

BY YOUR OWN MEASURE

Applying the Anonymous Tom Buck Packet's Plagiarism Standard to
Sermons Preached at Pray's Mill Baptist Church

A consistency review of sermons by Scott Aniol, Dylan Joyner, and
Matt Sikes

Prepared August 2026

Important Qualification

This report does not adopt the anonymous packet's definition of sermon plagiarism. It applies that definition as a consistency test. Scott Aniol, Matt Sikes, Dylan Joyner, and Jon Norton have since admitted their involvement in the packet and resigned from Pray's Mill Baptist Church over the matter. Accordingly, this report treats their involvement as admitted rather than alleged.

Executive Summary

The anonymous packet concerning Pastor Tom Buck presented sermon plagiarism as a grave matter of pastoral integrity. Its own methodology was broad: it treated not only verbatim reproduction, but also close paraphrase of distinctive arguments, creative material, secondary-source research, repeated argument sequence, and structural frameworks as plagiarism when used without attribution.

Yet this standard is not a reliable basis for determining actual sermon plagiarism. Pastors routinely consult commentaries, and the line between legitimate dependence, common exegesis, remembered formulation, close paraphrase, and deceptive appropriation requires more care than the packet generally gives it. The purpose here is therefore not to defend that standard, but to apply it back to the preaching practices of men who have admitted their involvement in the packet.

The controlling biblical principle is the one Jesus gives in Matthew 7:1-5: judgment must begin with self-examination, and the measure used against another cannot be exempted from one's own conduct. In that spirit, this comparison is undertaken to expose the inconsistency of the men who sent the packet by applying their own measure to their own preaching. If the packet's standard is valid, substantially similar conduct in their own sermons must receive the same label. If those practices are instead ordinary and permissible parts of sermon preparation, then the packet's accusation against Buck was materially overdrawn.

Statistical Snapshot

The statistical review covers 106 PMBC sermon transcripts by Scott Aniol, Dylan Joyner, and Matt Sikes across five biblical books, compared with the corresponding volumes in Crossway's Preaching the Word series. Seventeen sermon-level cases were strong enough to include under the packet's own criteria. The count is by sermon, not by individual parallel; several included sermons contain multiple separate correspondences.

Preacher	Sermons Reviewed	Included Cases	Primary Series
Scott Aniol	21	7	Exodus, Luke, Hebrews
Dylan Joyner	42	7	Exodus, Hebrews, Mark, Romans
Matt Sikes	43	3	Luke, Hebrews
TOTAL	106	17	Five biblical books / five PTW volumes

Jon Norton is excluded from the substantive and statistical sermon analysis because the available body of his preaching was too limited to support a responsible comparison or pattern analysis. His exclusion should not be read as either exoneration or accusation.

Central Conclusion

The same categories of conduct the anonymous packet used to characterize Buck as a plagiarist appear repeatedly in sermons preached by Aniol, Joyner, and Sikes. Some cases involve distinctive exegetical sequences; some reproduce specialized lexical or historical observations; some follow commentary-specific frameworks; and some contain close paraphrases of memorable formulations. At the same time, these pastors also sometimes expressly named their sources. Those attributed uses were excluded.

This matters because the issue is not whether every included example is plagiarism under a truly sound definition. The issue is that the packet imposed a severe and expansive definition on another pastor while substantially similar sermon-preparation practices appear in the preaching of men who have admitted their involvement in the packet. That asymmetry demonstrates hypocrisy at the level of conduct. It also supports a finding of bad-faith

application: the standard was used as a one-directional accusation against a target rather than applied as a neutral principle to the men using it.

1. Purpose and Biblical Rationale

This report is intentionally different from the anonymous packet. It does not argue that consulting a commentary, following an expositor's interpretive sequence, or restating an exegetical insight automatically constitutes plagiarism. Nor does it claim the ability to read the heart or determine subjective intent from textual similarity alone.

Instead, it asks a narrower question: what happens when the packet's own stated criteria are applied to sermons preached by the men who have admitted participating in it? That question is especially appropriate in light of Matthew 7. Jesus does not prohibit all judgment; he condemns hypocritical judgment and commands the judge first to remove the log from his own eye. The moral force of the passage is consistency: one may not make another man's fault a public indictment while refusing to examine the same kind of fault in oneself.

