

Are You A Hyper Critical Heresy Hunter

by James Jennings

This sermon focuses on the danger of being hypercritical and overly judgmental, leading to divisions, lack of joy, and hindering the Gospel's impact. It emphasizes the need for humility, love, and discernment in our interactions with others, cautioning against uncharitable judgments and critical spirits that can harm relationships and hinder spiritual growth.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 7:21, Romans 14:1, Matthew 7:1, Proverbs 17:9, Philippians 2:3, James 4:11

Topics: "Humility", "Discernment in Relationships"

Description

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Transcript

Go ahead and turn to Matthew chapter 23. And imagine with me that you are a parent with a daughter who's away at college. Speaking of imagining, I was just talking to Mark and his son, Josh, now has a son.

And I thought, man, time is really going by fast. So it's easy to imagine having a daughter at college, I trust. Some of us are going to be in that situation before we know it.

And let's say this is in the 1960s. One day you get a letter from your believing child. The university that she attends is a Christian school.

And your 19-year-old daughter, let's call her Elizabeth, she writes to you saying, Dad and Mom, at chapel today, the sermon was excellent. But oh, the hymns, the songs, they were awful. The words were too repetitive.

And the way they sang, it just seemed breathy and not genuine. I've approached the leadership about this issue again. So say you get that from your daughter, a letter.

And she kind of continues to criticize the hymns that were sung and the way in which they were sung. So as a parent, you're reading the letter. How do you respond to your daughter? Do you have enough information from your knowledge of her and what she wrote to know whether she is lacking in love right at this point in her life? Well, here's what one father said in response to his daughter who wrote something

similar, very similar to what I just described above.

And the daughter was Elizabeth Lloyd-Jones. And the father was David Martin Lloyd-Jones, the well-known preacher of Westminster Chapel. And this was always a very striking comment in a biography in the second volume on page 176.

This is what he says to his daughter who had a similar critique. Your attitude is not one that I can commend. Your duty is to show that your views and beliefs lead to a higher and a finer type of Christian life and living.

Then that will lead others to speak to you and find out to your secret. To start a division on odd points and to raise difficulties, especially in a matter like that of hymns, seems to me to be the worst possible approach. It gives the impression that you are intolerant and that you regard yourselves as heresy hunters.

Your duty, it seems to me, is to attend the services. If you find you cannot sing a hymn, just refrain from doing so. And then he goes on.

You must be aware of falling into what appears to be the common evangelical trap and snare, namely an over-punctiliousness about matters that are relatively unimportant and a tendency to neglect more vital matters such as love and charity. So Lloyd-Jones, as a father, recognized that his daughter was coming off as a heresy hunter. And that's what he wrote to her.

It's pretty remarkable, a very loving letter from a father and very direct. Fathers need to be direct with their children. We can't beat around the bush.

And she was falling into the trap of being over-punctiliousness. It's a hard word to pronounce. Over-punctiliousness.

And that's basically a big word that means paying too much attention to tiny details. That's what it means. So I want to think this morning, and turn to Matthew 23 as I mentioned, I want to think this morning about not being a hypercritical heresy hunter who neglects weightier matters.

And why am I bringing this message? It's not because I look out and see that this is a significant problem in our church. But there's always a danger of this characteristic creeping in our hearts. Especially since self-deception plays a big role in this.

As we see in Matthew 7, you can have a log in your eye and be totally blind. So you can be self-deceived, making it hard to recognize when this is taking place in your own life. And perhaps this sermon will help you recognize, and me recognize, subtle ways that it manifests itself in our own lives.

So I'm going to pray, and then we're going to read from Matthew 23. Well, Father, Lord, I do pray You can reveal to me and to different ones of my brothers and sisters areas in our lives where maybe this is an issue. And Lord, we ask You to show us such.

Lord, I can't make that happen while preaching. But Father, You can send Your Spirit to search men's hearts and to show us what we need to see. And so Lord, I pray that You would do that, that You would grow us in this area.

Please, in Jesus' name, Amen. So Matthew 23. Let's just start in verse 1. This is Christ.

The title rightly says, seven woes to the scribes and the Pharisees. Verse 1, Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples, the scribes and the Pharisees, they sit on Moses' seat. So do observe what they tell you, but not the works they do.

For they preach, but they do not practice. Then He says this in verse 4, They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and they lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the places of honor and the feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

And then skip to verse 23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe men and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law. And that was Lloyd-Jones' concern with his daughter.

Was there something in her spirit that was not right where she was neglecting weightier matters? She was focusing on something. It's not that it has no relevance at all, but he could recognize there was a spirit about her that was not right. Neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness.

These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. And then verse 24, you blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. We'll look at that in a minute.

