

Your First Love

by David Wilkerson

David Wilkerson emphasizes the importance of understanding the book of Revelation and applying its message to one's life by seeking a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit's guidance and repenting of one's sins.

Duration: 1:03:26

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7, Revelation 1:1-3, Revelation 2:1-3, Revelation 2:6, Revelation 17:18

Topics: "Repentance From Sin", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses various topics related to sin and the need for repentance. He mentions a man named Moses Byrd who used to make and sell pornographic cassettes but has since been saved. The speaker emphasizes the importance of hating sin and urges the congregation to get rid of any sinful influences in their lives, such as television. The sermon also touches on the book of Revelation and the need to read and understand its prophetic message. The speaker highlights the significance of the seven men chosen to serve in Acts 6, emphasizing their good reputation, fullness of the Spirit, and wisdom.

Transcript

Oh, hallelujah. Lord, the word gives us life. We love your word.

Holy Spirit, I pray for an anointing. Touch me. God, get through to our hearts the message of the Holy Spirit to the churches.

We are a part of the church. We belong to the body of Christ. And Lord, we want you to speak to us through your living word this morning.

I thank you for breaking my heart over this this morning, and the tears that you brought to my heart. And now, Lord, convey that now to this audience. We're not here to impress anybody, Lord.

We just want to hear from you. That's why we're here. We want to hear from heaven.

We want the Holy Ghost to speak to our hearts, so please do that. We're open, Lord. We receive from you now.

Amen. Now, many Christians avoid the book of Revelation. It seems so mysterious.

Have you ever read through this and seen the symbols of the beast and the dragons and the man-child and the woman-clothed and the son and the red horses, white horses and vials of wrath and locusts with eyes and fire coming out their tails? Martin Luther said, nobody really knows what's in this book. That's what he said. In fact, he didn't even want to include it in the canon of the Scripture.

And he finally came around to quoting from it, but said nobody knows what's in it. And a lot of people believe that. But I believe it's one of the most important books in the Bible.

It's becoming more so the closer we come to the coming of the Lord. Go to Revelation 1.1, if you will, please. It says, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, if it's the revelation of Jesus Christ, it's rather important, isn't it? The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him, not to John, but to him. Now, John delivered it to us, but it's the revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to him to show to his bondservants. The things which must shortly take place, and he communicated it by his angel to his bondservants.

Now, look at verse 3. If you wonder about the book of Revelation, well, look at this. This is prophetic. Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near.

Now, wouldn't you say that it's important for us to know it and read it? And to pray for an understanding of the Holy Spirit, what the book is all about. Daniel suggests that the books, some of them are closed until the Holy Spirit opens them at the end. I believe God is beginning to open this book.

Now, I'm saying just a little bit, but many who are praying, seeking God, really believe it's locked up. Now, God's opening to many the picture of Babylon in the 17th and 18th chapter of Revelation. He's beginning to open the message to the church.

And that's what I want to speak to you about this morning. Blessed is he, it says, who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy. Now, we're going to hear some of the words of this prophecy this morning.

Now, what's the promise? Blessed. Now, do you accept that or don't you? Lord, by the Holy Ghost, I accept that. You're going to bless me while I preach it, and we're going to bless all the hearers as we hear it this morning.

Praise His Holy Name. Now, it's written by John. Now, John was one of the three pillars of the church, remember, at Jerusalem.

Now, you hear mostly of Peter and James. You very seldom hear of John. He was one of the three pillars of the church at Jerusalem.

I wondered how John got from Jerusalem way up to Asia Minor, because he appears to be the superintendent of the seven churches in Asia Minor. There were seven churches. This is not just symbolic.

There were seven churches beginning at Ephesus, and this is where John finally moved after his release from the Isle of Patmos. Nero, remember, was the emperor who caused the first great persecution. From Nero to the Christian emperor Constantine, there were ten great persecutions.

Nero was the one who had Paul murdered. Remember that Peter was crucified, but Paul being a Roman could not be crucified by law, and tradition says he was murdered. He was killed by the sword three miles outside of the center of Rome, which is tres fontaines, which means three fountains, and tradition says that when they killed him, three fountains sprang up out of the ground.

And even today, you go to Rome, and there's a little thing there that tells the whole story of the murder of Paul, the apostle, and these three springs were supposed to have sprung up. Now, that's strictly tradition. But Paul was murdered between 64 and 69 A.D. after the death of Christ, and tradition said he was killed right outside of Rome.

But let me give you just a little bit of historical background. I love church history, and boy, some of the things I'm seeing lately have really made me look at what's happening today. It repeats itself, and it's true.

It's not just a cliché. The only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. Nero hated Christians, and he was the one, if you read it, it's frightening to read the life story of Nero.

He painted Christians in tar, and would nail them to poles in his garden, 300 at a time, and douse them with oil, and make human torches out of them. Of course, the tar made them burn longer. While they were all burning, 300 in a row, he'd race his white horse up and down laughing gleefully in and out through those burning human torches.

And the whole world was under persecution at the time of Nero. Remember, tradition says that Nero burned the city of Rome. He wanted it to be rebuilt called Nero, after his own name, and he blamed the Christians.

And that's why the persecution broke out as it did. The Roman Empire was in turmoil. Christians everywhere were being persecuted.

And it would last for 300 and some years, about 340 years, all the way up to Constantine. And remember that John is exiled under Nero to the island of Patmos. Now, even today, there's a basilica there, and there's a cave they said is where John stays.

And there really was an isle of Patmos. I believe John actually did go there. He was exiled there.

