The Death of the Loveless Church
Revelation 2-3
1245

The death of the loveless church...the death of the loveless church. We're gonna look at Revelation chapters 2 and 3 for our thoughts this morning, and our time is limited, and so we'll abbreviate everything and just kind of cover the highlights here.

We have been learning about the absolute importance of love. 1 Corinthians 13 verses 1 through 7 that we've studied in the last few months have left, I think, a profound impact on us as to the absolute importance of love. We have seen God pound home the message that love is everything, and lack of love reduces us to nothing, to sounding brass and a noisy gong. And, of course, my heart deeply desires that Grace Community Church be a church characterized by love. And I suppose if you were to ask me what is my greatest fear for Grace Church, it would be that we would be a loveless church.

We have so much knowledge, people, that it's just really incredible. Warren mentioned gifted men. Well, I doubt whether those of us who are really a part of Grace and have been for a long time really understand, because we don't get the chance to compare the amount of gifted teachers we have in this church. One theological professor told me that Grace Community Church was the most biblically literate church he had ever been to in his life. And he gets around. It is incredible the amount of biblical knowledge that we have and have available through messages and teachers and tapes and syllabus and training manuals that are produced and book store and all of the things that are available. And it isn't a problem for us in that area. I don't worry about Grace deteriorating doctrinally. I mean, we've got a strong foundation for now, and it continues to be built strong as we teach the Word of God. But there is always that possibility that Grace would lose out in the loving area.

It's easy to teach doctrine. I mean, that's easy to do. You just do it. But you can't teach people to love. That is a commitment of the will that has to come on the part of every single individual. And if Grace ever becomes so biblically, doctrinally, theologically, educationally proud that it loses its love, then Grace Community Church will begin to die. That's the warning of the Bible. Paul said, "Knowledge puffs up, and love...what?...builds up. We will only be built up as long as love really exists. You know, and I hear from time to time people in the outside say, "Oh, yeah, Grace Community Church. Yeah, they've got all the doctrine, but there's no love there." I've heard that comment. I don't think that's true, but I think that's the tendency for people, when they look at a church that knows the Word of God, and we hold the firm convictions. Then they tend to say, "Well, you hold your convictions so firmly, you're not very loving to anybody who disagrees with you."

But it would be a terrible thing if there was occasion to substantiate the accusation that we're not loving. And so I thought we ought to really kind of apply all the principles of love to the corporate life of the church. Is it important that you obey the principles of love in 1 Corinthians 13? It is, because you're a part of a community of believers, and as your love life operates, so will the collective testimony of Grace Community Church operate, and so will its collective love function. And that's

absolutely essential, because when love dies, Grace dies.

I don't have any great desire to build a big building that's gonna be empty in five years, and that's exactly what'll happen if love dies. And all we've got is another stone monument to a board and a pastor and a certain group of people who lived at a certain time and nothing more. And listen, the country is loaded with those, and you've seen them in cities all over America, great big stone quarries doing nothing.

I was in a church that seats 3,500, and on a Sunday morning, they averaged 50. It's dead. It died, and it died because of a procedure of degeneration that is catalogued for us in the letters to the seven churches recorded in Revelations chapter 2 and 3. I believe Grace Church is vital to God's plan. We want to produce pastors and missionaries and teachers and workers of greater volume than we ever had, and we're gonna have greater and greater attendance. We know from past history over the last eight years that we double every two years. Now if that's true, just project about ten years ahead. I mean, it's astronomical. The responsibility God is giving to us here is incredible, and we need to be very much aware of the fact that there is a need on our part to maintain an honest, truthful, biblical commitment to loving in the way that the Bible defines it.

Now I want you to look with me to Revelation chapter 1 very briefly, and I would have you look at verses 9 through 20. And I'm not gonna read them. I'm just gonna pinpoint a couple of statements. Revelation 1 introduces to us the person of Jesus Christ. Starting at verse 9, John begins to describe the vision that he had when he was on the Isle of Patmos. And he sees first of all the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he describes him.

