

# The Loveless Church

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thank you, Lois. What was that called? Ancient words. Ancient? Ancient words. Thank you.
- Ancient words. Good morning. Good morning. Very good to be with you.
- So, we come to the second chapter of the book of Revelation.
- See, we're just moving right along. Take your Bibles and turn with me if you are able to.
- To the book of Revelation, very last book in the New Testament. To chapter 2. Last week, we were able to observe the vision that John saw.
- [ 1 : 0 6 ]     The vision of lampstands. And then, more importantly, the vision of the Son of Man who was standing in the midst.
- Walking in the midst of the lampstands, which were the churches. And now we begin to hear the message to each church. Christ is going to have a message for seven different churches.
- And seven different messages. And at the end of each message, it says, To him who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church is.
- Plural. Not just what the Spirit says to that church, but everyone who has an ear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to all churches.
- No matter time, place, or situation. So, this applies to us. This is not just an ancient message. And I think you'll find as we talk about, as we read about this Ephesian church, this loveless church, cold church, we'll see that, yes, that is still something that happens today.
- [ 2 : 2 4 ]     Churches who lose their love. So, I want to read the text, and then we'll pray, and then we'll dig into it. So, if you're able, please stand as I read from Revelation chapter 2, verses 1 through 7.
- Jesus says, to the angel of the church in Ephesus, write, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven lampstands.
- I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles, and are not, and have found them to be false.
- I know you are enduring patiently, and bearing up for my namesake, and you have not grown weary.
- But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first.
- [ 3 : 5 2 ]     If not, I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.
- Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. So reads the word.

Let us pray for understanding. Father, we ask as always, that you would be the interpreter of your word, that you would be the speaker of the word, that you might use your vessel to speak through.

We don't want to hear just words on a page. We don't want to hear a history lesson. We want to hear from you. We want your diagnosis of ourselves.

[ 5 : 05 ] So, Father, we ask that you would speak through your Spirit in this word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

First loves. Remember your first love? I don't want to hear any stories.

No. I came across this story. I thought related in a little bit. The local news station was interviewing an 80-year-old lady because she had just gotten married for the fourth time.

The interviewer asked her questions about her life, about what it felt like to be marrying again at 80, and then about her new husband's occupation.

Well, he's a funeral director, she said. Interesting, the newsman said. He then asked her if she wouldn't mind telling him a little bit, a little bit about her first three husbands and what they did for a living.

[ 6 : 12 ] She paused for a few moments, needing time to reflect on all those years. After a short time, a smile came to her face, and she answered proudly, explaining that she had first married a banker in her 20s, then a circus ringmaster in her 40s, a preacher in her 60s, and now in her 80s, a funeral director.

The interviewer looked at her quite astonished and asked, why had she married four men with such diverse occupations? She smiled, explained, well, I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go.

First loves. I don't know if that's a true story. I have no idea. It came to my email box. Do you remember your first love?

I'm not talking about your first crush, your first infatuation. I mean the first sold-out commitment to sacrifice everything for the Lord Jesus.

Do you remember that first love? This is what Jesus asks of the church of Ephesus, the church that he says has left their first love, abandoned.

[ 7 : 53 ] They've let that love vanish. I want us to understand this church background just a little bit. It was no small village, as we might imagine, an early church, little villages, right? Ephesus. What was Ephesus like?

Well, let me read from a scholar named Robert Mounts, who I thought summarized Ephesus pretty well. He said, it's appropriate that the first letter should be sent to Ephesus.

It was the most important city in Asia Minor. It flourished as an important commercial and export center for Asia. The traveler from Rome, landing in Ephesus, would proceed up a magnificent avenue, 35 feet wide, lined with columns, from the harbor all the way to the middle of the city.

No village. By New Testament times, it had grown to more than a quarter of a million people.

[ 9 : 12 ] That's even bigger than Palmer Lane. Than Monument. A quarter of a million people in this ancient town. No small village.

It had commercial importance, and that was heightened by three trade routes, not just one, but three trade routes that came through Ephesus.

Obviously, they had the west coast port there on the Aegean Sea that was then next to Rome and Greece. And so that had a major commercial impact on the city.

It was a city of great political importance. As a free city, it had been granted by Rome the right of self-government. It also served as a city in which the Roman governor, on a regular schedule, tried important cases and dispensed judgment.