And after Paul dies, he spends his last 20 years in Ephesus. So it's very clear that John was in Asia, that he became the superintendent of the seven churches of Asia, and he was writing to them. They were in persecution at the time under Nero.

Now, remember, it says, if you look at chapter 2, I want you to go to chapter 2, and it says, let's go to chapter 1, verse 20 first. Verse 20, chapter 1, As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in the right hand, the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Alright, look at me if you will, please.

The word here in Greek, angel means pastor or messenger. That's the actual Greek interpretation of the word angel. In fact, it should have said to the pastors of the churches in Asia.

He's saying, this is what you pastors should be seeing in the Holy Ghost. This is what you should be preaching. The message is to you first.

And I receive that as from the Lord. This is something that I have to see first before I can share it. It's something that has to be made real to me.

And God is always speaking to the pulpit first. There are so many churches that are far ahead of their preachers nowadays. The letters we get, the congregations are far ahead of their pastors.

Now, not always, but generally now, the congregations are hungrier. All the ridicule that I get now from my book, the last book, does not come from the congregation, it comes from the pulpit. It comes from seven days in a row on PTL.

By some of the best-known prophecy teachers in America that they all rallied to say that it was a false prophecy. I don't care, it doesn't matter. I don't have television, I don't see it.

People write and tell me. But you see, the pastors need to see and hear from the Holy Ghost first so that they can bear this to the congregation. Now, I go to chapter 2, verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.

Now, there was a church in Ephesus, and this is where John died at a ripe old age. Some claim he was 90-some years old when he died. He died in Ephesus.

And there was an actual, this is not just all symbolic. Now, some people teach dispensationally that there are seven church ages. There were seven church ages, and the first Christian church was the Ephesus church.

And then during the dark ages, you had Sardis and Smyrna. And then we are the Laodicean age, the last backslidden age, rich in increased goods and not knowing that we're wretched and poor and blind. But you understand that even today we have Ephesus-type Christians.

We have those who have lost their first love today, don't we? You can find those who are the synagogue of Satan today. You find those that follow the doctrine of Balaam and Jezebel, all these things. I don't see it just dispensationally, and I don't argue with people who see it as seven layers of churches.

I believe God is looking at the whole church. He's looking over from the cross all the way to His coming. Then He sees seven types.

Seven types of Christians. Seven types of those who call themselves by His name. And there are these types today.

We don't have just Laodicean Christians today. And by the way, at Ephesus they had Laodicean Christians too, who were rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, as far as they were concerned. There were Laodiceans even in Ephesus.

So it's pretty hard to just layer it. I see God speaking, looking over the whole church, and what I hear is the Holy Ghost bearing the heart of God as He looks at His people. There are seven lampstands, and they're all on one.

It's like a candelabra. And He's the main stem, and these churches come out of this. And He's seeing some problems developing.

And remember Paul warned, he said, When I'm gone, grievous wolves are going to come in among you. He warned that the Spirit would come in among them. Now remember that the Holy Spirit gave this message, didn't He? Now, here's the prayer that I have with the Holy Ghost.

And I'll tell you, it's a strong argument when you get down and pray before God, and you open this book. And you say, Holy Ghost, You gave this to John. You said, Blessed are you who has ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, the Holy Spirit gave this, didn't He? He gave it to John, and He gave it to the church. Now, is there a different Holy Ghost that abides on you and me now, or is it the same Holy Ghost? You know what my argument is when I pray, Holy Ghost, You gave this to John, and You abide in me, so You know what this is all about. Because You're the one who gave it.

And You abide in me, so now You make it known to me. Now, you can go to God with that. You can put that in the bank.

And you can believe with all your heart that the same Holy Ghost that gave it, revealed it, is the same Holy Ghost who wants to make it real to us. Because He said, this is the way to overcome. I used to pray diligently, Oh God.

And I'll tell you, if you're in any kind of ministry today, singing or preaching, this has to have been your prayer. God, let me know what your heart is. Let me feel your heartbeat, so that when I get up and minister, I'm not just ministering something I've dreamed up or concocted, not just words, I want it to represent what you feel about this society.

I want to know your heart, I want to feel it, I want to preach your heart. The minute the Lord spoke to me, David, it's there, it's right there. This is what the Spirit says to the church.

The Spirit's in the whole counsel of God. He knows the heart of God, and He's already laid it out. David, here it is, get into it, seek it, pray for an opening, pray for an understanding.

And I believe that the secret of the whole system in the church now, and all that's happening, is right here. We're going to get into it in just a minute. The very same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, and who gave this to John, is the Holy Spirit that's here this morning.

And I want you to acknowledge that. Alright, I want to consider, not all the seven churches, I'm going to consider just the church of Ephesus. And I'm going to talk about an Ephesus-type Christian, because I believe these represent types of Christian.

Revelation 2, 1-7, we're going to read together, just follow me please. To the church, to the angel, to the pastor of the church of Ephesus write, the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands says this, I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men. And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not.

And you found them to be false. And you have persevered, and you've endured for my namesake, and have not grown weary. Now that's quite a compliment to the church, isn't it? Now would you like God to say that about you? Well, in fact, He does.

But, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. Now the church has fallen in spite of all these good deeds.

They have fallen. And repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I'm going to come to you, and I'll remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent. And this you do have.

In other words, there's one thing we have in common. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him whoever comes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Now, looking at this, you'd say, now it doesn't appear to me that God's very upset at these efficient type Christians here. Look at the list.

They worked hard. They persevered. That means they were patient.

They were steadfast. In fact, there are seven compliments that God gives this efficient type Christian. He said, you do many good deeds.