In verse 12, there are seven golden lamp stands. The seven golden lamp stands represent seven churches, the church being the light of God's truth in the world. And each one of these seven golden lamp stands is a church, and the churches he has in mind are the churches in Asia Minor. There were seven churches founded in Asia Minor, founded no doubt out of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, either directly or indirectly when he was there for three years in Ephesus. And these seven churches are not just seven historical churches, but they serve as seven types of other churches or seven different pictures of the problems of all churches through all times. And they help us to see that the problems of churches that are gonna be the same right down 'til today. They're very, very relevant and contemporary.

Now, along with the seven golden lamp stands or the seven churches, you see in verse 13, in the midst of them, one like the Son of Man, and that is Jesus Christ being described. Now here we then see Christ moving among the churches. He's moving among the churches, checking them out, evaluating, preparing to do something. And what He is preparing to do is write them letters, and in chapter 2 and 3 you have the seven letters that Christ writes to these seven churches after having evaluated them. So the symbolism of Christ moving in the lamp stands is moving in His church, drawing certain conclusions about each one and writing a letter to confront those conclusions. And we want to look at what we can learn today from these seven letters.

Now out of the seven churches, only two of them receive no warning or condemnation, Smyrna and Philadelphia. Smyrna receives no warning and no condemnation, apparently was really a very fine church. And Smyrna, you might know, was the church that was in the hottest position of persecution. Persecution has always tended to purify the church. Consequently, Smyrna didn't need a warning. The second church that receives no warning is the church at Philadelphia in chapter 3. The church at

Philadelphia is the church that was known as the evangelistic soul-winning church. We can conclude generally that a church that is being persecuted is being purified, and a church that is aggressively winning people to Jesus Christ is exhibiting qualities and characteristics that tend to rule out sinful things.

Now, the other five churches all fell into sin. And the way it works, you start with Ephesus, and you go right through those five, ending with Laodicea, and you will see a degenerative process that occurs in the church. And it all begins in Ephesus when it is said of the Ephesians, "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your...what?...your first love." And when love dies, then the degenerative process begins until it ends up in Laodicea, and the Laodicean church is the church that is no church, the apostate church to which Christ comes in judgment. And I say to you that when love goes, we fall into the degenerative process, and that's what I mean when I say that when Grace Community Church loses its love, then Grace begins to die.

Nobody really killed these churches. None of them was attacked from the outside. All five of them were attacked from the inside by sin, and let's begin at the beginning and see how the process of the death of the church can occur by just putting these together, starting with Ephesus in chapter verse 1. We'll call this Ephesus, the loss of first love. The first thing that went was love, first one, under the pastor or messenger or minister, some say angel, but probably should be translated messenger and means the pastor.

"Unto the pastor of the church at Ephesus, write this. These things says He that holds the seven stars in his right hand...that is Christ who does hold the seven pastors in hand, stars referring again to those pastors...and who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands or churches, this is His message to you. 'I know your works and your labor and your patience and how you cannot bear them who are evil, and how you've tried them who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars. And you have endured and have patience, and for My name's sake, you have worked and labored and haven't fainted. Nevertheless, I have something against you, because you have left your first love.'"

Now the first letter is addressed to a spiritually strong church, not unlike Grace Community Church. In fact, the parallels are almost exact. A church founded and taught by the Apostles was the church at Ephesus. They had the most excellent teaching. Their founding pastor was the Apostle Paul, a man who was obviously the greatest of all teachers, a man who was obviously the greatest of all leaders. He was their founder. He gave them three years of his life. And when he was leaving, he said, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." They were a biblically literate congregation. They knew the counsel of God. They not only had heard it, but they had seen it exemplified in the life of the Apostle Paul.

