

When Should We Answer Our Critics?

by Shane Idleman

As Christians, we are called to be stewards of God's word, being faithful and loyal to it, and not allowing opinions or criticism to sidetrack us from our purpose.

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:18

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Description

Shane Idleman addresses the question of when to respond to critics in his sermon 'When Should We Answer Our Critics?' He emphasizes the importance of discerning the motives behind criticism and the necessity of aligning responses with God's wisdom rather than worldly standards. Idleman highlights that while criticism can be constructive, it is crucial to focus on the truth of the gospel and to remain faithful stewards of God's message. He encourages believers to rise above negativity and to find joy in their faith, even amidst opposition, reminding them that God prepares a table for them in the presence of their enemies.

Transcript

The title this morning is an interesting topic. When should we answer our critics? Ouch. When should we answer our critics? And we're in 1 Corinthians, the series is Answers for a Confused Church.

The church was very confused in Corinth, and Paul was giving them a lot of direction. And we left off in 1 Corinthians 3, so if you have your Bibles you can turn to 1 Corinthians 3. I think we're going to start at 21, but I actually want to read from last week, if you just want to listen here at verse 18. Let no one deceive himself, we talked about last week, and we reminded ourselves that deception can come upon all of us, and we deceive ourselves.

And Paul said, if anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool, that he may become wise. We talked about not making decisions based on the world's standard, but making decisions based on what does God's word say. And you know there's two opposing forces there, don't you? The world's mindset, and what God's word says.

And their kingdoms colliding was the title of last week's message. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, he catches the wise in their own craftiness, and again the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are futile.

So he's contrasting the world's wisdom with God's wisdom, and it's just foolishness to believe there's no God. Foolishness to discount his biblical principles. And I will even submit to you that the reason our nation is in the condition it is in, is because we have drifted from those biblical principles.

We think we're wise, and we're becoming very foolish. Everything falls apart. Every topic out there, think of all those topics.

Healthcare, borders, President, Republican, Democrat, this, that, the budget, all of those have biblical answers. They all do. And when you begin to drift from those answers, chaos begins to enter in.

So that's the context. And then we pick up right at 1 Corinthians 3.21. So Paul says, therefore, and the reason I read the beginning is you want to know what the word therefore is there for, obviously. Therefore, let no one boast in men.

Basically, don't boast in what the world boasts in. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Now remember, the week prior to last week, people were saying, I'm of Paul.

I'm a follower of Paul. Or another way, I'm a follower of Cephas. Or I'm a follower of this.

And don't we do that even locally in our churches? Well this is my church. This is my path. And we're like, we're better.

It's like this competition. And thank God for all Bible-believing churches. It's really not a competition.

It's complimenting one another. But all of us can fall into that category or camp sometimes of defending our theological positions or wanting to elevate our favorite speaker. But Paul said, all things are yours.

As heirs of Christ Jesus, all things that God gives us are yours already. There's no need to boast. And even on that note, I wrote this this morning so I wouldn't forget.

Anything we do for God is because of God's sheer grace. And you run into people, you'll see people out there like, oh they're so anointed. Look what they're doing for God.

Don't ever think for one minute that they are doing that. That they get the credit. Look at them.

They've got, they're such a great person. Such great character. Such great, now they might have character qualities, but it's God's Holy Spirit working through them.

That's why we don't elevate man. We elevate Christ and what he does through man. So he said, all things are yours in Christ Jesus.

And you are Christ. And Christ is God's. So again, don't elevate men.

You are all heirs of God's blessings. Matthew Henry said this, in our opinion of ministers, as well as all others, we should be careful to avoid extremes. Apostles themselves were not to be overvalued, for they were ministers.

They were ministers, not masters. They were stewards, not lords. They were servants of Christ and no more.

And I like it, there's a book John Piper wrote many years ago, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals. It was written to pastors about being CEOs and running a church like a Fortune 500 company. And we have this, oh look at that, it's just servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of the same body. So what people do in the hospital homes and ministering and helping others are no different than what I'm doing here. At the end of the day, God doesn't go, wow, that Shane really did a great sermon.

He's, boy, I really look at him up here. And these other people, what are they? No, no, no. It's all, what has he gifted us to do? What has he given us the ability to do? A single mom caring for her children, raising them, ministering to others and doing things for God is no different.

We're all ministers of the gospel. And then 1 Corinthians 4, he goes right into, let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. So he's basically saying, listen, we're just stewards of Christ and we steward the mysteries of God.

What I think he means by that is not a mystery in the sense of, ooh, you can't know it. There's a mystery out there. But there are a lot of things about God that we just don't know.

We steward what we do know. We steward what the world calls a mystery. And many Christians even, the mystery of God, meaning God has not revealed it yet.

So we are simply stewards of what God has revealed and even the things he hasn't revealed, the nature of God, the character of God and all its complexity. We still preach those things. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

So what is Paul doing here? He's building up a case because these people are critiquing him and judging him and putting him down. Did you know people put down the apostle Paul? So you don't feel too bad when people put you down because they put down the apostle Paul. They put down the disciples.

Much of the fights and the struggles in the early church were over Paul's authority. Paul, not his character, but his authority. Who are you? We don't like this new teaching.

And really it wasn't a new teaching. It was just confirming what the Old Testament had already been proclaiming for many years. It was a fulfillment of that.

The New Testament, ever think the New Testament, Old Testament different? It was God must have changed his mind in the New Testament. Well, that was the Old Testament. Oh, thank God.

It's just all one story. God's operating the same way. Thank God for Jesus though, because that satisfied God's wrath, was satisfied on the cross, the beauty of the cross.

It's where judgment meets mercy. That's why I just heard an example of this. Paul Washer actually gave it yesterday on one of his videos, that if you knew somebody was guilty and they were a terrible person and they went to court and that judge just let them go, that would not be a good judge.