Number three, you can't stand the evildoers. You just don't like to see people committing sin. Number four, you have discernment.

You've not been fooled by the false preachers. You're not a phony. You recognize phonies.

There's something about you. You have discernment. You're a discerning Christian.

You've endured for the sake of my name. You really love my name. You honor my name.

You've not grown weary. Now, you keep that in mind because he says you're supposed to go back to something. Well, look, you can't say, well, I got weary.

You're not going to go back to something there. It's very, very important you see this. He said, you've not grown weary.

In other words, you're not ever contemplating the idea of quitting on the Lord. You've never thought of giving up. I doubt that there's anybody here who loves the Lord who's ever thought of giving up.

I've never once thought of giving up on my Lord. I can't even conceive of anyone who really loves the Lord, ever entertaining a thought, giving up. Now, you get discouraged, but you never think of quitting on the Lord, do you? Of course not.

Number seven, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. You hate them. Now, go with me to Acts 6, if you will, please.

This is very, very important. Many of us have seen this and we've skipped over it. I want you to go to the sixth chapter of Acts.

I'm going to read the first seven verses with you. Acts 6. We're going to find out who the Nicolaitans are. Because God says, you hate them just like I do.

You find it all through the second chapter. God says, Nicolaitans, Nicolaitans, I hate them and you hate them. Now, at this time, verse 1. Now, at this time, while the disciples were increasing in number, a

complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation. Now, look at this.

Seven. What kind of men? Men of good reputation. And what? Full of the Spirit and wisdom.

Is that the kind of men that we're going to choose? Well, we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Now, let's see who they appoint.

And the statement found approval with the whole congregation they chose. Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. And Philip.

Prochorus. Macanor. Timon.

Parmenas. And who? Nicholas. A proselyte or convert from Antioch.

He was a Gentile who came into the Jewish faith, the Jewish Christian faith. And Nicholas. And these they brought before the apostles.

What did they do? And after praying, they laid their hands on them. Nicholas was one of these seven men who were appointed to wait on tables. And he was chosen because the congregation considered him full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

And he was anointed and laid hands on by the apostleship. Correct? Nicholas. Now, what happened to Nicholas? Boy, church history is full of it.

Now, Polycarp was a student of John. And Polycarp's writings remained to then. Much of what we learned about John we get from the writings of Polycarp.

And he makes it very clear that Nicholas departed from the faith. That Nicholas... And boy, you... By the way, there's a jolly old gentleman at Christmas time. Saint what? Uh-huh.

I'm not going to get into that. There's a lot. Boy, when you follow it through, it's frightening.

Look at the... Go back to Revelation there, if you will. I want to show you the indictment against Nicholas and his followers. Go to Revelation 2, 6. All right.

I want to remind you. Yet this you do have, that you what? You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Go over to 2nd chapter, 15th and 16th verses now.

Verse 15 and 16. Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore, else I'm coming to you quickly.

And I'll make war against them with the sword of my mouth. Boy, God hates this thing. There's something that this man started.

There's something that this man taught that God hates. And boy, I did a study of this man. And he fathered a very hateful doctrine.

His followers became very corrupt and very sensuous. Because he left the message of the cross, of suffering and shame of the cross. He rejected the cross.

And Nicholas taught that the body itself was evil and could not be saved. Only the spirit could be saved. So that you could do whatever you pleased with the body as long as your spirit was right with God.

And that later became a doctrine called antinomianism, anti-law. And that antinomianism is still prevalent all over the church today. Anti-law.

Jesus died to save us from sin. You can live as you please. You can smoke and drink as long as you got saved, you're saved.

It's called antinomianism, anti-law. It started with the Nicolaitans. And the Nicolaitans became very sensuous.

And because they didn't hold to the cross, they didn't hold to what they did. They said, I was born in iniquity and there's no way my body can be transformed. The body is worthless.

It's no good. And that's finally why they started to wear these hair coats and reject the body. It led to monasteries.

It led to all kinds of rejections of the flesh. And remember, people spent centuries, they spent centuries trying to subdue the flesh. They tortured the flesh, beat it because it was no good.

But oh, their minds could race anywhere. They could do anything with their bodies as long as their spirit was right with God. And they became fornicators sexually.

They became immoral. And that sexual immorality was there in the very first church of Jerusalem. Nicholas, this apostolate, started it.

He gathered up a following and his followers carried it to the far extremes. And that has been with us to this very day. The spirit of the Nicolaitans is here.

Now, look at this Ephesian-type Christian. And this really hit me. Now, the word Nicolaitan is two Greek words put together.

Now, listen to me for just a moment. It's nikon, which means to conquer, and leos means to conquer people. To conquer people.

And this is a doctrine the devil instituted through Nicholas to conquer the church. The very word Nicolaitan means to conquer the people. The word means it.

That shook me up when I saw it. Nicholas first seduced the people to eat meat sacrificed to idols. He said, if I can get them to eat the meat sacrificed to idols, then he was a fornicator.

He reminds me of Moses Berg, the leader of the children of God. Moses Berg used to work for Teen Challenge out in California, out on Huntington Beach. We had a ministry there, and we gathered about 100 young people on fire for God, and he was one of the leaders.

And he was on fire, a man, a great teacher, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. But the man had a spirit of fornication in him. He never did yield that over to the Lord.

And those young people used to go up and down Huntington Beach during the hippie revolution, and they would preach Christ. Moses Berg would thunder the gospel. But then this thing got out of hand, and suddenly this Nicolaitan spirit gripped him.