For that reason, the term 'packet-standard violation' in this report is deliberately technical. It means only that a sermon contains the same kind of unattributed dependence that the anonymous packet itself treated as plagiarism. It does not mean that this report independently concludes that the preacher stole another man's work or intended to deceive his congregation.

The distinction is important because it exposes the deeper problem. If the packet's standard is too broad, the accusation against Buck was wrong in method. If the packet's standard is accepted, then the men who authored and sent it are implicated by their own measure. Either way, the packet cannot be defended simply by applying its rules in one direction.

2. Methodology

The sermon transcripts supplied for this review were compared with the corresponding Preaching the Word commentary volume for the same biblical book. The five commentary volumes used were Philip Graham Ryken's Exodus and R. Kent Hughes's Luke, Hebrews, Mark, and Romans. The review looked for the categories emphasized in the Buck packet: verbatim or near-verbatim wording, close paraphrase of distinctive arguments, unusual historical or lexical details, repeated argument sequence, creative or memorable formulations, and structural frameworks.

Several safeguards were applied. Explicit attribution to a commentator was excluded. Common biblical observations and standard theological formulations were ordinarily excluded. Borderline cases were not placed in the formal count. Where a sermon named another source that could plausibly explain the overlap, the case was either narrowed or omitted. The report also distinguishes source dependence from actual plagiarism: a strong correspondence can show that a commentary likely informed a sermon without proving deceptive intent.

A More Conservative Threshold Than the Packet

This review is deliberately more conservative than the packet's own implementation of its standard. The packet sometimes treated isolated phrases, familiar idioms, and fairly ordinary pastoral or exegetical formulations as plagiarism. For example, it counted the shared idiom "out of the frying pan into the fire" as a matching metaphor; labeled the sentence "worship will not be what it is meant to be unless there is unity" a distinctive creative formulation; treated "neutrality is not an option" as a distinctive claim; and counted formulations such as asking what God is teaching about himself in an Old Testament narrative or saying that God is with his people throughout life and into eternity. Isolated similarities of that kind are not counted. This examination excluded common idioms, generic theological language, ordinary observations that flow naturally from the biblical text, matches with a plausible alternative source, expressly attributed material, and borderline cases. In several instances, possible parallels were preserved during the analysis but left it out of the formal count. Accordingly, the 17 included

sermon-level cases reflect a higher threshold than the packet itself often used. If this examination applied the packet's practice with equal aggressiveness, the PMBC total would likely be higher.

3. What the Buck Packet Counts as Plagiarism

The Buck packet's executive summary says its alleged borrowing ranges from verbatim reproduction of paragraphs to close paraphrasing of distinctive arguments, creative illustrations, secondary-source quotations, and structural frameworks, all without attribution. Its detailed examples repeatedly treat distinctive word counts, lexical observations, paired phrases, repeated rhetorical constructions, and commentary-derived argument sequences as plagiarism.

That breadth is critical. A consistency review cannot fairly limit PMBC findings to word-for-word copying if the packet itself did not impose that limitation on Buck. The cases below therefore ask whether the PMBC sermon reproduces the same category of source-dependent material the packet condemned, not merely whether it contains a long identical paragraph.

4. Detailed Findings: Scott Aniol

Seven sermon-level cases involving Scott Aniol meet the packet's standard strongly enough to include. Four arise in Exodus, two in Luke, and one in Hebrews.

1. The Birth of the Deliverer

Scott Aniol | Exodus 2:1-10 | January 18, 2026

Comparison source: Philip Graham Ryken, Exodus: Saved for God's Glory, ch. 3, "The Birth of a Savior."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Aniol links Moses being described as "good" to the creation language of Genesis 1, as Ryken does.
- He emphasizes that the Hebrew word translated "basket" is the same unusual word used for Noah's ark and develops the same Noah/Moses-through-the-waters analogy.
- He explains the Hebrew word behind Moses's name as "to draw out" and connects Moses being drawn from the water with his later role in drawing Israel through the sea.