Excuse me. It boasted a major stadium, a marketplace, and a theater. The theater seated 25,000 people. No small village.

[ 10 : 28 ] The imperial cult was not neglected in Ephesus. Temples were built to the emperors Claudius, Hadrian, and Severus.

Three temples to honor the god emperor. But the major religious attraction, however, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the temple of Artemis.

also known in Latin as Diana. The temple of Artemis, as I said, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Why? Well, Pliny the Elder, an ancient historian, gives the dimensions of the temple as 425 feet long, longer than a football field, 225, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high.

Quite an accomplishment for ancient buildings. He also notes that one, that the 127 pillars were of Parian, Parian marble, with 36 of them inlaid with gold and jewels.

[ 11 : 54 ] Quite the sight. You'll even read, as you read of Paul coming into Ephesus, and by the way, Paul was in Ephesus for three years, planting a church that affected all of Asia.

And there was a riot in Ephesus when Paul was there, over this temple of Artemis, because Paul was converting people and turning them away from the cult, and to actually believing that their God was I know God.

And it was affecting business and trade as people were burning their magic books and their sacred arts and turning to Christianity.

This was not good. So, here we come to Revelation 2, this first letter to the church at Ephesus.

What does Jesus say to this church and to ours? Well, again, what was it like to be in Ephesus? Paul planted this church in about 52 AD, and now, by the time John is writing in about 95 AD, this church is over 40 years old.

[ 13 : 16 ] It's been there a while. And it's still battling with the religious cults. And, of course, the imperial cult, the cult to worship the emperor Domitian, Domitian was one of the first emperors to really push this idea, required recognition as a god.

And so, to not, to actually say there's another god, to proclaim that there's only one god and his name is Yahweh, not Domitian, is to get yourself in real trouble.

that's why John was banished to Patmos, the island. So, that's going on. So, what is it like?

So, here's an embattled church. I want you to get the, because, I want you to maybe begin to understand how they got into this position of losing their first love.

They're a battled church, embattled church. They're surrounded by enemies, by idolatry, by magic arts, by cults. Okay, very strong and active cults in this city.

[ 14 : 31 ] When Paul wrote to Timothy, he wrote to Timothy to go to Ephesus and, excuse me, encourage them and teach them about standing strong.

In Acts 20, when Paul left Ephesus, he met the elders of the church and he warned them about wolves who would arise even from within their own church. And so, they kind of had this fortified mentality, which is right in one sense.

They were defending the truth. But after battling for the truth for years, here's a church that I think has turned inward to protect itself.

kind of a defensive mindset. A culture of distrust and suspicion with outsiders.

There's so much to fight against. See, that good quality of defending the truth at the expense of loving others is probably what happens in this kind of church.

[ 15 : 42 ] So, what is Jesus' diagnosis? Excuse me. Take another drink of water. Worship was particularly good today for me.

Didn't have anything to do with you guys, just for me. No, it did have something to do with you, but that's not the point. Yeah, thank you. Thank you, brother. I need that.

So, what does Jesus say to this church and to ours? Is this, are we this church? Are we in danger of this church?

Well, I think every church is in danger of being like this. So, we need to listen. So, I think we could break it down into two messages that Jesus gives. One, of comfort.

He recognizes their strengths. He commends them, and then secondly, he confronts them about their weaknesses, about their loss, their fading, their vulnerability.

[ 16 : 45 ] So, he comforts. He sees their strengths. So, I would summarize their strengths like this. This is a church that is dedicated and vigilant for the truth.

They are a hardworking, diligent, devoted church, and they are particularly vigilant for the truth. That's good. That's a strength.

Notice in verse 1 who's speaking. Jesus introduces himself and he refers back to the vision that John saw. He's going to pick out two characteristics about what John saw when he saw the Son of Man.

Verse 1, to the angel of the church in Ephesus write the words of him who what? One, holds the seven stars in his right hand, and two, who walks among the lampstands.

So, he's one who has a strong hold of the seven stars. Remember, he saw in the vision one holding seven stars in his right hand, which he then explains at the end of chapter 1 are the seven stars are the seven angels of the churches, which could either be a human messenger angel or more more likely a true angel of the church, a representative, spiritual representative of the church, who would be held accountable for that church?

[ 18 : 08 ] Angels are not perfect. We know they can rebel, and we know that we will judge angels. Don't want to lead that charge, but Paul talks about they are accountable.