And he started with the young women a ceremony, a hallowed ceremony that he invented. And I'll say it as tastefully as I can, but he would choose the mates, and he was the one who had to have the first night with every bride. And when we found it out, of course, we evicted him.

Three months later, he came to my rallies in Melody Land and picketed outside, calling me the antichrist and the beast. But by that time he had three wives, and he had seduced this whole thing. Because you see, he had taught these young people that if he could get them to make one compromise, they'll follow him all the way.

This is what Nicholas did. If I get them to eat the meat served to idols, I can get them to be fornicators. And they went right through the altar, they went right through this compromise, and that's why compromise is so hated by God.

That's why a man of God has to preach against compromise. That's why it burns in my soul. And Moses Berg, for the last ten years, he took three or four of our leaders out of Teen Challenge.

He took Linda Meisner, one of our right-hand girls up in New York, thundering prophetess, boy-conceived priest on the streets, got seduced, lived in absolute sin, and he turned all of his girls into prostitutes who were walking the streets prostituting with men to get them to join the children of God. He sent 30 women into Gaddafi's court to try to seduce Gaddafi and his whole court so that he could have some world power. Today, right now, I'm standing here, Moses Berg is a lunatic who spends his whole time making pornographic cassettes and selling them around the world with children.

His wife has been saved, one of his daughters has been saved. I met them in a rally two years ago. They've written a book since, a chilling book, and they said, his daughter said, that my father now spends his whole day, nothing sexually pleases him, nothing can touch him, he's like a lion in a cage, he walks back and forth all day long, a mad man, out of his mind, the spirit of Nicholas, the Nicolaitans.

Now, look what God is saying to this church. He said, you hate this, just like I hate it! You hate sin! You're the kind, you know, and if you haven't gotten rid of it, you tell it and you still sit there and say, isn't that awful? Man, I hate it. Well, if you hate it, turn it off.

Just turn it off. Clement of Alexander, one of the church fathers, listen to what he said about Nicholas and the Nicolaitans. He said, they abandoned themselves to wild pleasures like goats in lives of shameless self-indulgence.

They were wild goats. There were two requirements of the early church, remember? The Holy Ghost said, abstain from food offered to idols and avoid fornication. Isn't that what it said? Nicholas broke it, broke it.

He got his followers to eat the meat served to idols and to get caught up in what it meant and they became fornicators. Society of that day accepted sex outside of marriage and Nicholas capitalized on that. Now, the Spirit sounded an alarm from God's heart.

The vision type Christian hates this kind of thing and here, it's just as plain as it can be right there in 1.6, yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He said, you're one with

me on this hatred against sin. Now, look at me just a minute.

Do you hate the doctrine of the Nicolaitans? Do you really? Does your blood boil when you see the way some Christians are living today? Even Christians in the church, their compromise? I don't dislike Amy Grant. I'll pray for her. I love her as a part of the family of God.

But I hate that compromise. I hate it. There's something in me that says, God, that's not right.

You see, the whole thing is I'm trying to bring them the message and language they understand. But if you bring Jesus outside of the cross and outside of the anointing of the Holy Ghost, there's no life to it. It doesn't change anything.

Just saying Jesus or just quoting the Scripture, that's a dead book and not the Holy Ghost. Do you sit around with your Christian friends and talk about something like this? Look how the way the world's going. Think of the wickedness in the world.

Doesn't your spiritual blood boil in you? Come on now. You hate, don't you? You hate. I don't know how you can even call yourself a follower of Jesus and not hate what you see happening in the world and in the church especially.

In the church. The hatred that Brother Ravenhill's had against him all these years, that's not it. That's from the Holy Ghost.

When I feel it and when it comes from this pulpit, that's the Holy Ghost venting His anger against it. He said, you hate corruption. You hate fornication just as I do.

Now that's good. Look what we have so far. We've got an efficient Christian who's got a servant heart.

He's a persevering man or woman. He's not thinking of giving up on the faith. He's holding to the precious name of Jesus.

They're doing many wonderful good Christian deeds. They're discerning the phony stuff. They're avoiding it.

They're hating sin, hating compromise with the past. And yet God says, I've got something against you. Now that's awesome to know that God can have something against you when you hate sin.

When you're holding to His name. When you're persevering. When you've not let go and you're not even weary.

And yet God says, I've got something against you. That's awesome. And that hit me the other day.

Because I'd just written a book called Set the Trumpet where I've hated sin and I've told the whole world about God's hatred for sin. And yet God in the secret clause said, I've got something against you. I said, Lord, how can you have anything against me? Man, I've preached sin like at the risk of my reputation.

Man, I've preached against sin. I'm not weary of you. I love you in your name.

How can you have anything against me? He's saying, in spite of all these good things I can say about you, you've fallen. You're in need of repentance. In fact, God says, if you don't repent, I'm going to come to you and remove my anointing, which is the candlestick.

I'm going to remove it from you. Huh. You see, God's going to start opening some of these things to us.

He's going to show us. You see, this is one of the most misunderstood... Revelation 2, 4, and 5. Look at it. This is the most misunderstood Scripture.

One of the most misunderstood. But I found this against you. But I have this against you.

That you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you've fallen to repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I'm coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent. Now, you see, we preach about going back to our first love.

We talk about it. We preach it. There's not a Christian here that hasn't heard about going back to your first love.

I've lost my first love. Oh, we've so misquoted that we don't even begin to understand what that actually means. I hope we can today.

Let's begin by telling you what it's not. Let me tell you what I believe it is not. It is not going back to your kind of love.