Why it matters: No single observation is uniquely Ryken's. The packet's standard, however, treats cumulative use of distinctive exegetical observations and parallel theological development as plagiarism even without substantial verbatim copying. The sequence of several Ryken-like moves in one sermon therefore meets that standard.

2. Yahweh's Divine Claim Upon His People

Scott Aniol | Exodus 5:1-21 | March 8, 2026

Comparison source: Ryken, Exodus, chs. 11-12, "Who Is the Lord?" and "Bricks without Straw."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Ryken explains straw as necessary to bind and strengthen the clay; Aniol gives the same historical explanation.
- Ryken's argument proceeds from the foremen bypassing God and Moses, appealing directly to Pharaoh, identifying themselves as Pharaoh's servants, and effectively asking their oppressor to rescue them from his own oppression.

- Aniol follows the same sequence: “They don't go to Moses... They don't go to Yahweh. They bypass Moses and appeal directly to Pharaoh,” then emphasizes “your servants,” continuing, “They're looking to Pharaoh to save them from his own tyranny.”
- Both extend the episode into the spiritual-bondage application of a taskmaster tightening the burden and the imagery of “bricks without straw.”

Why it matters: This is especially significant because the anonymous packet itself used the corresponding Ryken chapters to accuse Buck. The same historical explanation and argument sequence that were treated as evidence against Buck appear here without a Ryken attribution in the transcript.

3. The Serpent-Swallower

Scott Aniol | Exodus 6:28-7:13 | March 29, 2026

Comparison source: Ryken, Exodus, ch. 17, “The Staff That Swallowed the Snakes.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Both stress that the creature word is not the ordinary Hebrew word for snake and connect the term to the “great dragon” language of Ezekiel 29:3 concerning Pharaoh.
- Both explain the serpent/cobra as a symbol of Pharaoh's royal authority.
- Both move to the theme of Satanic imitation or counterfeit miracles.
- Both make the same specialized lexical observation that the verb for Aaron's staff “swallowing” the Egyptian staffs reappears when the sea “swallows” Pharaoh's army.
- Both call the episode a preview of the coming plagues and then move from Exodus to Christ's defeat of the serpent, including Colossians 2:15.

Why it matters: This is one of the strongest cases in the entire PMBC review. It combines multiple specialized exegetical, historical, lexical, structural, and canonical observations from one commentary chapter in substantially the same progression. It would plainly qualify under the packet's own criteria.

4. The First Commandment

Scott Aniol | Exodus 20:1-3 | August 2, 2026

Comparison source: Ryken, Exodus, ch. 49, “The First Commandment: No Other Gods.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Ryken explains “before me” as literally “before my face,” then reasons from God's omnipresence that there is nowhere another god can be placed outside his presence. Aniol gives the same sequence: “That phrase is literally before my face... there is nowhere we can go to get away from the presence of God.”
- Ryken quotes Luther's memorable definition: what the heart clings to and relies upon is properly one's god. Aniol gives the near-identical formulation, “A God is whatever your heart clings to and depends upon,” without identifying Luther in the transcript.
- Both then connect the issue to Jesus's teaching that no one can serve two masters.

Why it matters: The Luther formulation is another person's distinctive language transmitted through the commentary. Under the packet's treatment of secondary-source material and close paraphrase, this clearly qualifies.

5. The King Comes to Bring Peace in Heaven

Scott Aniol | Luke 19:28-44 | July 6, 2025

Comparison source: R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, ch. 84, "A New Kind of King."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes highlights the reversal between the angelic announcement in Luke 2 and the crowd's words in Luke 19: peace on earth / glory in the highest becomes peace in heaven / glory in the highest.
- Hughes develops the theological claim that peace on earth depends upon peace in heaven.
- Aniol makes the same reversal a central thesis of the sermon, calling Luke 19 "the whole song of the angels but in reverse" and arguing that "in order to achieve lasting peace on earth, Jesus first had to bring peace in heaven."

Why it matters: The verbal reversal can be observed directly from Luke, so this is not a strong independent plagiarism case. But the packet's standard explicitly counts adopted interpretive arguments and frameworks. Aniol's development closely tracks Hughes's distinctive dependency argument and therefore meets that standard.