But verse 25, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean. Amen.

Well, that is part of God's Word from Matthew 23. So these people, these Pharisees, which you've got to remember, Jesus is calling disciples to a new conduct. The religious leaders that they were under and were being impacted by, many of them, it was these Pharisees, right? Paul was even one of them.

This is kind of the conduct Christ is calling them out of. And here He's reproving this conduct in these Pharisees. And these were people who paid meticulous attention to certain details, yet they neglected weightier and more significant details.

And these people, look at verse 24, it says you blind guides. So that indicates what about these individuals? They were trying to be guides. These people were trying to direct traffic.

They were trying to have an influence on people. They weren't just sitting idly by. They were in the fray with religious opinions.

When there was a debate about something, they were right there. They wanted to guide. They wanted to direct.

They wanted to teach. But their influence was described as what in verse 13? Look at what their influence was leading to. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. So a guide who's supposed to get you into the kingdom doesn't end up making it himself, and in the process, the way he's leading you

actually keeps you out too. That's very terrifying.

He locks both you and him outside. What a terrible guide. He's supposed to get you in the door, not keep you both out perishing.

And we read, they tie heavy loads on people. What are some of the things they criticize Christ's disciples for? Not washing their hands? Very critical. Very judgmental.

So let's think about verse 24 right here. This is a well-known statement. And some versions... Notice when it says, you blind guides straining out a gnat.

That is very important. Some versions render it at a gnat. So that changes how you understand this verse.

Let's get an understanding of verse 24. Straining out a gnat basically involves filtering water or wine through a strainer before drinking it to purify it. Right? And that's the whole idea.

You blind guides straining out a gnat. I forgot to bring a strainer, but let's say you have a cup and you're pouring your wine in that cup, your drink in that cup. The strainer is going to pick up the gnats.

It's going to pick up other things so they don't go in the drink, so you don't end up drinking the gnats. Right? That's the whole idea. You're not wanting to drink the gnats.

And this custom, it was prevalent in the East, and it was adopted by the Pharisees as a measure to avoid consuming anything that ceremonially was unclean. Listen to these verses from Leviticus. Leviticus 11, 41.

Every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable. It shall not be eaten. A gnat falls under that category, right? So they shouldn't eat a gnat.

Listen to this. The camel also was unclean because it didn't have a divided hoof. Leviticus 11, verse 4. Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these.

The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, it is unclean to you. Do you see what Jesus is doing here? The Pharisee's about to drink from a cup. He strains it to remove what he does not want to drink.

He sees a gnat, and he's nauseated. He's nauseated at the thought of having that tiny insect, and so he makes this great valiant effort to keep that tiny insect from going inside of his drink. He keeps it out.

Yet, when he finds a camel in the drink, does he make the same effort to remove the camel from being consumed? No, he doesn't. He doesn't make the same effort. He drinks it down.

And the point is, think of how ridiculous it is if I'm up here and I'm taking attention to keep a gnat from being consumed, and yet I have a cup with a camel in it, and I'm drinking that with the camel in it. I mean, that's absolutely insane, right? And that's Christ's point here. He wants you to recognize how ridiculous they are.

They make a fuss about a little gnat being swallowed, but they don't hesitate to drink down a greater matter, a camel. An entire camel. So you understand what he's getting at right here.

This is a very shocking charge towards these Pharisees how they would strain out a gnat and not drink it, but they would go and swallow an entire camel. So let me put it another way. Imagine I'm taking you to the optometrist to have your eyes tested to see if you see clearly spiritually.

You sit down and you have two pictures on the wall. One's a gnat and the other is a camel. And they're life-size pictures, right? The picture of the camel is as big as the camel is, and the gnat is as big as a gnat is.

Very, very tiny. A gnat, I mean, it's barely noticeable, right? There could be gnats up here on the pulpit and you wouldn't recognize it. The only way you'd know is because I'm swatting myself or swatting the pulpit or whatever, but that's not how a camel is.

A gnat, it's not going to affect you in a great way. But a camel, that's a large mammal. It's known for its distinctive hump on its back.

It's strong. It's sturdy. It's capable of carrying heavy loads.

It's going to make a difference. Especially if you're drinking down that camel. It's going to make a greater difference on your digestive system than a gnat, right? Well, the doctor says, which one appears to be largest in proportion? He's checking your eyes.

How well do you see? And you say, oh, the gnat. I see clearly. It's huge.

The gnat, it's massive. The optometrist then says, wait, don't you see the camel? And you say, oh, the gnat is far bigger than that camel. Far bigger than that camel.

So what does the doctor write down? He doesn't even give you a prescription. He just says exactly what the Pharisees got from Christ. He says you're blind.