Not to the zeal and the enthusiasm you had when you were first saved. You see, many people are not even coming to the Lord and getting a sound salvation anymore. I'll go further.

I'll say the majority of people who are getting saved today in the church of Jesus Christ are coming out of selfish interest. They're coming out of a sense of avoiding the wrath of God. I don't want to go to hell.

They're coming because people are preaching, come to Jesus and you'll find happiness, you'll heal your marriage, you'll heal your body. It's self-interest. And because of that self-interest, we have not seen the cross, we've not seen the apostolic love for Jesus Christ.

And we get the idea of the Lord saying, when you first got saved, you had such zeal, you read the Bible, you witnessed, you prayed, go back to that. No, no, no. I don't want to go back to that.

And my Bible says that you can't enter the kingdom of God unless you become like a child. But once you enter it, He said, you put away childish things and you grow up and be a man. So it's not going back to something you had.

It's not going back to your kind of childlike love when you first got saved. Oh, I don't want to go back. I had zeal without wisdom.

In fact, He has just painted you here. He's painted us. The Holy Ghost has painted a picture of a mature type Christian who perseveres, who's able to discern wickedness and evil and good.

Someone who hates sin. I didn't hate sin like I should when I first got saved. He taught me how to hate sin.

I've matured since that point. Why would I go back to that? No, you don't go back to that. We see that as going back to an earlier experience in our Christian life.

In other words, I used to have it, and I lost it, so I'm going to go back and do well again. And so we keep struggling. You know, Lord, maybe if I witnessed some more and we put our spirits through trying to get back to something we feel we lost.

That's not what it means at all. I don't believe it means that at all. Well, I wouldn't want most Christians to go back to what they were.

Didn't have much to start with. Because look what the Spirit's saying. In fact, God's complimenting this efficient type for not getting weary.

He said, you didn't lose something. You did lose the zeal. He's complimenting.

You didn't lose your hatred towards sin if you had it. In fact, you've not lost anything. Look at there.

He's complimenting. You're not compromised. You've not been thinking of giving up.

You're not getting spiritually lazy. Let me read it in the original Greek, and maybe it'll come out a little clearer. Here is what I have against you.

I'm reading in the original Greek. You don't love me as at first. Remember how far you have fallen.

Turn from your sins and do what was done at first. Do what was done at first. Where? The apostolic church.

What have we fallen from? The love of those apostles. The love of that first church. He's talking about churches here.

He said, you have all the doctrines of the apostles. You have all the hatred of sin that you're supposed to have. You have all the makings.

You still do the deeds. You're doing the things by rote. You're doing all these things.

But in the process, you've lost the love that they had. We're not to go back to something we had. We go back to what the church had.

Now do you understand what we're trying to point out here now? Going back to whose first love? The first love the Holy Ghost revealed to His body, the church. The kind of love that made them go to the stake. To be burned for the sake of the gospel.

The church has fallen. God's looking on this modern church and He says, Oh, you do more charitable deeds than anybody. You have all the right words.

The doctrines are in place. You've retained all the ordinances. You still fight sin and corruption.

But you've lost. You've fallen from their example of love for me. You have lost that one thing that makes all of this other worthwhile in my sight.

Otherwise, all you're worth is filthy rags in my sight. Just sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Because only love, a passionate love for Jesus Christ makes it all right.

Acceptable in the sight of God. The fall from love began most notably under Constantine. Now, folks, please let me give you a little history lesson.

And this is what shook me up. I spent the last few days just reading about the imperial preacher. I'm thinking of a little book called The Imperial Preacher and The Imperial Kingdom.

Because we have Christians everywhere now preaching what they call the kingdom message. They preach dominion. And the concept is this.

God is going in these last days to give the Christians all the wealth of the world. He's going to give us the sciences and the arts and the government. He's going to put a Christian president in there.

And we're going to have all the wealth of the world. And we're going to take dominion. And we're going to bring sin down and bring King Jesus back to our earth.

It's been transformed by our power. It's called the kingdom message and it's not new. And I want to tell you something.

They had it all under Constantine. They had it all. They had an imperial preacher.

They owned the government. They owned arts and science. They owned it all.

And it ended in disaster. Constantine, after ten emperors that hated God, the last two, Diocletian and Galerius, persecuted the Christians more than anybody else. And they died terrible deaths.

Galerius committed suicide and Diocletian died. The historian said he died by a lonesome disease. His body ulcerated, swarming with tiny insects.

Meaning some kind of cancer perhaps. These emperors died horrible deaths. And here comes Constantine to the throne.

And he has an edict. They passed in 313 an edict. An edict of toleration where they began to tolerate Christians.

And then Constantine claims that he had a vision of Christ and Christ appeared to him and he got a picture of the cross. Helena brought two nails from the cross of Jesus from Jerusalem. One nail he put in the stud of his horse and another nail he put in his helmet to remind him of the cross of Jesus.

And Constantine became emperor around 313. Passed the edict of toleration Christianity. Within eight years became the state religion.

Now remember, it's a state religion. Now Constantine, the emperor of Rome made Christianity the state religion. He set himself up as the chief head of the church and bishop.

And it was the beginning of a new kind of Christianity. A church state religion. He would preach against sin like no man.

He would thunder against sin. Now keep in mind, now listen to this. You can get your history book and if you're interested I'll tell you where you get the books.

Not only Miller's Church History, but I'll give you two other tremendous, very dependable, historical church history books and you can prove this. He called himself the imperial preacher. And you know what we want today? We want somebody like Pat Robertson to be our imperial preacher.