Here they're accountable too. Somehow, God works with having an angel, maybe a guardian angel, I think, to each church that is helping us fight this invisible battle as Israel had angels protecting her.

So anyway, what we're focusing on is who Jesus presents himself. What is it out of that vision that he wants Ephesus particularly to focus on? One, he's the one holding those seven angels in his right hand.

What does that mean? He has sovereign control of this church. To use a pun, he's hands-on. He has this church in his hands.

Okay? And then secondly, he's the one walking in the midst of the lampstands. He is present in this church. He is there. He's with us as well.

[ 19 : 21 ] He knows us. He's walking with us. He knows what we do well and what we may lack. So then, what does he commend?

First of all, he commends their works. He says in verse 2, I know your works. I know. I see all your works. God does not miss the works that we as a church do.

God does not miss the behind-the-scenes prayers, the behind-the-scenes labors, the caring, the hard work, the dedication, the practice time to make sure things go well so that worship is not disturbed, the hard work and study, the Bible studies, the visitations, what the phone calls.

He doesn't miss any of that. He knows. He knows where the hard work is, where the dedication is. Nobody else might know, but that doesn't matter if we're doing it for Jesus.

It does matter in some social ways. We want to be encouraged, but he knows. And so he says to them, here's what I know about you.

[ 20 : 43 ] Your toil. In other words, you work hard. You labor. Your patient endurance. You keep doing it. You do it when it's hard. You do it when you don't want to do it.

You keep doing it. You are dedicated people. You're faithful. Then he adds in verse 3, I know you're enduring patiently and bearing up.

Why? For my name's sake. I know you're doing it for the right reason. You're not just going to do it. You're doing it because of me. You love me. You do love me.

You've lost some love, but you love me. You're doing it for me. Hard work. dedication, loyalty, devotion to Jesus.

And then notice especially in verse 2, the second part of verse 2, he calls out something about them, this vigilance, their watchfulness. He says, I know that you cannot bear with those who are evil.

[ 21 : 52 ] In other words, you don't tolerate ongoing evil. That is aggressive evil. They're not out there condemning the world. Things that come into the church, they're not going to allow evil to persist.

They're going to overcome evil with good. And so you don't tolerate those who are evil, particularly those who call themselves apostles and are not because you have tested them and found them to be false.

false. So you don't just take their word for it. You don't just believe anyone who says, God speaks through me. Because there's lots of people that say God speaks through me and they're lying.

me. There's a way of testing that. Because God is consistent in his word. Well, I like what Jesus, because I've heard recently folks that have been in the church and left the church who talk about, well, yeah, we should pay attention to what Jesus is, but now I follow the spirit.

as if the spirit would say something different than Jesus would say. Well, see, the spirit's adapting to the time. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Jesus' word is eternal.

[ 23 : 09 ] Jesus knew what would happen later. Jesus did not say something that only applies in the first century and now is outdated in the 20th century. Well, I guess we're in the 21st, aren't we? I'm still slow.

Haven't gotten used to that. So they don't touch. They test it. How do you test someone who's called an apostle? Well, Jesus said, one, you'll know them by their works.

You'll know them by their fruit. Do they have fruit? Now, that's going to take a while to see. That's going to take a while. You're going to see if they're really patient, right? If they're really enduring, if they're really faithful, if they're really gracious, if they're loving, those kind of things, the fruit of the spirit, in other words.

But right away, if they're an apostle, that means they're teaching, they're speaking, they're speaking with authority. So then you test their teaching. Well, does it square with the gospel? That's all you've got to do.

Does it square with the gospel? So all those preachers on TV do what they say, square with what Jesus says. It's pretty easy to determine that many of them do not.

[ 24 : 13 ] They're not speaking the words of Jesus. They're speaking different words. They might take a word of Jesus and move it over here and say, see, this is what Jesus says. So they test.

Is it a true gospel or false gospel? Is it a different gospel or a contrary gospel? And then he particularly points out in verse 6 that they hate the works of the Nicolaitans. Who are those guys?

Well, those are guys that apparently lured people into idolatry and immorality. They called themselves Christians, but see, Christ has forgiven us of sin, so we don't have to worry about sin.

We don't have to worry about, I mean, Jesus forgives, so we can do whatever we want. We have freedom. And so we can adopt other gods and we can commit immorality.