6. The Innocent King Condemned by the Guilty

Scott Aniol | Luke 23:1-25 | October 19, 2025

Comparison source: Hughes, *Luke*, chs. 99-100, "Herod before Jesus" and "Pilate before Jesus."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Both move through the political charges, Pilate's recognition of their weakness, the transfer to Herod, Herod's desire for entertainment, Jesus's silence, and the return to Pilate.
- Both emphasize repeated judicial declarations of Jesus's innocence and Pilate's attempt to appease a bloodthirsty crowd.
- Both stress the irony that Barabbas actually was the kind of seditious figure Jesus was falsely accused of being.
- Both culminate in the same theological move: the innocent Jesus takes the place of the guilty Barabbas as a picture of substitution. Aniol says, "The great substitution had been made. The innocent is condemned so the guilty can go free."

Why it matters: Much of Luke 23 naturally leads to innocence and substitution. What triggers the packet standard is the accumulation and order of the subsidiary observations. The sermon follows Hughes's interpretive chain closely enough to qualify under the packet's broader framework test.

7. Hebrews 12:12-17

Scott Aniol | May 26, 2024

Comparison source: R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, ch. 41, "Failing Grace."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes notes that "see to it" is plural, carries the idea of oversight, and is related to the word from which "bishop" is derived; he then applies it corporately to believers watching over one another.
- Aniol similarly identifies the Greek *episkopeo*, connects it to overseer/elder language, and says the command shifts from individual concern to corporate vigilance.
- Hughes then turns directly to Deuteronomy 29:18 and argues that the "root of bitterness" is not merely private resentment but an apostate person whose poisonous fruit can contaminate the covenant community.

- Aniol follows the same move, explicitly rejecting the ordinary “individual bitterness” reading, going to Deuteronomy 29:18, and describing a poisonous person within the body.

Why it matters: The significance is the two-part sequence: lexical/oversight observation followed immediately by the same Deuteronomy-based reinterpretation of the bitter root. That cumulative structure is the kind of distinctive exegetical dependence the packet repeatedly labels plagiarism.

5. Detailed Findings: Dylan Joyner

Seven sermon-level cases involving Dylan Joyner meet the packet's standard strongly enough to include. They span Exodus, Hebrews, Mark, and Romans.

8. The Sovereign, Faithful, and Wise God

Dylan Joyner | Exodus 5:22-6:13 | March 15, 2026

Comparison source: Ryken, Exodus, ch. 14, “The Seven ‘I Wills’ of Salvation.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Ryken identifies seven “I will” statements in Exodus 6:6-8 but then says they reduce to four basic promises.
- He organizes those promises as liberation, redemption, adoption/taking Israel as God's people, and possession of the land.
- Joyner says, “we saw seven promises of God, seven reiterations of the phrase, ‘I will.’ And again, we can break those down into four great promises,” then gives the same four-part sequence: rescue from slavery, redemption, being taken as God's people, and inheritance.

Why it matters: The distinctive feature is not merely noticing seven “I wills,” but reducing seven statements to four promises and arranging the same four categories in the same order. The anonymous packet explicitly counts sermon frameworks and argument structures, so this qualifies clearly under its standard.

9. Hebrews 2:5-9

Dylan Joyner | November 13, 2022

Comparison source: Hughes, Hebrews, ch. 5, “The Ultimate Intention.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes frames the passage as God's original intention for humanity, that intention being stalled by the Fall, and the ultimate intention being realized in Christ, the second Adam.
- Joyner announces nearly the same architecture: humanity's “original purpose,” its “present state of failure,” and “the future hope for humanity that we find in the gospel.”
- Both connect Psalm 8 to Genesis 1:26-28, move through humanity's failed dominion, and conclude that God's original purpose is completed in Christ.

Why it matters: Hebrews 2 naturally lends itself to creation-fall-redemption categories, so this is not a strong independent plagiarism finding. It nevertheless meets the packet's expressly broad structuralframework criterion.