Same thing with God, his goodness, his holiness. So he can't just, well, just let it go. Why can't God just let things go? No, that it requires justice.

Hence the justice of God, sending Christ mercy and grace meet on the cross. It's a wonderful picture of God's attributes coming together. But it is interesting here.

He said it is required of stewards. Now, are you a steward of God? Let me do this for you. If you are a believer, you are a steward of God.

You are an ambassador, you are a servant, you are a minister of God. Maybe not in the ordained sense, but we're all ministers for God. So here's one major requirement.

It's amazing he doesn't go into a lot of other things, but it's all found in this word. It's required that stewards, that you and I are to be found faithful. Faithful, what does that mean? Well, I'm glad you asked.

Loyal, there's a whole bunch of words. I just chose the top three. It means to be loyal, constant, and steadfast.

Don't you like steadfastness? Don't you like those who are constant and steadfast and faithful and true to their word? Boy, have we changed three or four decades ago. Even when I was little, growing up, my dad, I've told you before, their contracts were not pieces of paper. They were this.

Handshake, a man's word meant a lot. You didn't sign here. Why? I already said it.

There's something about that. It's loyal, it's constant, it's steadfast. So if you're here this morning and you're saying, you know, I don't even know where to start, Shane.

I've drifted off course. I'm just lost somehow. I haven't been going in a good direction.

I haven't been leading, maybe leading my family. I just am lost. Return to this word loyal, steadfast, get back to God's word, and God will honor those who are steadfast and loyal.

It's interesting. God told the prophet Micah in the Old Testament, he said, what does the Lord require of you, oh man? What does God require? Just to love mercy, to love justice, and to walk humbly before your God. And so that's a very simple way of getting back on track this morning.

You could say, you know what? I haven't, God, been faithful in these areas. I've been drifting. I haven't been a good steward.

I'm coming back. I'm going to be faithful with that loyal, constant, steadfast. When we say something, we mean it.

And that's a hard part for churches sometimes. When you have employees, you can make this point a little you'd be amazed at how many people say, I'll help. I'll be there.

Guess what happens? Now this church is great. Let me get that out there. But many churches I've been to, right? I'll sign up for children's ministry.

I'll sign up to go serve there. I'll sign up to do that or I'll be there. And then what happens when the day comes? It's almost like nowadays we say something and it really doesn't mean I'll be there.

It means, well, I'll check my schedule when the day gets there and then I'll make a decision. But God's word is clear. Make the decision now and stick by your word.

Blessed is the man who swears to his own hurt, meaning I said it, I must perform it. Maybe that's a good word for someone this morning. God will honor that.

God will bless it. He doesn't bless us backing out of our word. And that's why I learned a long time ago, be careful what I commit to.

Yes, I'll be there means, yes, I'll be there. Many cases and many times. Unless, of course, you know, obviously if you're sick or something comes up, emergency.

But it's required that stewards be faithful. And we're not seeing that a lot in the church. People aren't loyal or constant or steadfast.

And then in verse three, but with me, but with me, Paul's saying, it's a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. So Paul's saying, it's a pretty funny thing.

You're judging me. I don't even judge myself, for I know of nothing against myself. Paul says, I haven't done anything worthy of judgment.

Yet I am not justified by this. In other words, it doesn't matter what I say. But he who judges me is the Lord.

He knows my heart. Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsel of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

So it appears that Paul was being wrongly judged. And I actually wrote on this, if you Google, doesn't the Bible say judge not? It'll probably come up on my website. Doesn't the Bible say judge not? Because there's that view out there that, well, we shouldn't judge.

You Christians are a bunch of judges. And I hope you see what's going on in our nation. It's not necessarily the Christian that people are upset at.

It's the Christians who dare to speak what God's word says. Going forward, if there's persecution, you'll be fine if you say, well, I'm a Christian and that's it. Do what's good for you.

Worship your God. I'll worship my God. Let's just all get along.

You're not going to upset anybody. But if you start to say, hey, God's word is clear on these issues, we're actually called to discern between right and wrong. So you are, as a believer, we are actually to judge.

When Jesus said in Matthew 7, judge not, he goes on to say, first remove the plank from your eye, and then you can judge your brother. So the whole point he's addressing there, ironically, is a critical spirit. We are supposed to discern.

We are supposed to. And it's amazing all these corporations trying to silence Christians, trying to silence the voice of truth. And you see what's happening in Los Angeles.

They have the big gay pride parade, and they have just pride in large letters. As long as you don't say anything, you're okay. But if you start to say, hey, God's word has something to say on this, you're not to

judge me.

That's what you'll hear often. Who are you to judge? The Bible says, judge not. No, actually it says, I am to judge.

Once I get my heart right, look at my own sin, my own failings, my own faults, and take that to the cross, and then discern between what is right and wrong. Jesus had a lot to say on discerning between what is right and wrong. So we are to judge things that are clear, but not rush to judgments.

The irony is, the flesh wants to rush to judgments. Oh, did you see that person? Did you see what's going on? And rushing to judgments. And I'm hoping to do a sermon in the future entitled The Devil Whisperer, because that's what he does, doesn't he? He whispers.

Everything could be fine. You see someone, maybe they're kind of in a bad mood. Do you ever get in a bad mood? We don't know all the background.

We don't know what they just went through, the phone call they might have received. And instead of the devil whispering, oh, I'm sure they're going through a difficulty, just give them grace. What does he whisper? See? See? They don't like you.

They're arrogant. They're mean-spirited. They must have it out for you.

What kind of Christian are they? And do you ever fuel that? And it starts to lead to more anger, more animosity. That's why that phrase comes from, don't work yourself up. Because you can get your thoughts worked up.

And that's why the Bible says to take those thoughts captive and err on the side of grace. Now, unless it warrants, you know, some looking into. But many times, the devil's going to plant those seeds.