And there's no hope of fixing that because there's a heart problem. There's a heart issue. Why are they blind? They can't discern between matters of true importance, camels, and those that are relatively trivial, gnats, and their spiritual journey and their interactions with other Christians.

Right? They can't tell. They can't discern. So they don't just have stigmatism in the eye.

They've got a heart issue, a critical spirit towards matters that are really just not that important. Like Lloyd-Jones told his daughter, you want to show these people you've got a higher type of life. And if all they think about is your similarity to the Pharisees, that's not exactly going to compel them to follow this Christ.

We want 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient and kind, is long-suffering, it believes all things. We want those characteristics to be supreme in our life. That's what Paul prayed for the Philippians, right? He said, it is my prayer that your love would abound more and more with knowledge.

Knowledge is important, but that was not the supreme thing on the Apostle Paul's mind. And Lloyd-Jones, as a good father, recognized that in his own daughter. The great concern for his daughter wasn't more knowledge and more discernment, it was more love and actually displaying true Christianity to these people at her college.

So what about you and I? Can we discern between camels and gnats and nothings? One preacher said some things are camels, they're major, weighty matters with God. Other things are gnats, they're relatively trivial. Then other things are nothing.

They will never be asked of us at the judgment seat. We need to discern then what are camels and gnats and nothings and thus do business in the Kingdom of God accordingly. Many are birthed into the Kingdom of God with eyes trained on finding gnats.

I've shared this before, but many of you know I was an arrogant member of the Straining a Gnat Society of Reformed Believers in Southern Texas. For three years, I won their award for the most judgmental member. I had a great opinion about Christian rap to name one thing that I was willing to open my trap and speak about in a critical way and make others feel condemned for their partaking of that style of music.

I eventually saw the harm my membership was causing, that I was actually binding people up, so I resigned from the Straining a Gnat Society of Reformed Believers. The thing is, I didn't know I was a member of that society. You see, some of you might be members of that society here today and you don't know it because you're blind to it.

Some of us might have been a member of it and resigned and we rejoined and we don't even know it. But that is part of our conduct right now in the present. Now, you might be thinking, Lloyd-Jones told his daughter to not be a heresy hunter.

But you know what, James? It's not the same 50 years later. There's so much heresy in the land, someone's got to go hunt it. Right? People want to have that attitude.

Well, there's so much heresy, we've got to go hunt it. And I thought about the feral hogs, right? All these hogs. In Texas, thankfully, all the hogs that go and ruin farmland, you can go and shoot them, right? I was reading the other day about another state.

They don't even let you shoot the hogs. They say it's going to mess up their habitat or something. That's how some believers are.

They look at it and they say, look at the heresy. We've got to go get in the helicopter and get the AR-15 and shoot all of them dead and get rid of them so they don't destroy the land. Look, this message is not to say that we should not be people who form opinions about the conduct of others and of what is indeed evil and dishonoring to God.

We better be people who practice our discernment in that way. No doubt Lloyd-Jones wanted his daughter to do such. And I would even argue her own judgment of the music might have been an overflow of some discernment that her father had practiced during dinner time.

Kids are products of their parents. My children are products of me as a parent. And whatever interactions I have at the dinner time, I'm actually affecting my own children.

And so, you know, Elizabeth might have been affected by her dad in that way, but she was taking it too far. She was now having a spirit about her of hyper-criticism that Lloyd-Jones recognized, this is bad. This is really bad.

So many people, they try to accurately discern matters, but they end up disintegrating themselves while blasting others. They end up harboring an internal spirit that is not honoring to God. They see a little fire over a little matter, and while trying to put it out, they end up burning themselves to death and the other people in the process.

You see, that's kind of what we're seeing happen with the Pharisees. So, let's also turn to Matthew 7. Matthew 7. So brethren, this is something we've got to think about in our own lives. Is there a spirit about me in my zeal for truth to where I have become hyper-critical? And like Lloyd-Jones, I'm not displaying a higher degree of love, and I don't have a right balance of love, but my knowledge is constantly abounding more and more and more with all discernment and love isn't there.

So Matthew 7, which again, Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, His teachings. You've got people coming out from under. Teachings of the Pharisees.

It's no wonder Christ hits on this reality of what He's saying in Matthew 7. Verse 1, Judge not that you not be judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That's pretty shocking. The measure you judge is going to be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? So they're looking at something smaller, a speck in their brother's eye, but they have a bigger issue in their own life.

Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there's actually a log in your own eye? You hypocrite. First, take the log out of your own eye. So that means there is the reality you can remove a blind spot from your life and get the log out of your eye.