It doesn't matter. Those are fleshly things and we only worry about the spiritual things. So they just had that name, Nicolaitans. They hate that because they know it's contrary to Christ and the gospel.

[ 25 : 22 ] So these folks are vigilant. They remember what Paul had said 40 years before. To watch yourselves and the flock.

To know that there were, there are some who will arise, wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, who will arise even from among you, what Paul said. So, how do we test false teaching?

How do we test, there's not a lot of folks going around calling themselves apostles. There's a few. There's a few, but a lot, there are a lot calling themselves preachers of Christ.

A lot calling themselves teachers of Christ. How do we know if they're true teachers? Well, does it square with the gospel? Listen to how Paul describes his relationship with the Galatians.

He particularly focuses on this issue. He says to the Galatians in chapter 1, verse 6, after greeting them and saying, you know, love you and all that, he gets right into it.

[ 26 : 38 ] He says, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed.

That's very strong language. Wait a minute, they're just teaching something different. No, let him be accursed. That's not the gospel. That gospel will not save you.

That gospel will condemn you. A gospel contrary. And then he says it again, as we've said before, I say now again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you receive, the one you hear and read in the scriptures, then let them be accursed.

So what's different about this gospel? Well, we come to find in chapter 3 of Galatians, he gets a little more specific. What does a different gospel look like? He says to them again, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, who has tricked you, who has lured you away from Christ.

[ 28 : 04 ] It was before your eyes that Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. How can you forget that? Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Did you have to do things and jump through hoops to get the Holy Spirit? Or, did you simply believe what God has said and you received the Holy Spirit?

Which was it? And of course, the obvious answer is, no, it's by faith. I didn't have to do anything. It was by faith. I believed. And I was born again and I have the Holy Spirit.

So then he asks the second question. Are you so foolish? Remember. You remember the beginning. You remember. having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Are you following that gospel? You started with the Holy Spirit. It was a work of the Holy Spirit and you walk by faith.

[ 29 : 07 ] And now it's up to you. You're saved by grace. Now you're sanctified by works. Now is it up to you? Now you have to do things to please God?

In your own strength? That's a different gospel. It's called legalism. It adds works to gain God's favor. It's up to you to do these things. You're not working by faith.

You're working by works. So that's a different gospel. The other flip side is the other kind of different gospel where it adds licentiousness. It doesn't matter if you sin.

You're free to do as you please. Remember Paul says, God is not mocked. You will reap what you sow. You treat God's grace cheaply.

So first he gives comfort to this church. He recognizes their true strengths. They are dedicated and vigilant for the truth. But here's the second message in verse four.

[ 30 : 12 ] He abruptly changes now with a confrontation. But I have this against you. Ouch. I wonder what Jesus would say to us.

What would he say is our strengths? What would he say is our strengths and then come to that sentence, but I have this. Now we want to hear that so we can correct it.

And it might be a surprise. I wonder if it was a surprise to this church. Thinking, oh, oh. But we're doing everything for you, for your name.

In what way have we left your first love? So he confronts their weakness. He summarizes it this way. They've forsaken and forgotten their first love. They've forsaken love.

What is that? How have they forsaken their first love? Well, this word forsaken means to abandon, to let go. Literally, it means to let go of something, to neglect it, to abandon it, forsake it.

[ 31 : 27 ] It's an interesting word because it's the same word that means to forgive. So when we forgive somebody, we let go. We release that. It's also the word that means, that is translated divorce.

I divorce. I let go. I send away. So I forgive. I divorce. Like, really? Same word? Yeah, same word. So I divorce.

I'm abandoning. I'm forsaking. I forgive. I'm abandoning. Forsaking. I forsake my first love. I'm letting it go. I'm neglecting it.

I'm forsaking it. I'm abandoning it. It's kind of like the Pharisees. You know, they have all the rules. They're doing all these. They look good on the outside, right? But they've left their love.

Jesus says, you tithe dill and mint and cumin, and yet you neglect love love and mercy and justice, the weightier things of the law.

[ 32 : 27 ] Pay attention to the nitty gritty, but you neglect what really, really matters. And this is a church that's kind of done. That's got their focus in one area.

You know, work hard. Keep the truth. Guard the truth. We're in evil country. We're in, you know, we're being tested. And I get it. Yeah, they're battling for the truth.