Why didn't they get back to me? Why aren't they responding to me? Why did they say that? Isn't it funny how we often hear those comments and we make those comments, which I actually agree with them, is it's not good to communicate certain things on email or text. Praise God, right? Oh, learn some lessons the hard way, right? But often the enemy will use those and plant those seeds. Did you see how that was? Are they being rude? Are they being short? Are they mad? And then here we go.

Here goes the firecracker, getting ready to explode. So that's how, that's why as you see, you see mature Christians, I can spot them a mile away. They've learned to take their thoughts captive.

Haven't they? I'll brag on some people. I'll brag on my mom since she's not here at this service. Talk about someone who just lets it go for a season.

Like, doesn't that make you mad? Well, I'm sure they didn't mean it. I'm sure that wasn't, I'm sure they're having a bad day. I'm like, oh, wow.

Now that can, that can be, your blessing can also be your curse too, if you're just always naive and never addressing anything. And what do they call it? It's just, it's just sweeping under the door, Matt. And we never, that's not biblical either.

It's hard to find that balance. But Paul was being wrongly judged. So here's the key we can learn so far.

Don't allow opinions to sidetrack you, but learn from constructive criticism. There's an old adage out there, I think about a hundred years old or so that I've seen a few times. Most of us would rather be ruined by praise than helped by criticism.

I don't think you caught that, so I'm going to repeat it. Most of us would rather be ruined, ruined by praise than helped by criticism. If all you get is praise, it will ruin you.

I'm telling you right now, if all you get is praise, oh, oh, just praising you and praising you and never, never iron sharpening iron, you will not grow, you will not mature. Because what happened? You start to get puffed up. And then God will sometimes allow that constructive criticism to go in and sharpen and mold and shape us.

You have to be open for both. Now, boy, this could, this sermon could take a lot of rabbit trails. I'm hoping to get to this in a minute.

But what do you do when you're someone like myself who receives negative stuff every single day? Every day. Every day. And on some days it makes up for the whole year.

Well, two things. Number one is, who is it coming from? Where is it coming from? Of course you're going to upset our culture with these kind of messages. Hello? And right now at 10 a.m., the messages from a few weeks ago are airing in New York on top of the Trump Towers yesterday and today.

You think those are going to just all positive stuff? So first, you look at who's it coming from. Who's saying that? Number one. Number two is, how are they saying it? How are they saying it? See, when someone says, hey, we appreciate West Side Christian this.

Have you ever thought about this? It kind of comes across wrong. Or, oh, the tone. See, the tone, the demeanor.

You can tell they might truly care. But also, you would look at those who respect you, who you know, those closest to you, those who love you will speak the truth into your life. So, for example, since I'm being transparent and the target this morning, I would look towards those who care about the church, care about the ministry, and would want to truly offer constructive criticism.

I've shared this before. I think a few weeks back, the lady who transcribes these sermons puts them out on paper and transcribes them and helps with editing, a lot of different things. She said, Shane, the Lord put on my heart really strong and I hope you take this okay.

And I'm like, oh no, I'm reading the email. What is this? She goes, but when I'm transcribing the sermons, different things. It sounds like you're really pushing the 6 a.m. worship and you're forcing people to be there.

And they might be coming for the wrong reasons or wrong motives. It's like you're really just driving that point home. So, I didn't get mad.

I said, you know what? You're probably right. That's something I don't want to do. Now, I'll still encourage it, but I don't want to push it on people.

And what happens is I get so excited, so passionate about something. I'm like, come on, guys, you've got to be here. This is life changing.

God really spoke to me this morning on the altar. But it becomes where it's pushing it too much. So, those kind of things.

Spouses can offer good constructive feedback. And hey, you're this with the kids or you seem short. So, you have to be open for that.

So, most of the criticism out there, I won't even look at. I won't even read. It doesn't really, you know, it's like you have two inch thick skin now, like a rhinoceros after the years go by.

It's expected to do that. That's what expected to happen. YouTube comments.

Oh, my Lord. How can people cuss and say such hateful things on YouTube? Nobody edits these things. And something you might find in your bulletin when you get home, if you're signed up for it, is we sent out this morning, I had an almost an hour discussion with a Democrat politician.

The audio was just sent to you. We talked about the issues from borders to Trump's past, to security, to healthcare, to abortion. Is that going to cause a little bit of negative? But see those, I should expect it.

There's a battle. There's a war. There are enemies.

Yes. So, you prepare yourself many times. But I'm assuming a lot of that doesn't have to do with the majority of people listening or in this room.

But some of this does. I like what happened with Dwight Eisenhower. You remember him? General Dwight Eisenhower.

When he was about to implement a battle plan, this is well known, he would take it to his critics. And someone said, why are you wasting your time showing your plans to your critics? Instead, take them to your advisors. He answered, because my critics helped me find the weakness in the plan so I can correct them.

I wonder if anyone's ever thought, that's why I often talk to the other side. That's why I talk to the other side on issues to find out, ah, let me see where you're coming from so I can better fence in our argument. I can better understand where you're coming from.

Isn't that what those of you who have a sales background, isn't that what you do? You anticipate the argument before it comes. And the same thing applies to us. Now when Paul's talking about judgments here, it's very interesting.

He talked about three different judgments. And William Barclay, in his commentary, that's a good commentary, I'd recommend that, he speaks of three judgments every man must face. He must face the judgment of his fellow man.

An ancient philosopher used to say, there are only two people who can tell you the truth about yourself. You ready for this one? No, it's not your spouse, although they can. It's an enemy who has lost his temper, and a friend who loves you dearly.

Because when a person loses their temper, boy, doesn't it come out. You're never there for me. You're always busy.

You're always on your phone. You always put work first. We know.

It comes out. Not everything that comes out of a person's mouth is false when they're angry. Many times it's stuff they've been holding back and holding down.

And it comes out. And also a friend who loves you dearly. And then number two, he must face the judgment of himself.