They were zealous. They were evangelistic. They were solid in doctrine. They were committed to the Lord. But a tragic thing happened. The second generation of Ephesian Christians had lost their love. Now it doesn't tell us to whom that first love is directed, but it's obvious that they had lost their first love for the Lord, and their first love for the family would follow right behind. They were a loveless group. They had lost that first experience of love that comes when a person meets Jesus Christ.

Man, they'd had a great beginning. The Apostle Paul had come to town, and some fantastic things had happened. It was the town where Diana was worshipped, our Artemis, and one of the most monumental temples in the world was built there, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the

temple to Diana. Scores of eunuchs and prostitutes and musicians and dancers and musical instruments were being played and singers. And it was a great theater of paganism, and the worship was a kind of hysteria. The people worked themselves into frenzies, and they actually sexually mutilated themselves. And Hereclitus said that the morality of animals exceeded that of the people in the City of Ephesus.

And nestled in this mess, huddled in the midst of this paganism was this community of believers. And the first thing they did was confront their society. They created a riot, didn't they? They literally threw the city into chaos, and people were wonderfully saved, and a church was born, and Paul was their teacher, and God blessed. And when Paul left, they got a second pastor who wasn't half bad, either. His name was Timothy. And if that wasn't enough, they had another pastor who was the most eloquent man we know of in the New Testament, and his name was Apollos. I mean, they had had the biggies, folks. They knew what to believe. They had all the theology compartments all isolated and filled with proper information, and they had everything going for them.

Look in verse 2. They had works. "I know your labor or your service." Capas. It means labor to the point of sweat. I mean, this was a hard-working bunch of people. They weren't like so many Christians whose lifetime toil wouldn't exhaust a butterfly. They were active. They were involved. They were busy. Additionally to that, he says they were patient, and the word "hupomone" means they were steadfast. I mean, they were courageous in the middle of hardship. They stuck it out, and they made it work in the midst of a very difficult situation.

Also, he says in verse 2, "You couldn't bear them who are evil." In other words, they were intolerant of sin. They dealt with sin. They suppressed evil. Further "thou hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars." They were strong enough doctrinally to evaluate false teachers and deal with them. They recognized the true prophet. They recognized a false prophet. They had had the best of teaching and the best of warning, and Paul said with tears, night and day for three years he had warned them of false doctrines.

So they had it, folks. And further, this just really parallels them with us. In verse 3, he says, "And they did it for My name's sake." And we've said so many times that that is the motive of glorifying God. You do it all for Him. That's so much like us, doctrinally strong, steadfast, holding on to the truth, busy, and doing it all for the glory of God. And, you know, it sounds like an absolutely invincible bunch, doesn't it? But, you see, there's one word absent there. Unfortunately, it's not absent from verse 4. "Nevertheless, I have something against you, because you've left your first love." They missed the basic thing.

Ministry is based on love, and when Jesus was gonna reconfirm Peter in the ministry, he didn't ask him, "Are you willing to serve me, Peter? Have you got your doctrine straightened out, Peter? Do you know how to recognize a false prophet, Peter? Are you gonna hang on, Peter, through all the hardships? Are you dealing with sin, Peter? Do you hate sin?" He said, "Peter, do you...what?...do you love me?"

Now see, that was the heart of it all. Ephesus somehow had grown cold. The best churches, this has got to be one of them, the very best, in all of history, one of the best. And the penetrating, all-seeing eye of omnipotent Christ saw one fatal fault. They lost love. They lost their passion. It turned into a cold orthodoxy. It turned into the service of performance. It turned into a place where they defended their theology rather than loved each other. And that was tragic. The honeymoon had ended, and it

was just down to business as usual. The spark was gone.

And Jesus says three things to them in verse 5. Number one is remember. "Remember therefore from where you're fallen." Remember those precious love-filled days when your love for Christ was born, and your love for people followed along. Have you ever noticed that when somebody receives Jesus Christ, naturally they feel a tremendous love for Christ, but they also immediately feel a great love for the people of Christ? I've had a lot of people that you'll lead to Christ, and the first response they have is to hug you. "Oh, this is so exciting," and they feel instantly like they're your friend, like something just welded you together. There's great affection among new believers.