10. In Defense of the Doctrine of the Resurrection

Dylan Joyner | Mark 12:18-27 | August 20, 2024

Comparison source: R. Kent Hughes, Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior, ch. 40, “Resurrection? Yes!”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes explains Jesus's use of Exodus 3:6 by arguing that God's continuing covenant relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob extends beyond their physical deaths.
- Hughes then moves to Hebrews 11: the patriarchs died without receiving all the promises and looked for a better, heavenly country, so the covenant promises ultimately require resurrection.
- Joyner asks the same interpretive question—how “I am the God of Abraham...Isaac...Jacob” proves resurrection—and follows the same Exodus 3 to covenant promise to Hebrews 11 to heavenly inheritance to future resurrection chain.

Why it matters: The argument is known beyond Hughes and cannot uniquely identify him as the immediate source. But the packet did not require unique source identification when it found a distinctive argument sequence. Under that standard, the case qualifies.

11. The Triumphal Entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem

Dylan Joyner | Mark 11:1-11 | April 13, 2025

Comparison source: Hughes, Mark, ch. 36, “Welcoming the King.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Both contrast Jesus's prior avoidance of public demonstrations with his deliberate public selfpresentation as king at the triumphal entry.
- Both ask how Jesus knew the colt would be available, discuss divine knowledge versus prior arrangement, and suggest that the owners likely knew Jesus.
- Both connect the unused colt to the principle that an animal devoted to sacred use had not previously been put to ordinary use.
- Both then develop the royal significance of the colt and the deliberate fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.

Why it matters: The “sacred use / ordinary use” observation is relatively specialized, and it appears inside a broader sequence of closely corresponding points. That cumulative pattern meets the packet's standard.

12. The Astonishing Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Dylan Joyner | Mark 16:1-8 | April 5, 2026

Comparison source: Hughes, Mark, ch. 54, “Sunday's Children,” including Hughes's quotation of William Lane.

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes treats Mark's ending at 16:8 as fitting because astonishment and fear are recurring motifs throughout the Gospel and quotes William Lane to that effect.
- Joyner makes that exact insight the organizing key to his sermon: he surveys Mark from beginning to end, cataloging episodes in which people respond to Jesus with amazement, astonishment, fear, or trembling.
- He concludes that the women's trembling, astonishment, and fear in 16:8 are “perfectly consistent with everything else” Mark has done.

Why it matters: This is a particularly useful packet-standard case because the parallel is not incidental background. The same interpretive architecture Hughes presents through Lane becomes the organizing thesis of Joyner's sermon.

13. Irresistible Grace

Dylan Joyner | Romans 8:30 | May 25, 2025

Comparison source: R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, ch. 18, "Super Conquerors."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes refers to Romans 8:29-30 as the "golden chain" and emphasizes that everyone who enters the chain reaches its intended end while discussing the effectual call.
- Joyner calls Romans 8:30 "what theologians often refer to as the golden chain of salvation," says "The chain is not broken," and walks the same predestined → called → justified → glorified sequence.
- Joyner likewise emphasizes the absolute certainty of the chain: those predestined are called, those called are justified, and those justified are glorified; in his words, "That chain cannot be broken."

Why it matters: The "golden chain" and effectual-calling concepts are standard Reformed terminology, so the source cannot safely be assigned to Hughes alone. Under the anonymous packet's broader treatment of repeated argument sequence and close formulation, however, the parallel is strong enough to include.

14. Training Our Hearts to Love Worship

Dylan Joyner | Romans 12:1-2 | April 19, 2026

Comparison source: Hughes, *Romans*, ch. 23, "Elements of Commitment."

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes explains that "world" in Romans 12:2 is better understood as "age" and cross-references Galatians 1:4 and the present evil age.
- He then treats "transformed" in relation to metamorphosis and notes that the same Greek word appears only three other times in the New Testament: Matthew 17, Mark 9, and 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- Joyner follows the same sequence: aeon/age → Galatians 1/present evil age → metamorpho/metamorphosis → only three other New Testament uses → Matthew 17 → Mark 9 → 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Why it matters: This is a strong packet-standard case because it reproduces a specialized lexical and crossreference chain, not merely a common theological conclusion. Joyner expressly credits Daniel Doriani elsewhere in the same sermon, and that attributed material was excluded.