Paul knew very well that a man's judgment of himself can be clouded by self-satisfaction and by pride and by conceit. Doesn't, can it? We can't leave our judgment up to ourself. Because what clouds our judgment? Self-satisfaction, pride, and conceit.

Because we're not often open for constructive criticism. However, the Bible doesn't let us off the hook. But in a very real sense, every man must face his own judgment.

We must face our own judgment. That's why Paul would, in one of the epistles, he would say, examine yourself. Possibly in Corinthians, if we keep reading, Paul said, examine yourself.

Examine yourself. Is Jesus Christ really in you? Self-examination. Peter writes on examining self.

Look at your heart. Look at what, what are you allowing into your mind and what the words you're speaking. Many times, I believe my sermons are designed to help us examine ourselves.

When it hits, oh, that hit, that hurt. Why? Because examination hurts. And also, finally, he must face the judgment of God.

We must face the judgment of God. God is the final, God has the final say, the final judgment for two reasons. Here's why.

Only God knows all the circumstances. He knows the struggles a man has had. He knows the secrets that a man can tell no one.

He knows what a man might have sunk to and also what he might have climbed to. And God also knows the motives. Here's the key.

Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention. That's why Paul would also say, who are you to another servant? To his own master he stands or falls. So that type of judgment, we're not to go around judging other servants of God and having this pious attitude, this critical heart and always judging and looking at the wrong and being sin sniffers.

That's where that comes from. Can you, can you smell the sin in here? I, what, is it over here? I think it, want me to walk down? Man, there's a lot in here. He says remove that judgment, judgmental, I can have some fun with that one, but I'm, I'm not going to go there.

Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention. Listen, everyone in this room, this is a wake-up call. If we've been playing games with God, it needs to end today.

If we've been fooling man, fooling man by our actions or by not saying something or by saying something and, and having this facade, and look, I've got everyone fooled. I'm living in sin, but I've got everyone fooled. No, what a man sows, he will reap.

It will be exposed. And when it's exposed, it's a lot worse. See, there's something interesting that happens when a person comes clean and says, you know what? I haven't been honest.

I've been struggling in this area and I need to just confess and repent. There's mercy and there's grace and something beautiful happens. But if you get caught or found out, all hell breaks loose.

Marriage can, marriages can be saved. Things can be saved when confession takes place. So let me just, I'm sure you're wondering, when should we answer our critics? Well, I'm getting to there, getting to that.

I actually wrote an article, you can Google that as well. When should we answer our critics? If you don't have it in hand, I'm not sure if you do. I think you do, but those listening will not have it on hand.

When should we answer our critics? Well, we cannot always give people an answer. Just remember that. You cannot always answer everyone.

If that's what I did, I would be busy every day answering people. But there are times when we should answer our critics, answer those who have questions. Now let me say this up front.

I do have concerns about the attitudes behind some of the judgmental websites, vindictive videos and pharisee blogs that are out there. You know those armchair quarterbacks, they write, you know, standing for the truth and they just blast everyone. They've got such an arrogant, critical heart.

They not only throw people under the bus, they like driving the bus. And this is a strong rebuke to those. I know people like that are listening.

They listen to these types of messages because they love the truth, but they don't like humility. They like to pull everybody down, every church down, every worship team down, every worship song down. If it doesn't fit right within their doctrinal parameters, you are on their hit list, you've got a target.

And that's not what I'm talking about. Also, I think it's important to discuss when we don't answer before we talk about when we do answer. Thom Rainier, it actually spells his name T-H-O-M.

Thom Rainier, he writes tremendous articles on church growth and church issues. He said, don't answer your critics when you have already repeatedly responded. Amen.

This happens to me all the time. Somebody will ask me a question, what Bible translation is best? Or why do you use a new King James? It's from hell. You can only use a King James.

Well, here's an hour long message I did on translations. Yeah, but blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Okay, well, here's this.

Yeah, but this guy's just like, he's never going to stop. Why? Because often they're contentious. They're not looking for answers.

They're looking to fight. So that's very important. If you've already responded, you've clarified.

I'm sorry, sir, but I must move on. And to be honest with you, people listening here, well, I'm honest with you the whole sermon, but this is an extra, extra, extra, extra honest point. This is one reason why I just don't feel led often to respond on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, podcast, YouTube.

Like how do I disable all these comments? And people say, no, you can't do that. And then nobody will pay. People all want to comment.

But this is why I don't, because many people are not sincerely looking for answers. I'd say one out of 10. They just want to go back and forth and get their point across.

And who has time for that? So that's very important. If you've already responded and you've already clarified. Does this happen in family issues? Family dynamic.

There's some head shaking on this one. This happens in family dynamics a lot. We've already talked about this two or three times.

We've went through this. This is it. I can't keep going back and forth.

We've clarified it. Also, don't answer when the critic intends harm. That's a given.

Also, don't answer when the critic will not reason with you. That pretty much goes back to number one, what I was saying. They're not open.

They don't want to reason. When the criticism attacks your character, see, it often shifts. They'll be at a point on something, and then they shift your character.

Like I saw one recently. I just deleted it from YouTube, even though I don't usually see them. He's like, on this one video, he goes into this whole rant and says, you're only in it for the money.

I'm like, do you know my past? Do you know he just uploaded all my books for free as free downloads? Do you have any clue? Now he goes from a question about a sermon topic to now you're just in it for the money. You're misleading people. You're like, what's this guy's problem? Where's he come up with that? See, they just throw it out there.

Just throw it out there. You have to use wisdom here. We're really not supposed to attack a person's character, unless you have valid reasons, of course.

But if you're talking about different issues, you don't switch the issue and then go to your character, necessarily, if it doesn't apply. Here are some points to consider when answering our critics. Ready for this? Or do you want to do this next week? No? Okay.