But that just kind of died in Ephesus, so he says you better remember. You want to know something? A lot of us have trouble in our Christian life, not from what we've never known, but from what we've forgotten. That's why Peter said, "I will not cease to put you in remembrance of these things." Don't forget.

Second, repent. Remember and repent. In other words, recognize that a lack of love is a sin, and repent of it. Recognize that a cooling of your affection for Christ and one another is a sin, and repent of it. And thirdly, he says, "Repeat," or "Do the first works." Go back and do what you used to do. Go back and do those acts of love that you used to do for one another, or else, verse 5 says, "I will come unto you quickly and will remove your lamp stand out of its place except you repent."

Now listen to me. People say, "Oh, the devil destroyed that church." You want to know something? There are churches that the Lord Himself has destroyed. Did you know that? That's right. People say to me a lot of times, "Well, I'm in a church, and So-and-So is in that church, and I know it's deteriorating, and they don't preach and teach the way they ought to, but I think I'm gonna stick it out" or, "Boy, I don't know whether I ought to stay or go." Let me tell you just how to handle it. Satan gets into a church and begins to work, and if that church succumbs to Satan, then I believe Christ comes in and kills that church from this verse. What you need to determine is whether you need to stay and fight Satan or whether Satan's already taken over, and Christ is killing the church. And in that case, you might as well leave.

The church at Ephesus was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was the one who would bring its life to an end if it didn't repent. That's how serious he is about the loss of love. We've got to balance love with orthodoxy, people. We've got to. And so he says, "I'm gonna come, and I'm gonna remove the lamp stand. I'm gonna take that church right out of there." You know what happened? He did that, because they did not repent. They did not remember. They did not repeat the first works. Ephesus died. It died a tragic death. It doesn't exist to this day. The lamp stand in that place is gone. Be warned. When a church loses its first love, it takes the first great step toward destruction.

The second step is illustrated by the church at Pergamus in verse 12. Notice it quickly. "To the angel of the church at Pergamum, write, 'These things saith he who hath the sharp sword with two edges.'" Now that's not exactly a benevolent greeting for the letter. He has something to say judgmental. "I know your works and where you dwell, even where Satan's throne is." He says, "I know you've been a hard working group, and I know you dwell in a very difficult place, where Satan's throne is." It could refer to the fact that Pergamus was the center of emperor worship. It could refer to the fact that there was a huge, big altar to Zeus in the middle of the city of Pergamus that was shaped like a throne, and maybe he's alluding to that in a kind of a symbolic way. Or it could be that this is a reference to the fact that this was the headquarters for the worship of Esculapius, the god of healing.

The symbol of Esculapius was a snake. On a medical sign, you still see a snake, don't you? That's from the ancient Greek god Esculapius, supposed to be the god of healing. And in the temple of Esculapius, which was a magnificent temple, there were snakes crawling all over the floor. And when people wanted to get healed by Esculapius, they came in, they would lie on the floor, and if they were touched by one of those snakes, that was the healing power of Esculpaius. And, of course, the demons made sure that they activated enough healings to keep the people believing that.

Well, whatever one of these things or all of these things the Lord means when he says, "I know you dwell where Satan's throne is," he is saying, "It isn't easy in your town, because you're not in a Christian country living in a Christian city. You're in the midst of paganism, and I know it's tough. And I know," He says in verse 13, "you hold fast My name." I mean, "I know that you're hanging on to the name of Christ and all that is involved, and you haven't denied the faith." In other words, this is still orthodox. This church is still an orthodox evangelical church. You've even been through martyrdom. One of the people there named Antipas apparently was a faithful martyr, and they had even gone through the loss of that. Maybe he was their pastor. We don't know.

