greek word scandaliso. And it means to put a stumbling block before others. And boy I was convicted today, how much stuff are we allowing in our homes, those with little kids or teenagers, that you're actually putting a stumbling block for them.

They're allowed to go on and watch Netflix or voodoo and maybe come across Fifty Shades of Grey or maybe come across this or maybe come across that. All these things that we're allowing porn on our computers. We're putting a stumbling, it's a scandal in our homes.

We're putting stumbling blocks before the children. You see I'm getting to the point now where I'd rather err on the side of removing too much than too little. You can call me a Jesus freak, you can call me a holy roller, you can call me self righteous, you can say oh that's some weird homeschooling family over there.

You know those little terms. But I'm going to follow Christ and I'd rather err on the side of removing too much that might be distracting than too little. And every parent I believe has got to take it to the Lord.

Some things might be fine but for others we have to be careful. Because here's the deal, kids are moldable and impressionable. This is no secret right? Kids are moldable.

What you're taking with children is you're molding them and you're shaping them into who they'll be. And many times when you have problems in therapy and counseling you can go back to childhood experiences. Learn behavioral patterns right? Cognitive behavioral patterns.

All these things. Now no excuse in my opinion. It's not an excuse.

We can't go well because my dad was mean to me I'm this way. Welcome to my world. But you can trace it back to those times when you were moldable and shapeable.

Now I'm wanting affirmation. I'm needing esteem. Girls who want affirmation who never got affirmation from their father will seek it out in other men.

And they'll become promiscuous by age 15. Why? Because they were moldable and shapeable at those young years. That's why God says teach them, train them in the way they should go.

When they were older they will not depart from me. Show them. It was interesting in 2005 American Medical Association surveyed teenagers 13 to 18 and they found and this is one of the stumbling blocks.

They're talking about how easy it is for minors now to get alcohol. Two out of three teens say it's easy to get alcohol from their homes without parents knowing. Two out of five say it's easy to get alcohol from friends parents.

One in four teens has attended a party where minors are drinking in front of parents. Nearly one in four teens and one in three girls say their own parents give them alcohol. Now this isn't a topic, you know, just going to go after alcohol here, but I am showing you that if that's not putting a stumbling block before a child, I don't know what is.

I mean I can relate to this. My friends all around town, let's go get that southern comfort while they're sleeping, put a little bit of water in there, they will never know. Everclear.

Have to go to Nevada to get that. Just replace it with some water. They'll never know.

And that formed in me at 16, 17 from parents. It was a scandal. They put a stumbling block before me that was taken in.

So I would just encourage you, look at your house. God forbid, is there a stumbling block in my house? Is there a stumbling block in my house? And I can even take this further. Look at what we're feeding little kids.

If I see another five-year-old at the Lillyfield with a Dr. Pepper this big and Doritos, I'm gonna have a heart attack. Well, he's got ADD and this and that. Well, you might want to start with correctly giving him something that will take care of his body.

And I'm asked, I was asked last month if I could start writing articles for a big news organization on fitness again because they called it a childhood epidemic and childhood obesity. It's an epidemic. Now, what's going on? I say, first, look in the pantry.

Out of sight, out of mind, and it falls directly on the shoulders of the parents under a certain age. Unapologetically, I'm saying that. Under a certain age, it falls directly on our shoulders.

So if we're feeding them a bunch of garbage and they have no attention, they have no discipline, their bodies, we are I truly believe we're putting a stumbling block in front of them. We are not helping them physically. We are hurting them physically.

As parents, we should have, we should want the best for our children. Feeding spiritually, mentally, emotionally. I'm not putting out the same page of spiritual health at all.

But if you think about these little kids were given to us to mold and to shape and to take care of physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, yet we're going to neglect this important area. It just doesn't make sense. We're destroying their bodies physically.