Number one, when they are genuinely seeking answers. We see this from Paul, as he was writing in different areas. When they are genuinely seeking answers.

What happens a lot, especially, this won't apply to a lot of people here, but in the Christian community, some of the leaders out there that a lot of us know, they don't answer their critics often. And they're proud of it. And I think, for good reason, they don't need to.

But sometimes, they often say, well, Jesus didn't. He just did ministry. Well, no, he did.

He actually responded quite often to people. And when he was hit on the cheek, he didn't turn the other cheek. He said, what evil have I done? Why did you slap me? He confronted often.

He didn't remain silent all the time. Other times, he spoke out. He clarified.

He lovingly challenged them. They would say something. He said, oh, you stiff-necked people.

You try to do this and try to do that. And he would clarify things. So it's okay to do that.

But you have to make sure God's in it. You're not excited about clarifying that. So when they're genuinely seeking answers, it's good to respond to your critics.

Let me tell you one thing. I hope this is okay. I might be getting myself in trouble here this morning.

But I've got letters on this and emails. And one lady was actually very genuine. I explained it.

You know, sometimes when I get fired up, you know where I'm going with this one, huh? Man, I'm just preaching. I go, oh, Lord, help us. People respond.

They say, you're taking the Lord's name in vain. You're blaspheming. No, I'm just saying, Lord, help us, Lord.

Oh, God, help us. Lord, help us. That's not taking the Lord's name in vain.

So I really, okay, Lord. So I send it to the elders too. Hey, is this, is this, is this, I'm open.

Is this taking the Lord? I mean, do I need to work on this? I just get excited and God help us. Oh Lord, we help. This is not like saying OMG or something derogatory.

I've had to work on that too. People call me on that one. You can't say, oh my God, that's like, oh yeah, okay, hold on.

I go from construction, potty mouth to this. Come on, give me some grace here. Things might slip out sometimes.

You used to communicate with curse words. Go get that. It was, and I know Spanish curse words, a lot of them from telling people things in my past.

So there's not a lot of grace though in the critics. So when I do that, oh Lord, oh God, it's not taking his name in vain. It's calling out, God, I need you.

God, oh God, have mercy on us. And the person responded and was actually, oh, that makes sense. Now I understand.

So, but you have to, but see, here's what I, what's so hard to, I've got 60, some under 60, 60 minutes. Every word I say is being scrutinized. Every scripture reference I give is being double checked and triple checked.

And I, they let me know that wasn't Proverbs, that was Psalm. So thank you. Every, every nuance, every new story, every year, I quote, everything I say is under a microscope and I'm not going to live worried about the opinions of men.

I'm going to come here and I'm going to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I'm not going to, oh, oh, oh, oh. But we learn from it.

I remember my wife and brother, you say, every time you're like, um, um, um, um, um, um, um, um, I count a hundred times. I, eight years ago, like, okay, I've got to work on that. Pronunciation and L, you know, you, you develop into the person who you are through constructive criticism.

Right, right, right. People said, you say right too much. Okay.

I've got this whole list of things. I say this too much. I don't say this enough, enough.

I don't, and you just, you have, you know, you, you, you work on what you need to work on, but you also don't allow these things to really box you in. You grow and you mature, but I'm, I'm under a microscope on everything I say, theologically speaking, historically speaking. So there's, there's, there's criticism and you can learn from it.

You should, I think you should learn from your critics. So when they are genuinely seeking answers, number two, when your influence warrants it, silence is not always the best option. Sometimes it can be a smoke screen for cowardliness and passivity.

Many people say, oh no, I'm just not gonna respond to my critics. Well, that's sometimes because you're a coward or they're right and you don't know what to say. Isn't it interesting how people don't want to talk about it when they know they're wrong.

Isn't it? I often say the truth invites scrutiny. Let's, let's, let's talk about the truth. Side note, interesting point.

Many of you watch the Fox News clips that I go, that I'm on sometimes. And Fox has asked me a few different times, send us somebody who will actually debate and, and stand up for what they believe. Because all these people back out.

There's a liberal woman professor in New York. She's tried to get her on three. I don't want to talk about it.

I don't know. If you have the truth and you're right, wouldn't you want to talk about it? So that's the one thing you'll see people backing out, cowardling away. They don't want to talk about it.

You'll, you'll go to cults or other things, religions that let's, hey, can we talk about it? I mean, the number one thing I hear when I, when I talk to say, say Mormons, for example, hey, let's talk about our differences. Oh no, you go talk to my bishop. Go talk to my elder.

I don't want to talk about it. Well, if you have the truth and I'm on my way to hell and I don't know your God, wouldn't you want to share that with me? Because I think there's something demonic behind these things that knows it can't be challenged. When you're bringing the truth out, here's what the truth says.

Many people do not want to debate the truth. They want to pontificate. What does that mean? Speak eloquently and throw out all these, these great ideas.

And, and I, and I like the guy I debated yesterday. You see in your email, Chris is his name. Young guy.

He's for LGBT rights and, and run, ran for office. But half the time I'm sitting there going, what is he talking about? Like all these big swelling words, like, you know, Jesus would, and all these things. I'm like, that's not even the Bible.

He said Jesus wept in his mother's womb. He didn't weep in his mother's womb. He lep, lep.

L, not W. But a lot of these guys, there's just, there's just so many words. It's like an atheist, you're talking, well, philosophically speaking, the nuances of the universe and, and through the cataclysmic years of scientific exploration and discovery, we found that, like how, how did, how did we get from nothing? And then they go on for this five minute little, I'm like, I have no clue what you just said. And I mean that, I, maybe it's my, my mental capacity, but I have no idea what they're talking, because it just gets, doesn't make sense.

Great swelling words. But the truth, while we say here it is, here's the truth, let's talk about it. Let's talk about these issues.