And a lot of Christians think Reagan is the imperial preacher. I've heard preachers on television talk about how spiritual the man is and yet when he was giving his debates they asked him what it means to be born again. He said, I don't know what it means.

I don't know what it means. We should not be fooled. We should pray for the man, love him, but not make him our imperial preacher.

And we're still looking for that imperial preacher. He's going to come and bring the government of God down. He said, my kingdom is not of this world.

It's not of this world. He said, heaven and earth will pass away. Lord be to God.

Well, the whole time he's thundering against sin and by the way, here's where applause started in the church. About 318 A.D. They never had applause in the church. Christ was so revered.

His presence, bodily presence, so honored that they came in with their heads bowed. And they came in in a holy silence. The awe of His presence was so real.

But then when King Constantine came in and took the Pope to thunder against sin, they started applauding. Applause started in the church. I can tell you the year it started.

Because a man, an imperial preacher, this man's thundering against adultery and he locked up adulterers. He killed some for adultery. In fact, he killed his own son he thought committed adultery.

He didn't even have proof that he committed adultery. Now, here's the man preaching against sin, Constantine, yet he revered the God Apollo. He consulted with fortune tellers almost every week.

He revered the God of fortune, prosperity, and until the day he died, he kept the title Pontifex Maximus, which means the high priest of all the heathen hierarchy. The high priest of the heathen, and in the pulpit of Christ, preaching the gospel and everybody applauding. The bishops now were on the official payroll.

They were building big churches and bishops were competing with one another to build big churches and it was paid out of the state treasury. In the very year that he called the Nicaea Council, out of which came the Nicæan Creed, the very year he called that National Christian Conference, he ordered the execution of his brother-in-law, the cynist. He then killed his 11-year-old nephew.

He killed his oldest son, Crispus, and most historians believe, some don't believe, but two out of three believe, that he killed his second wife, Fausta, by having her suffocated in the vapors of an overheated bath. Murdered his wife, his son, his nephew, a murderer, an adulterer, but standing in the pulpit and the bishops applauding him, and get this picture, here's the first conference of the church, now it's a state religion, and they're at Nicaea, and this is the conference of Nicaea, and there are over 350 bishops lined up on both sides, and here's a great procession, all the bishops are in robes now, and those robes are hiding the scars from the salt mines, where just 15 years ago they were working in salt mines, under Diocletian, and they were being persecuted, and they were meeting in little meetings, crying out to God for deliverance, worshiping the Lord, and glorifying the cross of Jesus, and here they are now in purple robes, in fancy churches, on the state payroll. And here comes Constantine, in his royal robes, dripping in diamonds and rubies, on an ivory throne, in his procession of bishops and priests, and sits there, with murder and adultery in his heart, and he oversees the Nicæan council, out of which came the Nicæan creed.

And now all these bishops, are living in luxury, and now they're applauding this man, and saying he's the savior of the church. Nicholas, the Nicæan spirit. The emperor, and his bishops, jailed fornicators.

They were jailing fornicators. Did they not hate sin? But now, the church had nothing but outward form. And you know what happened now? And I can show you the book, I'll show you the page.

Because they lost the true love of the first church, they started applauding in church, and they started outward forms of worship, of dancing and carrying banners. Processions. They ended up five years later, at the graves of the martyrs, bringing their lunches and having suppers at the graves, and they began to dance and drink at these, and finally the heathens said, why be a Christian? They dance and drink just like we do.

We've had an imperial preacher. We've had an imperial kingdom. And it brought nothing but disaster.

The churches only thrived under persecution. It's all been done before, and it's ended up in a loveless faith. The church that failed from the love of the apostolic fathers.

And I see all the dancing today, and the waving of banners, and I'm not standing to condemn that, but I'm saying, if we had the love of Jesus Christ, the apostles' head, we would be on our face weeping, there would be such an awe, there would be such a ravage! I wonder how many people are carrying banners and dancing. Oh, hey, they hate sin in other people, but how many have the Nicolaitan spirit in their heart of compromise? How do I know that the love of the church of Jesus Christ is gone? How do I know that we have fallen from love? How can you tell that? Now, it's more than just, Jesus said, if you love Me, you'll obey Me. But it's more than just the lack of obedience we see in the church.

That's one of the signs. And I want to tell you something. If you love the Lord, you don't need ten steps on how to overcome sin.

You don't need a doctrine of holiness. If you love Him, He said, you'll obey Me. And it's that simple.

And if you're disobeying Him, you'd better look at it, you'd better say, something's wrong with my love. And we pick and choose on our sins, we've taught and pulled our sins, and we say, like if you have lust in your heart, or if you have a doctrine in your heart, if I could just get victory over this one thing, boy, I'd be so pleased with the Lord. No, He's saying, that's just a symptom.

You're not loving Me. You're disobeying Me because there's something wrong deep inside. And now when there's a failure in my heart, I don't look at the failure, I look at the cause of it down deep inside.

I get scared. I say, Lord, I'm doing this because deep inside I'm not loving You like I should. There's a lack of love.

I've lost that apostolic love. That's why I'm disobedient. Though there's another symptom that shows that we have fallen from the love that the apostles had for Jesus in that first church in Jerusalem.

And you know what it is? It's neglect of the hope of His coming. The neglect of the hope of His coming. You know what this kingdom preaching is doing? It's putting the coming of Jesus off into some distant point.

They're saying, first we've got to bring the world under subjection so everybody relaxes. Oh, we've got to have a Christian president first. We've got to have the resources of the world.

We've got to take over the arts and the sciences. And so everybody relaxes. When the first church did not relax, they thought He was coming in the twinkling of an eye.