That's pretty encouraging. Then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. So I can repent and remove a log from my own eye and now actually be a benefit to another Christian.

So as I trust you all know, this text is not teaching not to make judgments, but it's not to make hypocritical judgments. In v. 6, it speaks about recognizing the difference between a dog and a pig. And so we've got to be able to recognize these things and make appropriate judgments.

But, he hits on the same issue here. Someone focusing on something small in another while missing something weighty and large in yourself. You see that? Both of these teachings.

You've got a speck and a log. You've got a gnat and a camel. And you've got people who are blind to the reality that their life is full of getting rid of the gnats, not dealing with the camels, and looking at specks and others while not getting rid of logs in their own eyes.

This is pretty astonishing imagery here that Christ is teaching to us. So we need to have the humility to say, Lord, where is this in my own life? And, the same thing is taught here about the Pharisees wanting to be guides. They're wanting to help others.

They're wanting to be teachers. They're getting in the fray. Well, that's the same thing you see here.

You see a person who is wanting to speak something to their brother. They're wanting to say something to share their opinion with another. So, I trust you all remember the one Pharisee who was drinking down all manner of camels.

He probably had five camels in his drink. And he was getting rid of the gnats. But in Luke 18, the Pharisee stood by himself and he prayed thus, God, I thank You that I'm not like other men.

They're extortioners and they're unjust and they're adulterers. Even that tax collector. You remember that man in Luke 18? What happened to that man? He left condemned when the other man left justified truly being in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here the proud, critical man was looking down on others while he was drinking down many camels and not straining them out. So there are people trying to be moral but are not truly moral. Well, when Jesus said don't judge so you won't be judged, He wasn't saying we shouldn't have opinions about others or condemn what we know is wrong.

Instead, He's cautioning His followers against being unkind in their judgments or enjoying criticizing others. He condemns fault finding mainly because of the risk involved. And what was the risk involved with being a fault finder here? I didn't see this as a young Christian.

You see it? It'll put fear in you. The risk in Matthew 7 is the way you judge others is what? It's how you're going to be judged. Right? You're setting up your own standard.

Not just applying it to those around you who are likely now to judge you as harshly as you're judging them, but also I believe it's speaking about God who's going to use the same standard you're judging others and He's going to judge you. And the Lord is one who is going to judge with no partiality. And He knows everything.

Jesus also suggests right here in Matthew 7 that being overly critical is just, again, it's absurd. He gives that picture saying it's like someone with a beam in their eye trying to help someone with just a splinter in theirs. It's just hypocritical.

Alright, so it's no wonder, right? I don't know how many of you have experienced this, and I know I used to be the person who would... well, let me just say this. So, when you hear the words love and gentleness, there are people in Reformed communities who, they hear you say love and gentleness enough, they hear you saying what? Heresy and compromise. Right? That's just how they operate.

It's like love and gentleness have become terms of compromise. Brethren, we don't ever want to become like that. That is absolutely deadly.

That is contrary to the Lord Jesus Christ. So what happens to the hypocritical person? There's a whole lot we could mention, but I want to mention a few things. First, as we saw in Matthew 23, and this is terrifying, this is sobering, the hypocritical, overly judgmental person, the person who swallows down the camels, they remove all the gnats, they keep others out of the kingdom.

They keep others out of heaven. Now if that's true, right, as we read, in a smaller way I would say this, they're at least keeping people from being open and truly honest. Right? The hypocritical person does not encourage honesty, because what happens when you're honest if someone's really critical? They're just going to rip you apart.

Right? They thus discourage true believers who struggle. This is another characteristic that I had when I was a member of the straining gnat society early on. I know there's two people that came to my mind as I was studying this who I know I worked as a force in their life to condemn them and strip them of their

assurance.

Which is terrifying that I took part in that. And are there people out there who need to be warned and shocking youth messaged? Absolutely. There's many out there who fit that deception.

But there are also true believers who are facing early struggles who need grace and kindness. So let me give an example. This is from Jeff Van Vonderen.

My mother-in-law sent me this. It's from a book, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*. And it records a situation that I think is very fitting for us to consider.

After Jeff was converted, he remembered back on a couple in the church he grew up in who showed him a lot of genuine love. So he wanted to reach out to this couple. And the church he grew up in, it was very much an image-is-everything type of church.

Right? Where you're really worried about how you appear before others. That was just fostered in that community. This type of outward hypocrisy.

So he says this, In the letter, I told what had happened in my life and what God had done for and in me. The letter concluded with, While I still struggle with smoking once in a while and a few other remnants of my past, Jesus is the most important person in my life. I love Him and I know He loves me.

I want to do whatever I can to further His kingdom. The letter I received back from them started out business-like. It was cold.