So when your influence warrants it, in other words, if you're a father, if you're a leader, moms, if you're in the workplace and you're leading or your, your influence warrants a, a, a, a, a, a, you have to answer your critics. It warrants it. And that's why I had to write an article recently.

I don't know if we passed it out. I think it's on my website. People started saying stuff about the church, even a few people locally, that I was against, I don't remember, against women or something.

And because we believe that, that, that women, that the, the role of elder, pastor, teacher, there's no, there's no critique. There's no character qualities for it. Paul doesn't talk about women in the position of a senior pastor, leader, elder.

But biblically speaking, we don't see that. So I had to clarify that because people were confused. You don't let women do things.

They can do whatever, everything. We promote women. We love women doing everything.

We don't look as we're better than, or we look as compliment. How is God using us? So we see that one position as an elder, pastor, lead pastor, guy in the, as the role male, male, a position of, of the male. Now, biblically speaking, you will not find women pastors.

You can look and you can look and you can look. There's no qualifications. There's no examples.

So we just look at the biblical. If God said, here's the qualifications for a woman pastor, I'd be the first to raise my hand and go, amen. But God created us a certain way.

And another question comes in, where, where are your positions on the gifts of the spirit? So we have to talk about the work of the Holy spirit. So if your influence warrants it, you have to let people know where you stand. Now, number three is a given when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

See, here's Paul's main thrust. This is why he would, he would speak up what we just read. And in the future, he would speak up because when the gospel, when the truth of the gospel is at stake, you speak up.

Did you say that always lead to God? You just need to speak up. Did you know I've said that many times and I still say it and people start going, Oh, is Shane shifting? No, think about it. Always lead to God.

Salvation judgment. Either way, you're going to, you're always will lead to God. I didn't say always lead to heaven.

You will, no matter what road you take, at some point you will face the judgment of God. Always do lead to God, but not what people think. Not to heaven.

At least the judgment, every path, every road at some point, no matter how errored, how crooked, they are going to stand after they get to the end of that road and stand in front of almighty God and be judged. And I shock people. They say, well, you know, Shane, all roads lead to God.

I mean, yeah, that's true. You believe that? Yeah. Yeah.

But you either hear well done thou good and faithful servant or depart from me. I don't even know you. What are you going to hear when you stand before God? Well, I've never thought about that.

Well, yeah, you will have to answer for what you did with Jesus Christ. That's the whole thrust of, that was something yesterday we talked about too. He said the whole, the message of Jesus is being nice to people.

I said, no, the message of the gospel is that we are lost. We need a savior. That's a good news.

When the gospel is at stake, you speak out and you clarify. Number four, when a lot of confusion surrounds our ministry. Okay.

If there's a lot of confusion, I'm really probably they'll never hear this, but this is mainly for some of those big churches out there in the United States that have a lot of confusion around their ministry, like the worship times and this fire tunnels and angel dust and angel globes and dust falling from the, just all this confusion and weirdness that is going on supposedly at their church. I think these people need to clarify, need to speak up. Silence is not a virtue in this case.

If there's a lot of confusion around your ministry and what's going on, let people know, clarify it. God is not a God of confusion, but do you know who is? The devil. He loves confusion and wants to avoid bringing light and clarity to questions surrounding our beliefs.

Have you ever noticed that? The devil doesn't like when we clarify our beliefs. He doesn't like when we speak the truth. He doesn't like to get friends who are at odds together again or families together again.

He wants to keep the whisper and he'll keep whispering those thoughts so we stay divided and stay apart. But God wants us to bring clarity to our lives and to our beliefs and our thoughts. And then number five, I'll close with this final point.

When scripture or godly counsel encourages us to do so. When does scripture encourage us to do so? Well, there's an interesting, we'd have, we could spend quite a while on this, but there's an interesting scripture in the Bible. It's actually, it's actually very similar.

It says, answer a fool according to his folly. Oh, okay. I get to do that.

Wait. And then it says, answer not a fool according to his folly. Well, which one's right? Both.

Because there are times, you know, when I need to answer this fool according to his folly. I need to put him in place. I need to, I need to answer, they're destroying their life.

They're being foolish. I need to answer this person according to their folly. Meaning the answer I'm going to give them is based on the lifestyle they're leading, based on the people they're hurting.

I'm going to answer them according to their folly. I'm going to tell them what the fruit is of their bad choices. But there comes a point we all know, don't we? Where you answer not a fool according to his folly.

He's not going to listen. I've been there before. I don't have peace about talking to them, and I'm not going to answer them.

There's no cut and dry answer on that. When I, when you answer someone, I believe a lot goes into play. Number one, did you pray? Really pray? Because the more I pray, the more peace I receive.

Or less peace. Are you, are you reacting? Or are you responding? Come on, we know that, the difference. What's reacting? I'm going to email them right back.

That's reacting. Responding is, I'm going to, I think I'm going to sit on that email or text till tomorrow. Boy, how many times have I deleted that when I've slept on it? You come back to you're like, oh, so glad that didn't go out.

That would have not been good. So are you praying? Are you responding in love, waiting on it, and not moving too quickly? And of course, the inner conviction, the inner peace of the Holy Spirit, I believe people are directed, can be directed by the Holy Spirit. Not against the Word of God.

Not superseding the Word of God. But I believe that they're, the Holy Spirit directs us. He leads us.

He guides us. He opens doors. He shuts doors.

He prompts us. These are all biblical principles. This is all biblical truth throughout, especially the book of Acts, where it says the Holy Spirit forbade Paul.

He didn't allow Paul to go there. The Holy Spirit did such and such. And I'm not one of those people who put the Holy Spirit and leading us above scriptural truth.

I believe we have the Bible as our primary mechanism for making choices. We have the principles. We have the truths.

It's all laid out. All laid out. But sometimes it doesn't tell me and urge me and push me, go talk to that person.

Go talk to that person right now. Don't leave this door. Go talk to that person.