The message was said, behold, He comes quickly! Prepare! Awake! They said He's coming for those who look for His appearance. In fact, the Scripture denounces those who say the Lord is delayed. He's coming.

He denounces that. Our Christ thunders against those who say the Lord. Paul thundered against those who said the Lord's delayed.

He's coming. Now folks, you may not believe in the rapture, but I hate to hear men get up and mock the rapture. Mock it! And say you poor, deluded Christians believing that Jesus is going to come and take you off the earth.

He's not taking you off the earth. You're going to stay here on the earth. Well, there's going to be a new heaven.

There's going to be a new earth. There's going to be subdued. There's going to be a government of God.

A righteous government of God. There's no question about that. There's going to be a new heaven and a new earth.

This heaven and earth are going to pass away and that new one's not going to be like this one at all. It's going to be glorious. Hallelujah! After His own nature.

Glory be to Jesus! You can't legislate the sin out of hearts. There's a man out in Colorado. He sends out magazines.

He mocks my message. He preaches on, but oh, he said, America's getting better and better. The kingdom is coming.

We should be rejoicing. Don't listen to these gloom and doom preachers. And I said, my brother, have you ever heard of AIDS? Have you not heard of chlamydia? There may be 5 million girls now with chlamydia in the United States and chlamydia causes the womb.

I just got another article yesterday and they're worried that maybe 50% in the next few years of our young ladies will not be able to have children because of chlamydia, another sexual disease. Where have you been, preacher? Where have you been? Is it getting better? No, it's in ruins. And it's going to pass away.

God's going to burn it by fire. There's a fire reserved right now. Hallelujah.

Going to burn it out! Lord of God. Imperial preacher, imperial president, Christian president. We've had it.

You see, they say even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. This is how you can know that the church has fallen from that love. Most people don't... I shouldn't say that.

Many Christians really don't want Jesus to come. They just bought a new car. They have a new home.

They're so enjoying life now. Life is just so sweet and beautiful now. The coming of the Lord would upset everything.

It would be a disaster. There was a young preacher in Dallas at a convention who said, I don't want Jesus to come now. I'm so busy.

He'll have to drag me away. And there was fear in my heart. I said, that poor, deluded young man.

He said he's coming for those who look for his appearing. Oh, if you love him, you want to be with him where he is. And that's the greatest hope.

That's the desire of my heart. I want Jesus to come now! Not that I'm tired of evangelizing. No, no, no.

And I feel for the loss of the world, yes. But the world is hearing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, I called and called and you refused.

And one of these days, he said, that's enough. The Bible said the trumpets will sound. He said he's coming as a thief in the night and the twinkling of an eye.

When that is, I don't know. But I know, he said, we're to watch. We're to expect his coming.

And that's the hope. That's the hope. And the church is losing that hope.

You don't hear a man anymore standing in the pulpit saying, Get ready, Jesus is coming. When's the last time you heard the message burning in your heart from the pulpit? A man who fastly got your heart stirred up and started to get you looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's coming at any moment.

And brother, sister, if that doesn't make you expect it, that should put you on the tip of your toes. You're going to stand one of these days before the judge of the whole earth. It was intended for that very purpose.

You say that's too emotional? That's too fleshly? No. Peter said, what kind of man ought you to be? What kind of man ought you to be? Knowing that the fire of the holocaust is about to come. And all manner of conversation.

It's all going to burn. What kind of persons ought we to be in light of that? Is there anything in this world worth holding on to now in light of that? Is there anything you own worth taking your mind and your time and your attention? That's the one thing I have against the prosperity preaching. That it's blunting this hope.

It's blunting this hope. It's taking the eyes of the people off. The scripture says, if you love the world, the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

The hope is not in you anymore. You've fallen from that expectancy. Those disciples expected Him at any moment.

And they worked and they lived in the light of that. Not in fear, but out of love He's coming. Not afraid of hell.

No, they were saying, oh, I want to see Him, be with Him. Don't you have that this morning? Are you losing that? He says, go back to that. When He's saying go back, you go back to that expectancy of the first church.

That kind of love for me that wanted to be with me. That expected me at any moment. Now, what's the Holy Spirit? It's one thing to have the Holy Spirit speak to the church and sit back and say, well, that's what He's saying to the church.

The church is falling. But what about us? What is He saying individually? I want you to go with me to 1 Samuel 16, please. I want to make it personal.

1 Samuel 16. Verse 7. Here's another misunderstood scripture. 1 Samuel 16, 7. But the Lord said to Samuel, do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.

For God sees not as man sees. Now, here's the very familiar passage. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Now, would you look at me, please? Man looks at the outward appearance. Who is the man? We always say it's the other man. No.

I'm the man. And I'm the one who's guilty of looking at my outward appearance, but not really getting to my heart. You see, we get the idea that nobody really understands me, but God sees something in me.

Everybody's looking at my outward appearance. No, you're looking at your outward appearance, God says. And He's saying that to me.

Hey, David, you keep looking at your outward appearance, and you look at all the good deeds you're doing, you look at the way you hate sin, you look at all these outward things. But He said, I'm interested in what's happening in your heart. I'm interested about that love thing that's deep inside your heart.

And you can say, Lord, I love You. Love Your name. I've never thought of quitting.

I'm always faithful. I'm not a phony. You see, to think that God can have something against us because something's missing in our heart, in our relationship to Him.

I'm going to tell you something. If you don't have this apostolic love for Jesus, all the preaching to condemn you to read your Bible will not work. I can thunder here, and any preacher can thunder trying to get you to pray, pray, and they can condemn you, and conjoin you, and ridicule you, and condemn you, and you'll not do it.