They're there on the front lines. But over time, that means they've just kind of got this defensive mentality, and they've forgotten the whole motivation, the whole reason they're doing it.

So what is first love? Does it mean first as in what you love first, like priority? Well, that would be God, right?

The greatest commandment is love the Lord your God, right? And then love your neighbor. I don't think it means priority because he mentions the same word first again down in verse five, right?

[ 33 : 31 ] Do the works you did at first. So in other words, your beginning love, your initial love. What were you doing at the first?

Well, what did Jesus call us to do? What was his command? The Old Testament had two great commands.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your, right? Remember? Your strength.

And love your neighbor as yourself. Those are the two greatest commandments. Everything else hinges on that. But in the New Testament, what does Jesus say? Does Jesus emphasize loving God? Actually, no.

What he emphasized over and over and over and what the apostles emphasized over and over and over. In fact, Jesus says, here's the new command. Love one another.

[ 34 : 33 ] As, here's the new part. Not just as yourself, but love one another as I have loved you.

Follow my sacrificial, kind of, laying down my life for you. Love. As I have loved you, you also love one another.

And then he said, this is John 13, by this, by loving one another, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples.

If you have love for one another. It's the very thing that makes you distinct. It makes you a lampstand in a dark world. The thing that makes you conspicuous, the thing that makes you stand out from everyone else in the culture is how you love one another.

The world will see that. Because it's so different. It's so conspicuous. It's so distinct. And of course, the rest of the New Testament.

[ 35 : 46 ] 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, right? How does it start? Without love, you are clanging cymbal.

You're not, you know, you can be doing all the greatest things, but if you don't love, you're nothing. 1 Peter, excuse me, yeah, 1 Peter 4, above all, keep love earnestly.

Colossians 3, above all, put on love. Ephesians 5, walk in love as Christ. So it's just over and over and over again. That's the focus.

That's the big priority, love one another. And in 1 John, John says, yes, we love God. Absolutely. That's a given.

Because if you do not love your brother, that's proof that you do not love God. Even Jesus said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

[ 36 : 43 ] It's not a threat. If you love me, you'll keep my commandments. No, it's, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. I know that. If you love me, you'll do that.

And my greatest commandment, love one another. If you love me, you'll do that. So, in other words, he's telling this church, yeah, I know, I know you're dedicated, you're doing it for me.

you think that's because you love me, and I guess in a way it is. But really, if you really love me, you'll, you'll redirect your priorities.

Yes, defending the truth is very, very important. It's not more important than loving one another. Keeping error out, yeah, that's important.

But man, if you miss loving one another, what do you got? What do you got? A cold, orthodox place.

[ 37 : 55 ] Yeah. For Jesus, yeah, orthodox, yeah, absolutely. But man, it's got to be heated up, it's got to be warm, it's got to be caring.

Love for others, that's the first love. Care for the hurting, that's the first love. How do they recover it?

Well, he says in verse four, he says, well, he says in verse five, I guess he gives the remedy, doesn't he? Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, and repent, do the works you did at first.

So, not only have they forsaken their love, but they've forgotten the beginning. Remember, from where you have fallen. Remember back. Think back. How do I repent, and recover my first love?

Well, I've got to go back. I've got to remember what it was like. What was it like at first? What was it that moved me? What was it that consumed me? What was it that was so important?

[ 38 : 56 ] Love. Truth, yes. But I still, when I speak the truth, I speak the truth in love. Yes. Remember.

Can I remember? Can I get back there? The remedy is to remember. Think back. Why are we here?

To defend the truth. Well, yeah. But Jesus didn't walk in the midst of a bunch of pulpits. He walked in the midst of what?

Lampstands. What are lampstands? Oh, we lost our lampstand. We are lights. You are the light of the world.

You don't put a light, you don't take a lamp and put it under the table, you put it on a lampstand so it gives light. Why are we here? We're here. Why do we exist?

[ 39 : 57 ] Not for ourselves. I mean, yes, we're here to build up and encourage, but we're here because we're, don't just close the doors and lock in and keep it all secret.

We're here so we can be encouraged to go out there. So the light can shine. That's why he says at the end of the verse, if you don't repent, this is, this is kind of scary, right?

Look at the end of verse five. Repent, do the work you did at first. If not, I will come. Actually, literally he said, I am coming.