I'm not going to get any rest until I go talk to that person. It's the Holy Spirit leading and leading and leading. Funny story.

Let me just tell you what time we have. There's a store. I'm not going to say what store.

Last year when I did the Health Expo conference, they were not going to put out any flyers. And they let me know why. Biblical, biblical answers at a church.

Okay. Well, the funny thing happened. This year, this year, not only can we put them out, but they're going to donate some things.

And I was just, here's the irony, is a year ago, I'm like, you know what, I'm never coming back here again. I was reacting, right? I'm like, okay, I can play that game too, flesh. I'm never coming back here again.

I'll show them. But, okay, no problem. Well, now two of those employees come here.

I think one's here at this service, the first service. We've given gift cards and food cards and helped some of the employees there have gone through difficult time. They've seen how the church has reached out to others, and now they're excited about being part of it.

But had I did what I wanted to do, and I fought for it a few days, well, I'm just never, I'm going to tell you how much business you're going to be losing. Do you know how much business you're going to be losing a year because of that? It happens here too. Once in a while, when people leave upset, they say, and before they let you know they're leaving, they say this, and I'm a tither.

Well, don't go then. If you don't send that check, we're falling apart. But it happened.

It was a few years ago when we canceled our Saturday night because we couldn't do the whole, we just couldn't do Saturday night and Sunday morning. It was too much for staff, worship team. And the person, they got upset.

They got mad at me. Like, they're still mad. Three years later.

Like, I didn't do anything. I don't know. Like, oh, there must be something.

I can't believe you guys did this. And we were good givers. We were tithers.

I don't know what to do with that. Because see, that's not a good thing to say. It shows that kind of sometimes we're lashing out.

Two closing points. I want to talk to those. Are you being taunted or ridiculed this morning? Are you being taunted? Are you being ridiculed? Is someone harassing you? The enemy harassing you? Anyone? Taunting, criticizing you? It's happening to me right now.

People send me letters with no name, no address. You think we're going to answer those or take those seriously? Constant, constant, constant. So here's what Micah 7 says.

Rejoice not against me, oh my enemy. In other words, he's rebuking the enemies that rejoice. He said, when I fall, I shall arise.

And when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be the light upon me. Remind your enemies of that. Remind yourself of that.

Oh, though you rejoice over me, my enemies, God will raise me up. I will rise up again. God says, get up and fight again.

Christian, believer, get up and fight again. That's a good word for our culture. Don't get discouraged.

We're just called to get up and draw the line. Do I feel defeated and discouraged a lot? Absolutely. It seems like the media is against us.

It seems like political parties are against us. It seems like Hollywood's against us. Guess what? They are.

They are. It's enormous. It's enormous.

All these major corporations caving into political correctness. And sometimes we stand here like Elijah and say, Lord, I only am left. And God says, oh, I have 7,000 prophets who have not bowed their knee to bell, nor have they kissed his image.

I've got my remnant. I've got my people. I haven't called you to get discouraged.

I've called you to pick up arms. I don't care if you see any difference. I don't care if you don't see any type of change.

You are to call to be that salt and to be that light. Rejoice not against me, oh, my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise again because the Lord holds me up with his right hand.

And I love Psalm 23 as well. He prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies. What does that mean? God blesses, he sustains, and he strengthens you in the midst, in the presence of your enemies.

See, often we want to run. Oh, just go run. Get away from them.

God says, no, you stay there. You stay there and you hold the ground. And I'm going to build this abundant meal right in front of them.

They're going to watch you. Take in my blessings. They're going to watch me sustain you and strengthen you right in the presence of your enemies.

God likes to mock sometimes. God says, I will mock your enemies. I will fight for you.

I will strengthen you. Go sit down and just start to eat. Have you ever eaten? Have you ever just eaten in the presence of your enemies? Like, I don't care, I'm eating.

This happened to me about, I don't know, five or six years ago. I could tell this guy was full of a devil. And I'm trying to eat.

And he's like, you're just in it for the money. Oh, you preachers. I'm just trying to eat.

And the more I ignored him and just ate my whatever, the madder he became. And the enemies will just watch. God bless you.

They get so mad because you just keep your mouth quiet. Keep your mouth silent. And you work, you minister for God.

You keep your Christian faith, your Christian character. And God says, right in the midst of your enemies, right when life gets challenging and difficult, they think you're going to fall. And actually, you still stand strong.

You still stand there in the midst of adversity. That's why God said, I will prepare a table for you in the midst of your enemies, the presence of your enemies. Forks, knives, spoons, soup, five-course meal.

They're going to see the blessings of my hand upon you. Did you know that the absence of warfare may mean that there's no battle? Have you ever thought about that? The absence of warfare means there's no battle. So the fact that you might be having warfare in your life could be an indication that you're doing

things for God.

Conversely, if there's no spiritual battle, and I run those people off, and they say, you know, my life is very easy. My boss loves me. Everyone on Facebook loves me.

Hollywood loves me. CNN, NBC all love me. I'm like, hmm, why do they love you? Because you're not stirring the pot.

You're not standing up for biblical truth. Because anytime you stand up for biblical truth, the enemies of God will hate you as well. Jesus said, if they hated me, they're going to hate you as well.

We don't look for that. Please don't misunderstand. I don't want anybody leaving here going, ah, I hope you hate me.

No, we want the world to love us and see God's heart in us. And then Psalm 27, and now my head shall be lifted above my enemies all around me. Therefore, I will offer sacrifice of joy in this tabernacle, in his tabernacle.

You can see and read the rest there. And now my head shall be lifted up. In other words, if you read this in the context, there's enemies surrounding.

God's going to lift his head up above his enemies. And as a result, there should be joy in this place. That word just stuck out this week, joy in his tabernacle.