Any more than you'll lose weight by your husband or wife screaming at you. If you love Him, that's the byproduct. And if you're not doing it, you better check your love.

If you're not into this book, hungry, if you're not praying daily seeking His faith, you better check your love. All this talk about being faithful, all the hatred towards sin, and all these other Ephesian effects, these seven Ephesian complimentary things about you mean nothing. Because you don't love Him.

Because if you loved Him, you'd be in His Word. If you loved Him, you'd be talking to Him. You'd be with Him in His presence.

Wouldn't you? So what good is me trying to say, Hey, I used to go around and say, Have you been reading your Bible lately? Have you really been praying? I'd talk to my staff. And now I just don't feel I can do that much anymore. I should be saying, Do you really love Him? Now, I want to give you a closing thought.

When I saw this last night, tears just welled up in my eyes. Go to John 21 with me. I'm going to close in just a minute, but I want to show you something.

It broke my heart. And I hope and pray that it will touch you. I believe the Lord has given me a revelation here.

Just a simple revelation, but I want to share it with you. John 21. Go to verse 15.

And just wait for us. We're going to start at verse 15. It's very familiar, but I want to show you something.

The Holy Spirit, last night, I just had to stop and get my handkerchief. Oh, God. I'd never seen it before.

So when they had finished breakfast, verse 15, John 21. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? More than the other disciples, he means. He said to him, yes, Lord.

You know that I love you. He said to him, tend my lambs. It means, and King James has the correct one, feed my lambs.

He said to him again the second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him, shepherd or feed my sheep.

He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, feed my sheep.

Now look at me. You know what we've thought of? You know how we've dealt with this Scripture? He said, go evangelize. Go teach the people.

Go preach. That's not it at all. No.

It's much more than that. Isn't Jesus Christ the bread, the living bread? Doesn't he feed us? Let me put it this way. There's some of you that I know that come to these meetings and you feed me.

And you don't say a word. You've never preached to me. You've never witnessed to me, but you feed me.

There's something about your countenance. You've been shedding with God. And there's a love for the Word in you.

And you sit and you drink it in. And I see Jesus in you and seeing that, you feed me. It feeds something in me.

It's a hope you give me. It's a joy. That's why Paul the Apostle, when he's writing to the church and they were overcoming, he said, you're my joy in the Lord.

You're my life. You're feeding me. You feed something in me.

I want to see people loving Jesus. And you feed that in me. I want to see people in the Word and you feed that in me.

That hope, you feed me. There's some of you here, you feed me. I love to be around you.

Just being around some of you, you feed me. You know what he's saying to Peter? Peter, when you denied me, you already took something out of these men, your brethren. You were a hope.

You had such zeal. And when you failed, they were so cold and empty as a result of that. Now, I want you to love me so much that your love for me will be an example.

You'll feed them. You'll be feeding their spirits. Not that love.

And I'll tell you what, the man who loves me the most, and there's so much in the Scripture that says God is love, and if you don't love your brother, you don't love God. You know the man who really loves me? It's the man who loves Jesus with all his heart. By loving Jesus with all his heart, he's loving me.

He's feeding me. It's not the man who puts his arm around my back and compliments me. The man who really loves me and loves the whole world is the one who passionately loves Jesus Christ.

He's loving the world by loving Jesus. He's loving his brethren. Do you see that? Am I the only one seeing that? Is the Holy Ghost making that real to you? This precious bread of life? Do you know that Peter's been feeding me ever since? When I see Peter stand in front of the same priest who crucified Jesus, the same priest that once made him coward, he's standing before Annas and Caiaphas, he's standing before that same mob who crucified Jesus, and he ran from them, now he's saying, they're saying, don't you dare preach his name.

He said, who are we to listen to the man? Now I'm listening to God at the risk of his life. That feeds me. Peter's been feeding the world ever since.

Oh yeah, you're all these good things, and I compliment you for that, Jesus says, but there's one thing I've got against you. Church of Jesus Christ, you've fallen from this biblical love, this New Testament love. Nothing can shake.

You go to the 11th chapter of Hebrews and you'll see it. Dying at the stake. Saum asunder.

Do you call this love today when people clamor for things? In their rights? They shake their fist at God, it's in the book and I claim it! It's mine! Oh, the arrogance of that. The selfishness of that. The lack of love! That's a church that's calling from grace and love.

And I hate it. But I hate it in myself more than that. And I've had God say to me, it's not enough to protect the church from the devil, but to feed the sheep.

The shepherd can get a whole flock of sheep in there and be so concerned about the enemy, he doesn't feed them. And they can be the most protected flock and starve them to death. No, it's not just security.

It's feeding. Jesus. He said, if you love me, feed my sheep.

Feed. Lord, I want to feed my brothers and my sisters. I want to love you, Lord, to the extent that you're not just first, but you're everything.

That nothing in this world is going to hold me. Not my ministry. Not anything in this world that I would be shut in with you, growing in the knowledge of your love.

And that you so consume my mind and my thoughts that when I'm around people, they'll see Jesus. And their hungry hearts will be fed. Lord, it's not so much what I've said this morning as the Spirit of the Lord that makes it real.

Now, Holy Spirit, you gave this. Now, bless it. Let it bring forth fruit in our hearts.

Let it bring forth fruits. Are you anxious to be one who feeds the sheep? Oh, it's not just the preacher and the pulpit. You're to feed the sheep.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/15/SID15751.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-wilkerson/your-first-love/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net