6. Detailed Findings: Matt Sikes

Three sermon-level cases involving Matt Sikes meet the packet's standard strongly enough to include. Two arise in Luke and one in Hebrews. Sikes also provides several examples of expressly naming the commentator he is using; those attributed uses were excluded.

15. What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life

Matt Sikes | Luke 18:18-30 | June 1, 2025

Comparison source: Hughes, *Luke*, ch. 80, "How Hard It Is for a Rich Man!"

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes stresses the absurd visual image of the largest beast in Palestine, "humps and all," attempting to pass through the eye of a needle.

- Sikes similarly asks the congregation to picture a massive camel, “with his humps,” trying to squeeze through the eye of a sewing needle.
- Both then analyze Jesus's commandment list through the second table of the Decalogue, focus on the omission of coveting, and explain covetousness as the inward root that can manifest in outward violations.

Why it matters: The camel image and second-table analysis are not uniquely Hughes's, so this is only moderate source-specific evidence. But the packet routinely counted colorful close paraphrase plus repeated exegetical sequence; by that measure, this sermon qualifies.

16. The Son of Man Came to Seek and to Save the Lost

Matt Sikes | Luke 19:1-10 | June 22, 2025

Comparison source: Hughes, Luke, ch. 82, “The Little Big Man.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes places Zacchaeus in prosperous Jericho, discusses major tax-collection centers and subordinate collectors, speculates that Zacchaeus may have known of Levi/Matthew, and suggests that wealth had failed to satisfy him.
- Both describe the sycamore as easy to climb and imagine the socially dignified Zacchaeus concealed in the branches for a private view of Jesus.
- Both emphasize the sovereign necessity of Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus and conclude by returning to the preceding rich-ruler image: the camel actually going through the eye of a needle.

Why it matters: This is Sikes's strongest included case. The weight comes from the accumulation and order of numerous non-obvious details rather than from verbatim copying. That is precisely the kind of cumulative dependence the packet uses against Buck.

17. Hebrews 13:17-19

Matt Sikes | July 21, 2024

Comparison source: Hughes, Hebrews, ch. 47, “Responsibility toward Leadership.”

Packet-standard finding: YES. This is a finding under the anonymous packet's stated methodology, not an independent declaration that the sermon constitutes plagiarism under a sounder or narrower standard.

- Hughes rejects “unqualified blanket obedience” to church leaders and warns against models in which members submit virtually every life decision to elders.
- He emphasizes the particular local leaders who watch over the congregation, explains the watching language in terms of keeping oneself awake or losing sleep, and then moves to leaders' accountability before God.
- Sikes follows the same progression: pastoral authority has limits and does not govern every decision; the text concerns the congregation's specific elders; the watching word can mean literally losing sleep; and elders must give account.
- Both then invoke Luke 12:48 and James 3:1 in connection with pastoral accountability.

Why it matters: Any single element could be common pastoral exegesis. The cumulative sequence—limits on authority, specific local leaders, losing sleep, divine accounting, Luke 12:48, and James 3:1—meets the packet's argument-sequence standard.

7. What These Findings Do - and Do Not - Prove

These findings do not prove that Aniol, Joyner, or Sikes intentionally deceived their congregations. They do not prove that Hughes or Ryken was always the immediate source rather than a shared secondary source. They do not establish that every close paraphrase of a commentary is plagiarism. Indeed, this report's central premise is that the packet's definition is too blunt to carry that moral weight.

What the findings do establish is that the packet's categories are not foreign to PMBC preaching. The same sorts of dependence the packet treated as evidence of plagiarism—specialized lexical observations, distinctive interpretive chains, commentary-derived historical material, memorable formulations, and sermon structure—appear repeatedly in the supplied sermons.

The evidence is also stronger because attributed material was deliberately excluded. The PMBC preachers sometimes name Ryken, Sproul, Ferguson, Doriani, Hendriksen, MacArthur, Ryle, Lane, Murray, and others. That shows that they know how attribution works and often practice it. The issue here is not that they used commentaries; it is that the packet treated comparable unattributed use as a serious moral indictment when the target was Buck.