It proceeded to a blistering critique of my letter and the process of change that I had described. In conclusion, Hank and Louise voiced their doubts that I had become a Christian at all. If I'd really found the Lord, I wouldn't be struggling with so many things.

How could I still smoke and call myself a Christian was beyond them. And he has in parentheses, The story is not about smoking. It's about accepting one another as a believer.

Please don't smoke. It will kill you. Not long after this, I did quit.

He goes on. I experienced pain reading that letter. I was shocked by its intensity.

I felt rejected and humiliated that I had trusted them as people with whom I could share my inner growth. I grieved the loss of friends I'd assumed were on my side. I thought they cared about the real me.

I was baffled that someone who had been through what they had they got pregnant outside of marriage and this image-is-everything church, that they could have so little understanding of my situation. And I felt profoundly sad at this realization that Hank and Louise were more accepting of me as an unbeliever who hid his struggles than a believer who admitted his struggles. But what hurt the most was that I had been judged on the basis of my behaviors, not the reality of the inward transformation God had worked in me.

The verdict? I was spiritually unacceptable. I think that's a very helpful illustration. Were there issues in this man's life in the letter that he needed to grow? Yes.

But there was far more weightier matters of the change that God had wrought in this person's life, and that needed to be the focus of encouragement rather than tearing this individual down in the early stages of his

spiritual journey. And so brethren, in your zeal for holiness, have you ever overly hammered someone where you actually took part in unintentionally diverting their focus from Christ all the while trying to help them get holy? You actually don't help them get holy but make them more unholy, with your emphasis. Anytime I ask myself that question, like I said, I have two people that come to my mind that I'm aware of the negative impact I had on their life.

I know in my zeal I wanted to help them, but I actually hurt them. Has that happened to any of you? Can you look back and recognize the counsel you gave, though well-meaning, was actually hypercritical, a wrong emphasis, a wrong focus, and it was a detriment to them. It was not a help to those individuals.

Now, moving on to the second effect that happens to the hypercritical person. The first was they keep people out of the kingdom. They can keep people out of the kingdom or at least keep them from being transparent and open and honest.

Second, the critical person often shoots off a lot of friendly fire. What do I mean by that? Criticisms or attacks directed at those on the same side. They create divisions.

They hinder cooperation and fellowship in the Gospel. A passage I thought about, and we're not going to look at it. A whole sermon could be on it.

Turn to Luke 9. This has always stood out to me that the disciples fell into this type of attitude right here. You could imagine. You're one of the guys with Jesus.

That's incredible, right? And then you've got other groups out there. Look at Luke 9.49. John answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name. And we gave Him a word of encouragement and we wrote Him a letter and just said thank God for Your labor in the Lord.

Is that what they did? I thought I did a sermon on this years ago. I couldn't find it. Maybe I thought it was bad and I didn't put it on the Internet.

Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name. We tried to stop them because He doesn't follow with us. Oh, it's incredible.

Jesus said to him, don't stop them, for the one who is not against you is for you. A lot could be said here, but I at least gather from the text there's kind of this sense of being overly cut off and in a sect over here, right? Exclusive. They're not thinking that if they're not with us, they're against us.

And Jesus says, no man, you're wrong. You guys are wrong. That's not right.

You shouldn't be trying to stop them. So brethren, our ability to have an impact on the world can be hindered based upon unnecessary divisions that are rooted in a critical spirit. Are there divisions that need to be made? Yes, I recognize that.

Please understand. I realize we have to have balance. Lloyd-Jones was right to not sit on a podium with Billy Graham and other major Catholic individuals in the 1970s.

I think Lloyd-Jones was right to make a battle out of that and not compromise. You see what I'm saying? There are situations like that where if you just say whatever, Catholics and all, no, that's not what we're talking about here. Yeah, you need to take a stand there.

It was right to not lock arms with the Catholics at Planned Parenthood years ago during the evangelism. There are divisions that need to be made. Now they can be made in a very charitable way where we're standing for the truth.

But I'm talking about just among reformed communities where overall we've got a lot of the same doctrine. And this isn't some far-out thing. Listen to this from church history.

And this hindered a church's ability to have an impact on the world. It can do the same for ours. So many of you know about the Moravians when Count Zinzendorf opened up his estate in Hearnhut for persecuted believers.

For a season, the city of Hearnhut had all these people flocking there who basically the Catholics were trying to kill in their home country. And so Hearnhut just grew up with all these different Protestant believers. And listen to J.E. Hutton.

He recorded this. As an asylum for the persecuted Protestants, all sorts of religious malcontents came to make Hearnhut their home. And instead of trying to help each other, men actually tried to cut each other out of business just like the rest of the world.