We're destroying their spirit spiritually. The parents, the adults who are called to lead and shepherd these children. Remember what I said last year, I think it was Father's Day, with Josh McDowell said that one of the questions he gets the most from young adults is how can we live for Christ when we don't want the Christ that our parents have.

I mean that one sentence should bring this room to repentance. Honestly. It's a scandal.

Scandaliso. We're putting a stumbling block before others. And it needs to stop.

And then of course, verse 10, it's interesting, he goes right into the lost sheep. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. God's heart for the children.

This might be a good point to tell you, get involved in children's ministry. We need a lot of children's ministry helpers and we don't have enough. And I think a lot of it has to do with this.

Do not despise one of these little ones. I'm guilty. Now that I have kids, I'm not like this, because I love them.

I'd want seven more, but it's very hard. But what does this mean? Do not dislike. Do not shun.

Do not dislike. Do not shun. Remember that guy? Get away from me, Ken.

You bother me. Who was that guy? He was in the 50s, 60s. There you go.

Get away from me, kid. You bother me. But that's what parents do.

Many times they're adults. Get away. You bother me.

And Jesus is saying just the opposite. Do not despise one of these little ones. However else you want to interpret that verse, you can't.

That's what he's saying. Despise. It means to dislike or to shun.

Get away from me. When God says a heart should be for the children, we're saying get away from me. Get away from me.

Jesus says, for I say to you that in heaven there are angels. All we see the face of my Father in heaven. So do kids have little personal angels? Guardian angels? Well, I don't know what else you'd make of that.

For I say to you that in heaven there are angels. All we see the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, surely I say to you he rejoices more over that sheep. That one sheep than all the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

This is a good point to remind you of that sermon a few months ago. Unstoppable Love. God the Pursuer.

Don't forget that God is the Pursuer. Many mistakenly believe they've done too much damage that God can't use them now. But that's not true.

God is always pursuing. He's always pursuing. Even when I was living like hell, heaven was still beckoning me.

Even when I was denying my Savior, He never denied me. It doesn't matter if you still have breath in your lungs right now. God is pursuing you.

That lost sheep. Even the lost sheep. I'm too lost.

I'm too far gone. I'm on this. I'm on that.

God will. No, no. He's looking for that lost sheep.

That's the message it needs to get out. There's people on crack cocaine right now on Beach Avenue. They're on heroin.

They're on this. They're on crystal meth. They haven't slept in two days.

They're on a high. They're on a trip. They're saying, I can't step my... I can't step into that church.

God will kill me. He says, no. God says, I'm drawing you.

I'm looking for that lost sheep. To what? To convert and turn back to me. That's a loving Father.

That's what He does. It's unstoppable love. So all my theology can be summed up in this.

Four words. Jesus Christ, die for me. That's five words for you paying attention.

Jesus, die for me. Your theology can be summed up in that. I don't know of a better way.

I have some more notes, but they're pointless now. So when you go to worship, think about that. And I really want to get this point across.

These aren't just songs. Well, let's just buy some time until the next service. This is time to worship.

Actually, more takes place during worship. The Monday night worship night, I'm still getting positive feedback. 70 of 60 of us here Monday night worshipping God for an hour and a half.

That's all we did. And that's the point of worship, is to get our hearts back in that direction. And if your cause is stumbling block, repent during worship.

If you don't know God, if you don't know Christ, all you have to do is say, Lord, I'm a sinner. I need you. Come back and pray with us.

We'll pray for you. Whatever it is, you need to do business with God and get right with Him. If you don't know Him, and if you do know Him, and you've drifted, know that God's pursuing.

And if you're still on course, you're doing great, you're a spirit-filled believer, then take this time of worship and thank Him. Thank Him that you have not drifted off course. Because we can get pretty proudful on that, can't we? As soon as I have a guy tell me I haven't had a drink in a year, then I find out he's back hooked again.

Be very careful, because in our pride and arrogance, in our pride and arrogance, we can judge ourselves and the enemy saying, ah, I've got a foothold now. So be careful in that area.

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