8. Hypocrisy and Bad-Faith Application

The hypocrisy problem is objective before it is subjective. One need not know a man's heart to observe that a rule was publicly used to condemn another while materially similar conduct appears in the rule-maker's own practice. That is the kind of inconsistency Matthew 7 warns against.

The bad-faith question requires care because motive cannot be read directly from sermon comparisons. Therefore, “bad faith” is used primarily to describe the manner in which the standard was applied. The relevant facts no longer depend on identifying anonymous actors: Aniol, Sikes, Joyner, and Norton have admitted their involvement in the packet and resigned over the matter. The packet used an unusually expansive definition, framed the alleged conduct as a grave integrity failure, was distributed anonymously, and applied that standard outwardly while substantially similar practices appear in the preaching of the men who sent it. That one-directional application is difficult to reconcile with a neutral effort to establish a principled rule for preaching and supports the conclusion that the standard was being used in bad faith against a particular target.

A genuinely principled anti-plagiarism standard would first have to distinguish ordinary sermon preparation from deceptive appropriation and then be applied prospectively and consistently to everyone. The packet instead treated a wide range of commentary dependence as moral misconduct and applied the resulting label to a particular target. The PMBC comparisons show why that method is unsafe: the same net catches the men casting it.

9. Conclusion

The anonymous Buck packet should not be treated as a sound template for judging sermon plagiarism. Its standard is too expansive, its categories frequently collapse source dependence into moral culpability, and its methodology does not adequately distinguish common exegesis from deceptive appropriation.

But once that standard was used publicly against another pastor, Matthew 7 makes the consistency question unavoidable. Across 106 PMBC sermon transcripts by Scott Aniol, Dylan Joyner, and Matt Sikes and five corresponding Preaching the Word volumes, 17 sermon-level cases were identified that meet the packet's own categories strongly enough to document. Several contain multiple distinct parallels. Jon Norton was excluded from the sermon analysis because the available body of his preaching was too limited to support a responsible comparison.

The proper conclusion is not that these three men should now be subjected to the same sweeping accusation of sermon plagiarism. The proper conclusion is that the sweeping accusation itself was unsound. If these preaching practices are legitimate forms of commentary use, then similar practices should not have been transformed into a moral indictment of Tom Buck. If the packet's rule is nevertheless maintained, the men who admitted employing that rule cannot exempt their own sermons from it.

In that sense the comparison exposes both the methodological error and the hypocrisy of the exercise. Because the four men have admitted their involvement, the remaining question is not who was behind the packet but whether the standard they used was honestly and consistently applied. The evidence in their own preaching supports the conclusion that it was not, and that the packet's method was used in bad faith against Tom Buck rather than as a neutral standard they were prepared to apply to themselves.

Appendix A - Source Materials

Anonymous packet:

June 2026 packet, "Documentation of Sermon Plagiarism - Tom Buck, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Lindale, Texas."

Commentaries:

Philip Graham Ryken, Exodus: Saved for God's Glory, Preaching the Word (Crossway). R. Kent

Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word (Crossway).

R. Kent Hughes, Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul, Preaching the Word (Crossway).

R. Kent Hughes, Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior, Preaching the Word (Crossway).

R. Kent Hughes, Romans: Righteousness from Heaven, Preaching the Word (Crossway).

PMBC sermon corpus:

Statistical corpus: 106 supplied PMBC sermon transcripts by Scott Aniol, Dylan Joyner, and Matt Sikes across Exodus, Luke, Hebrews, Mark, and Romans-related material. The formal findings above omit sermons with no qualifying parallel and omit borderline cases for brevity.

Appendix B - Editorial and Verification Notes

1. Scott Aniol, Matt Sikes, Dylan Joyner, and Jon Norton have since admitted involvement in the packet and resigned from PMBC over the matter. This report therefore treats their participation as admitted rather than alleged.
2. Quotations from sermon transcripts have been lightly normalized for punctuation and obvious transcription artifacts without changing substance.
3. The 17-case count is intentionally conservative. Borderline parallels, common exegetical observations, and expressly attributed commentary use were not included.
4. "Meets the packet standard" should not be silently converted into "proved plagiarism." The former is a consistency finding; the latter is a moral and factual conclusion requiring a narrower standard and stronger evidence of deceptive appropriation.