Shouldn't Christians be the most joy-filled people? Why are we the most miserable? Think about that for a minute. Did you know that we are millionaires, most of us, compared to the rest of the world? Unless you live off \$3 a month and have dirt floors and no running water and cockroaches and mice running through your house. I'm talking about billions of people live worse than we do.

We should be the most thankful. But why are we often the most unthankful, critical? This house isn't big enough. This three-car garage ain't cutting it.

My pension. If my Social Security isn't there for me, my retirement. No, I understand.

Of course, it'd be nice to have that. Don't get, don't misunderstand. But we get so negative.

Anybody complain about taxes? You pay more taxes a year than what most people make in a decade around the world. And God's really been just dealing with me on this area of joy, joy. If you have kids, you know your house can be difficult sometimes, right? There's not a sprinkler I'm not fixing, a glass I'm not picking up, neighbors I'm not talking with, broken stucco, window screens.

I just told my wife recently, I said, you know what? I'm just not gonna have a clean backyard for the next 10 years. I'm gonna stop trying. I'm gonna stop trying, just be thankful.

Make a mess. Because you know when it's gone, it's silence out there. You have a nice yard, but no more sound.

And you begin to realize what you missed out on. Thankfulness, joy. Maybe that's a good thing for the second service.

This message is taking a little different angle than the first. But being joy-filled. That's actually a fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love and peace and joy and contentment. All those things. So if those things are not happening in your life, that means something is quenching and grieving that joy.

And usually what is quenching that is self-centeredness. Uh-oh. Hear a pin drop.

But when it's not going good, when this is not my plans, this isn't how I thought, this isn't what I want, this is uncomfortable, we become critical. And we look at life through our lens. You're going to be miserable if it's all about you.

If it's always all about you. I'm preaching myself again. If it's only all about us, we're going to be miserable.

Because when it's about others and when it's about God's will, things get broken. Oh well. At least the kid's not broken.

We start to joy, we take joy in life. What about the joy of health and having your children and your vehicles and a church with air conditioning and being joy-filled. And Lord, thank you for a healthy marriage.

And maybe some people don't have that here. Well, thank you for health. Maybe some people don't have it here.

Well, thank you for running water and air conditioning. You know you can put on a dial 7-0 or 7-9 and it sticks on 79 degrees in your house. The people don't even know what that is.

They don't even know what an air conditioning unit is in other countries. There's so much reason. Refrigerator? A refrigerator that keeps things cold? Yeah, you just plug it in.

Plug it into what? Electricity. You don't have electricity. Think about these things.

So that's my hope, is that we just leave here joy-filled. Because you cannot worship God critical and bitter and try to worship God. You also can't be a joy-filled Christian if we have a critical spirit.

Now remember, I've opened up about this. Anytime you preach truth like this, you can run the risk of becoming critical. I mean, it just comes with the territory.

I see the love and wonderful things, but then I see, oh, look at where this direction we're going. School districts wake up. Politicians wake up.

And you become critical in trying to find that balance. But my joy, my strength is in the Lord. And bringing that to the foot of the cross every day in repentance.

God, help me. You can pray, help me, Lord, with my selfishness. Help me with my being angry and upset.

Lord, help me. God, let me just be joy-filled again. You can come out of that prayer closet, out of that time of worship, built up and encouraged again and filled with the joy.

You're walking around filled with the joy. Oh, the joy of the Lord is my strength. And then you go on the news.

Oh, joking but kind of not joking. Because isn't it true? We foster sometimes that critical spirit. Those we get around.

And let me close with this. Verse 23 of chapter 3, Paul said, and you are Christ's. You are God's.

You are Jesus Christ's. But are you? Some of you, I might be talking to one person, I don't know. Are you truly a follower, a believer in Jesus Christ? See, the beauty of the cross, people think of just, oh, sin.

Yes, the beauty of the cross, though, is where God's perfect justice meets perfect grace. What would you think of a judge that let a felon off that murdered people? What would you think of that judge? You say, oh, go ahead. He's a corrupt judge.

Why? Because it requires justice. So God just can't say, oh, just go ahead. Yeah.

It requires justice. So perfect justice meets the grace of God, the mercy of God and Jesus Christ on the cross, they collide. Justice and mercy, grace all meet.

That's what the beauty of the cross. And so many people, so many people are allowing the devil to continue to condemn and criticize and beat them down. If the devil's criticizing you, here's how you answer this critic.

You take it to the cross. Let Jesus fight your battle. Repent this morning.

Repent and believe in the gospel. That's all the Bible says. It's that simple.

People say it's that simple. Repent and believe. It's simple but not easy because the flesh says, I don't have to repent.

I'm a good person. Repentance actually means I see sin the way God sees it. I see that I'm in sin.

I'm a sinner. I can't stop sinning. I see that, God.

I repent. I acknowledge that and I embrace the cross. I need Jesus' sacrifice on the cross so I can stand before you someday, God.

I need that. That's the gospel. That's what repentance is.

See, so many people in the church know about Jesus intellectually. Ah, they have head knowledge but no heart interaction, no heart engagement. And God looks at the head or the heart.

I the Lord search the brain. I the Lord search the heart to give every man according to his works, according to his doings, the fruit of his doings, the fruit of his ways. I search the heart.

So what is your heart this morning? Have you been going through the motions? Kids, have you been relying on your parents? Salvation? I've had to talk to my kids about this and I'll continue to. Don't, don't trust my faith. Don't trust my faith.

Please, please don't look to me. Look to the cross. You're going to need, and I tell them, you're going to come to a point someday in your life where you're going to have to cry out to God.

You're going to have to own it. You're going to have to repent of your sin and trust in Jesus. I won't be with you on the day of judgment.

I won't be with you. Think about that. Kids, grandchildren, someday will face God.

Your children, your grandchildren will stand before God. Wouldn't that change the way we live and pray? If we could grasp that and hold on to that every day, it would, it would prioritize your day. Three hours of Netflix but we don't have time for a three-minute prayer.

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