Remember, Jesus is coming back. When's that? Well, it might be pretty soon. If we don't repent, not coming back like it's the end of your life, but it might mean the end of the church's existence.

It might mean the end of the church's witness. Now the church might still be there physically, but the spirit's withdrawn. The lamp is gone.

[ 41 : 06 ] I will remove your lamp stand from its place. I don't know totally what that looks like, but there are churches on the verge of extinction because maybe they have crossed their T's and dotted their I's and they got the truth right, but they've forgotten the great priority to love one another.

They've grown cold. And they've forgotten why they're here. Not to keep the world out, but to bring the world in, to talk to the world, to shine the world, to care for the world, like Jesus did.

Remember? He's always mixing it up. He's not supposed to be out there eating and drinking with sinners. That's what he was doing. Why?

Because he's the light. And he became winsome. All of a sudden, these sinners were joining the disciples. Who are the disciples?

Tell that woman, she's screaming at us, Lord, tell her to go home. Oh, yeah, yeah. Remember? The lady, Jesus. And then he tells the disciples after it's all over, guys, that's what faith looks like.

[ 42 : 28 ] See what she did? She didn't care how anybody thought of her. Didn't care how much noise she was making. Repent, he says.

He tells the church to repent. Repent. He tells the church to repent. In fact, in these seven letters, I think five of the churches are called to repent.

I thought that's what you do when you get saved. You just, you repent, right? Now you're saved. You're okay, right? Well, apparently you can be in church and apparently drift a bit and Jesus, our shepherd, says, little lamb, time to turn back around again.

The sheep has wandered. Repent means to change the mind. It involves regret and a return. It means a redirection of your ways.

And what difference does it make? Well, if they keep doing what they're doing, they will cease to exist. To sum up verse seven, how does he kind of wrap this up?

[ 43 : 45 ] Verse seven, he says, to he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And then he says a second thing. To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

So this confrontation ends on a good note. It ends with hope. It's not just, you know, threat. It's, no, conquer this. I'm telling you because you can conquer this.

I'm telling you because the Spirit is speaking to you and you can hear it. So hear it and overcome this. Conquer this.

It's actually a spiritual battle. Do you know that our loss of love is a spiritual battle? That's a spiritual battle. Conquer this. Overcome this. Hear.

Hear what the Spirit says. In other words, the Spirit is speaking when God speaks. When the Word is read, the Spirit speaks. That's why sometimes when the Word is read, some of you are going, ooh, I felt that one.

[ 44 : 50 ] Because you're convicted. Because the Holy Spirit's going, tickle, tickle. Or maybe, scratch, scratch. Every once in a while, maybe it's a little, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Fall off the ladder. Okay. Usually he's quite gentle. He's wooing you. He's not trying to scare you.

He's wooing you. He wants you back. You know it's the Holy Spirit when you're drawn back to God. It's the devil when you're repulsed.

Okay. When it's kind of guilt and shame that makes you want to, that's not the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't do guilt and shame. He does conviction. Which is draw, which is, come on.

Come on. Just got to get that nerve right there. Kind of like a chiropractor working on a, just, I had a spot, and he's like, it's over there. And he's like, yeah, that's it.

[ 45 : 55 ] So, so, do you hear the Spirit speaking to you today? This might apply, well, it does apply to our church as a whole, but it applies to us individually as well.

Anyone who has an ear, let him hear. Be teachable, be open to what the Spirit is saying. Maybe I'm not totally forsaken, but maybe I've started to neglect that.

Maybe I've gotten focused outward, or inward. So, here, do you recognize a need there? And conquer, overcome, prevail. How do we conquer this issue?

By, by battling to repent, and remember, and recover. my first love. How do I get my first love back?

How do I, how do I love others that I've started to become annoyed with? Or, maybe, I've been annoyed with for quite some time. How do I, because I don't, maybe I don't like them anymore.

[ 47 : 00 ] And that's why I don't love them anymore. Well, remember the Greek word for love is not like. It doesn't have anything to do with like. It's great if you like people that you love, that's great.

But he doesn't require us to like. He requires us to lay our life down. Do you think Jesus liked, liked you before he saved you?

You know, when you're lost and doing your sin? Of course not. But he loved you.

Love you. I'm laying down my life for that. I want, I want that. So, recover this. So how do I recover that? Well, I go back to the cross. I go back to remember how he loved me.