As the first flush of joy died away, men pointed out each other's moats, and sarcasm pushed charity from her throne. And worse than all, there now appeared that demon of discord, theological dispute. The whole city on the hill was now a nest of fanatics.

And you know what? I honestly think if you step back and you take some of that similar language and you look at some of the pulse of all the reform stuff online, it can almost feel like that at times. Like all this reform stuff online, it's like a nest of fanatics where there's all these unnecessary disputes. And there's not much thought about advancing the Gospel, about missions, and the Gospel going forth.

There's about to be this week, I think it's two weeks long, one of the biggest evangelical conferences. It's going to be right here in San Antonio. What's the name of it again, brother? I just forgot.

Yeah, Evangelical Theological Society. I mean, it's incredible how many. There's going to be hundreds of seminars and sermons and conferences.

There's well-known people who are going to be there and I hope are going to do good. Joel Beeky and Stephen Wellham and others. May God use them in that way.

But my point is, all of that is about theology and theology matters. Absolutely. But imagine if all the energy there, and yes, right? Theology leads to biblical missions.

But imagine if all of that was energy and resources used to advance the Gospel. I'm not saying it's not advancing the Gospel. I don't want to be hypercritical in that conference.

Is there something in my eye right now? Can someone help me get that out please? Yeah, isn't that interesting? In my own sermon right here, I spontaneously... Well, but you see, I'm wrestling in my own heart right now from this pulpit on having a proper balance in this area. You get what I'm saying? So I thought of that based on this example I was reading. I'm not saying they're a nest of fanatics.

Apparently, I'm too judgmental still to this day. Lord, help me. I don't know, Jeff, what do you see in me? Alright.

You see, brethren, tricky's not a good word, but we have to be concise. There's things we've got to watch out for. We want truth.

We want to advance the Gospel. There are ditches to fall into. But I'm telling you, I could easily drive my car into one ditch and then to avoid it, I end up in the other ditch on the other side of the road.

Well, moving on, how do you know if you have a hypercritical spirit? Like I said, you might not know it. It might not be obvious. Pride leads to hypercritical spirits.

And so pride keeps you from recognizing you have a hypercritical spirit. And Jesus' illustration of a log in your eye and the guy doesn't notice it. So clearly, you might be sitting here sinning by being overly judgmental and not even recognize it.

And again, that could be me in this pulpit. So we all need to have humility. But here's something to think about.

Here's one indicator. A lack of joy. Do you anywhere see the Pharisees full of joy? If you come here to church and you don't have joy among the brethren, among the fellowship here, if you don't have joy, that could be a sign of you're here with too critical of a spirit.

Listen to Lloyd-Jones. This is Ian Murray here again in regards to Lloyd-Jones. This is very insightful.

Too often, professing Christians fail to enjoy peace in relation to others because of their own insecurity. People are complaining and over ready to be critical and to pass judgment upon other people who in the first place, they're not even at peace with themselves. Lacking yourselves in peace and rest, you're all on edge and so you react.

And you react generally in the wrong way when you meet others. It is people who are uncertain about themselves who are generally most critical of others. See what he's saying? There can be a baseline insecurity about self where my critical judgments of all manner of matters could be my own insecurity about my own self.

And again, it's rooted in pride. The tragedy is that it leads not only to strife, but to divisions and to schisms and to parties. Parties like separation, not like birthday parties obviously.

And so the Christian church gives the impression that she is just a collection of warring groups and sects and divided personalities. This is a warning, Iain Murray goes on to say, that he had long given. Certainly, Christians must sometimes be involved in controversy, but their greater character is that they are peacemakers.

And I would remind us all of Don Curran's excellent sermon on being a peacemaker from months ago. Their Father is the God of peace and they are to be like their Father. Another thought is on one of the effects of being hypercritical is you lose your own joy and you take joy from others.

Listen to George Mueller, his brother-in-law, Anthony Norris Groves. He said this, as I move among Christians, the thought often strikes me how exceedingly they disturb their own peace. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, they're continually ruining each other's happiness with things that are not worth a second thought.

And though you can put your finger upon the diseased spot in the soul from where the discord arises, those whom you love and wish to make happy, they won't see it. Oh, how much must the whole church grieve our dear and gracious and most long-suffering Lord based on all this conduct that we're doing, right? And Christ is bearing with us. He goes on, there's something particularly hateful about selfishness.

Perhaps we do not see it in ourselves as in others, but sure I am, if my selfishness affects others as theirs does me, it must be worth every exertion in my life to eradicate it. Root and branch, in this I feel I can only do by living in Jesus as a branch abides in the vine. I do pray I may live in such a way in Him.