I go back and remember that and I love him. And when I love him, if you love me, you'll what? You'll keep my commandments. You'll love one another. So, that's how I recover that.

[ 48 : 02 ] I don't go, okay, I got to find something likable in that person so I can love them. No. I go back and I go, here, I can find this. And I can rekindle my love for Jesus and that will, that will clear the way for me.

And what happens, what's the hope? The hope, and the end of verse seven, and I will grant, to the one who conquers, I will grant, I will give, to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The tree of life, where's that? Well, it's in the paradise of God. You just read that. No, wait, where was it? All the way back at the beginning, right?

It's Genesis. It's the tree of life. If they eat of that tree, they will what? Live forever. Right? So it's a tree of eternal life. It's at the beginning of the Bible.

It's also all the way at the end of the Bible. You read Revelation 22, the very last chapter. And guess what? Guess what's there in the paradise? Not just one, but two. Two trees of life.

[ 49 : 09 ] And they're bearing 12 different kinds of fruit in their month, each month. tree of life.

Tree of life. Tree of eternal life. Tree of life. The one who hung upon a tree that he might give us life.

Interesting, isn't it? Trees. Trees. God makes a garden, a beautiful paradise with trees.

And there's one particular tree that's life-giving. There's another tree that gives something else. And then when God builds a temple, what does he put in the temple?

He puts a tree-like figure. It's a candle stand with seven branches. Looks like a tree.

[ 50 : 14 ] And then as he builds paradise, a new creation, he's got trees again. God's got something about trees. But in the middle of history, he sends his son to hang on a tree.

And ironically, that's what gives life. Because that death covers all of our shame, covers all of our sin, covers all of our failure, covers all of our abandoning of love, and all of that.

So it covers it all so that we're clean and we're free and we live. So John describes how love for others is the proof of our Christianity.

It's the evidence that we're born again. Listen to what John, our same writer here writing earlier in 1 John 3, he says, we know. This is something we know.

We know that we've passed out of life into death. In other words, we know we were dead, now we're alive. We know we've been born again. How? Because we love the brothers.

It's proof that I've been born again.

[ 51 : 29 ] How do I know I'm saved? Do I love my brothers? Not like them. No, it helps to like, I like a lot of my brothers and sisters. I didn't say all, did I?

I'm not picking, not here, of course. Then he says, whoever does not love abides in death. In other words, whoever does not love is still not born again.

They're not, they're not, they haven't, they're in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Remember, that's how Jesus defined murder. Not just killing, it's hating.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this, here's how we know, here's the test. By this we know, love, that he laid down his life for us.

That's what love looks like. And so we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Same kind of way, love as he loves. But if, here's a scenario. If anyone has the world's goods and sees, recognizes, knows that his brother is in need, yet closes his heart, against him, doesn't do anything about it, has the resource, sees the need, and says, nope, keeping it to myself.

[ 52 : 57 ] John says, then how does God's love abide in you? How does that happen? How does that, how does that, that doesn't make any sense.

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, say we love, but in deed and truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our heart condemns us, convicts us, opens us up to shame, God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

So in other words, God's in control, so if our heart's condemning us, God's saying, yeah, you need to listen to that. But beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

And what do we ask? We receive from him because, why? We keep his commandments and do what pleases him because we love him. So love is of first importance. It proves we are God's children.

We do as he does. It shows that we are born again. We don't close our heart against a need that we are able to meet. We don't just talk about it.

[ 54 : 06 ] We actually do love. We demonstrate it. We're not perfect at it by any means. We're not saving the whole world. But the love, the needs that's right in front of us, see.

The good Samaritan who sees whether it's in the church or outside. The love that's in our heart from God has to pour out.

Okay, let me meddle just for one minute. Does your love for Christ overflow in love for others? What is your heart saying to you?

In other words, what is the spirit saying to you? And if you're unsure, just ask. Not me. Ask the Lord.

He'll tell you. He'll tell you. Is God working in your heart? If He is working in your heart, He's calling you back. Calling you to eat from the tree of life.

[ 55 : 20 ] Change your mind. Redirect your way. And love your brothers. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, help us to hear from you.

Thank you, Lord, that your spirit is working among us, that He is both comforting and confronting. We thank you, Lord, that you do that in such a gentle way.

Unless we've become stubborn and hardened. And then thank you that He does it in a more provocative way. Because He's still calling us back to you to experience life.

We thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.