And he saw this when he went to India as a missionary. He saw these reformed communities over there, this hypercritical type of spirit, and he just saw their joy was stripped. It's just always a debate.

Always something wrong. So, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents constantly making unkind and critical remarks about others, and 10 indicates rarely harboring uncharitable judgments in your heart about others, how would you rate your own self? Well, what are some ways in which reformed believers could tend to be too critical? What do you guys think? What comes to your mind? What are ways, specifically, reformed meaning those who have embraced the sovereignty of God, sovereignty meaning God's control over all things? What are ways reformed Christians can tend to be too critical? Congregational seeing. Expound more.

Meaning, did you have to do it that way? I see. We've really figured out the right way to do it, but they've got it wrong with the choir. So yeah, music.

I mean, that was exactly what Lloyd-Jones' daughter fell into. You know, the dinnertime conversations about what makes good music during a church service. She kind of took it too far when she was away at college, and Lloyd-Jones is like, stop, honey.

It's not right. You're becoming a heresy hunter. That's a license you don't want to have for hunting.

What else? What else in reformed communities? Yeah, views of the end times. Yeah, that can definitely be a very hot topic where people divide over. What else? Spiritual gifts.

Yeah, right now this whole cessationism, continuationism thing. I've not seen the documentary, but how gracious are they dealing with those who have another view that I would argue is actually more of a scriptural view that has a biblical basis for it? How well are we going to deal with these things? What else? Parenting, right? Parenting can be an issue in reformed churches. There are biblical truths of wisdom in the Bible that we better stand by and not rip those out because it was whatever, 2,000, 3,000 years ago, written.

But at the same time, people can add some extra standard. So legalism, honestly, really tends towards hypocritical spirit, right? And what is legalism? It's imposing something on someone's conscience that you cannot dogmatically prove from the Bible. Or it could also be defined as teaching a works-based salvation for justification.

But often we use legalism. We say someone's legalistic. Well, that means they're imposing on your conscience a standard they can't dogmatically prove from the Bible.

And you get to Romans 14, and what's Paul... He's saying don't judge one another for these things. And Paul does even more than that in Romans 14. He says the faith you have, what do you do with it? Go

share it with everyone else in the church? Keep it between you and God.

Isn't that incredible? I was telling someone recently, just because someone asked your opinion about a non-essential matter doesn't mean you even need to share what your opinion is. You can keep that between you and God. And you can keep that from spreading and in any way causing an issue.

And again, I'm not saying that's happening in our church right now. I want to make that clear. Maybe someone hears that statement and thinks I'm talking about something going on in our church.

I'm not, but that can happen. Anything else you guys can think of? Ways that Reformed believers could be too critical in our circle of churches. Yeah, yeah, you've got to do, quote, courting, which you don't find courting in the Bible, or condemning anything under the terminology of dating.

When someone uses the term dating, I'm dating, or I'm courting, or whatever term they use, just that term right there doesn't say they're embracing some system that whether it's godly or whether it's not. And that can then become some condemned thing. Or whether you homeschool or you don't homeschool.

So, a lot could be said there. A big list. Alright, we have a few more minutes.

So, one thought. Don't respond critically to those critical of you. Here one reason is.

Ecclesiastes 7. Don't turn there. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. So, whatever evil things anyone's saying about me, I don't want to know it.

Why? Listen to what he says. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. Isn't that something? You recognize, you know what? They're saying something critical of me.

Well, I done did that too. Right? And that's keeping you from rashly judging them. Richard Baxter.

I hope this isn't true of today, but it maybe is. He made this statement. He said, it's rare to meet, even among professing believers who are sincerely committed to Christ, those who are fearful and sensitive about sinning in this area of rash, ungrounded judging.

Baxter said that. If he did a survey of our church or in our generation, what would he say? Brethren, part of why I'm even giving this message, I want it to be more known of our own church that we are not the church of cornering people into a corner and convincing them that they're unconverted. Not that people don't need to be shocked and youth-messaged, as I had stated.

But we could have all manner of rash, ungrounded judgments bringing up issues that really take the focus away from what really matters. So you could have a conscience that meticulously filters out insignificant matters while you readily drink down major issues and you don't even recognize it. So is there any area that you start a division at? At odd points where it just doesn't further the cause of Christ? Like standing in a pulpit and saying anything about some evangelical conference.

Are you out there loving others and being patient with them? Fulfilling the weightier matters of the law? What if Lloyd-Jones was your dad? What would he say to you in a letter? You'd like to get one of those letters, right? Him being totally honest with you? I read one of Bob's letters rebuking Bethany when she was single. Wow, I was floored at how sincere and honest and blunt he was. It was absolutely telling of his love for his daughter.

Well, the last thing I have here. Much more could be said. But in the 1800s, a book was published which contains letters from pastors to their church members.

And one deals with this very topic. And the author, from what I could tell, is unknown. But let me read part of that here in closing.

I have noticed in you, for a considerable time, a growing disposition, which I fear is becoming a settled habit to deal in undue severity with the characteristics of your fellow men. It is a rare thing that I hear you speak well of anybody. Whenever an individual is mentioned, especially when anything praiseworthy is said of him, it seems as if your mind was immediately on the search for something of an opposite character.

And if nothing of this kind readily occurs to you as a matter of fact, you do not hesitate to engage in unworthy and harmful guesses about that person's conduct. If a person has performed highly in some action, you attribute it to some dishonorable and selfish motive. If he has done something of great character, you seem to delight in putting the worst construction upon it, as if he has failed.

From considerations of prudence to act in difficult circumstances, when he fails to do that, you reproach him for being timid. If he takes a bold and a decisive step in such a circumstance, you charge him with rashness and recklessness. In short, you're constantly searching for faults where there are none, like scrutinizing minor imperfections in a perfectly good product.

You seem to not breathe freely except amidst the errors and the shortcomings of your fellow men. The blessed Savior during His time on earth, though a faithful and earnest reprover of sin in every form, set a remarkable example of kindness, forbearance, and charity. Indeed, the overall inclination of Christianity in both its doctrines and precepts is to guide us towards forming the most charitable judgments of our fellow humans that truth and reason will justify.

It urges us not to proclaim our suspicions to the detriment of others when we cannot be certain that they are well-founded. Even if they are, there's no good that can result from broadcasting them. No one wants their actions misrepresented or their motives questioned by ungracious insinuations.

He then goes on later on to describe someone who was an elder in their church. If you mention an excellence in any character, he always had some blemish at hand with which to offset it. Or if you mentioned a defect, he would instantly mention another and a greater, unless indeed he might choose to indulge his ruling passion by taking an attitude of contradiction against yourself.

The consequence was that he rarely enjoyed friendship of anybody. He grew more and more an Ishmaelite in both the church and civil society until at length, though he was still an elder in the church, he was really a man totally by himself. Nobody asked his counsel in difficulty.

Nobody looked to him for consolation and sorrow. Nobody cared to meet him even on the highway. He was naturally a man of vigorous intellect and capable of extensive usefulness.

But, his habit of sarcasm and criticism made him sort of a terror even to his own friends. If this is an extreme case, as doubtlessly it is, yet it shows you at least what you are in danger of. It admonishes you to crucify this unhallowed propensity as you would accomplish the great end of your Christian profession.

So, may the Lord help us, brethren. We could start having this characteristic in us and it might take ten years for you to recognize how many people you've pushed away by your sarcasm, by your criticism. Let's pray.

Father, Lord, I thank You for Your patience with us. Oh Lord, You have been incredibly patient. Lord, I know with me, You've been very, very patient in my own life.

And Lord, I pray You'd continue to grow me in this area. I pray You'd grow my brothers and sisters. Oh Lord, we're thankful for truth.

We're thankful for all the knowledge that we have. But Lord, I feel it like Paul says, Lord, it is my prayer that our love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that we might approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Lord, we want to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to Your glory and Your praise.

Lord, would You continue to be at work in our lives to do that? Lord, give us the right balance. Lord, it's clear even from the abundance of a man's heart, his mouth speaks. Lord, even from my mid-comment in the sermon, and Lord, pausing and having a check about myself.

Lord, that right there, Lord, it's an indicator to me even of my own need to grow and being careful on this very thing. And so Father, I pray You'd help us. Lord, sanctify us.

Lord, we don't want to be joy-stealers. We don't. And Lord, yes, false teaching can steal joy.

But Lord, a critical spirit can do the exact same thing. And Father, I'm thankful for men like Lloyd-Jones who love their children. Lord, would You help us as parents? Lord, we could tear our kids down with our criticism.

Father, I know there's some kids in other churches I've heard about where they just grew up constantly discouraged by their parents pointing out things wrong with them. And Lord, it just made them incredibly depressed. A joyless childhood from a hypercritical parent.

Lord, keep us from that as parents. Keep us from that as spouses. Lord, I don't know what marriages here are struggling today because of this very issue.

Or Lord, even relationships in the church. Lord, if there's anyone that some of us can't receive with joy, Lord, because there's an issue in our heart, I pray You'd sanctify that out of us. And so Lord, be with us the rest of our time in our fellowship right now and in our next service.

Lord, we just pray, strengthen us. Make us more like Christ. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/r8eG2I5ZID4.mp4>

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