But he says, "You've hung on." But, verse 14, "But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things, sacrifice to idols, and commit fornication. And so hast though also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." Now he says, "This is what I have against you. The church at Pergamus compromised with the world." He says, "You've got the doctrine of Balaam." Now the doctrine of Balaam was this: Balaam taught the children of Israel to commit fornication with the pagans. He taught them to intermarry. It was God's people commingling with the world. Compromise. He says, "You are compromising with the world." This is the church that's falling in love with the world.

You know what happens if you fall out of love with each other. You're gonna turn your affections back to the world. That's exactly what happened, and that's step two in the degeneration of a church. It loses its love for the Lord and its love for its people, its love in the way God should have it be, and it begins to turn its affection, because we all have that affection to give. It begins to turn its affection toward the world system, and then it begins to compromise. And you have here the compromising church that no longer draws lines biblically.

It wants to tolerate the church. It wants to let them in. It's light fellowshipping with darkness. It's 2 Corinthians chapter 6. It's two walking together that are not agreed. It's concord between Christ and Belial. I mentioned to you one other time that a man told me it was difficult being an elder in his church, because half of the elders were not Christians, and half were. It's that kind of a situation where you have a compromise with the world, where there's no biblical guideline or framework, where anything is tolerated. I would say to young people, "Young people, if you do anything for the sake of your own life and the sake of obedience to God and the sake of the future of Grace Church, marry a believer, because you are the future of this church. Don't compromise at that point. Don't be unequally yoked."

And the church can't be unequally yoked, either. The church can't marry the world. It can't tolerate the world. It can't tolerate Nicolaitans. Nicholas was some kind of an immoral character who had a whole bunch of immoral people following him, and apparently he was some sort of a leader in the church. And so they were accepting the guy, because he was a supposed Christian even though his

lifestyle was anti-biblical. They were courting the world, fooling around with the system, and when the church begins to do that, it's taken step two toward its death.

And so he says, verse 16, "Repent, or I'll come unto you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth." There's no place for the church to court the world. We are to come out from among them and be what? The zephyr. We are to be the conscience of the community. We are not to be lost in a mixture, an add mixture of truth and error. We want to reach people. We want to love people. We want to stimulate people to Christ, but we do not want to compromise what we believe to tolerate the world.

Thirdly, and we're just covering the basic spiritual issue here. Thirdly, we see the church at Thyatira and the next step. A church loses its first love. Then it begins to attach that affection to the world. And the third thing that happens, it becomes like Thyatira, a church that totally tolerates sin. Notice in chapter 2, verse 18, the church at Thyatira, the Lord speaks. In verse 19, he says, "I know your works and your love and your service and your faith and your patience and your works. And the last are even more than the first. You're even coming along better." He says, "Now listen to me." He says, "You are still a somewhat orthodox group. You still get smatterings of the faith." But verse 20 says, "I have a few things against you, because you allowed that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols."

You know what this church had done? They had compromised with the world, and they'd gone one step further. They had tolerated sin. They allowed a woman to speak in the church. You know, a lot of churches are doing that today as a compromise with the world. The women's lib movement, so the church doesn't want to hassle the world, so they just say, "We'll ordain women elders, and they can do their thing, and women pastors and whatever." They're compromising with the world.

The next step is they're gonna tolerate sin, because they've already cut the cord of biblical integrity. And so you cut it one place, and it's gone all over the place. But that's what happened here in Thyatira. Then they allowed a woman who probably shouldn't have been doing that anyway, and of course, she started to propagate that sexual immorality was all right and that you could go ahead and eat things sacrificed to idols.

In other words, you could just ignore the consciousnesses of weaker brothers. You could just, you know, reject love and anything that would be conscionable for someone else. Didn't worry about it. Just eat things sacrificed to idols, go to the pagan feast, commit their fornications, and so forth. Here is the church that tolerated sin. This is the church that makes no issue of sin, engulfed in sin, never dealing with it, never confronting it, never disciplining it, never talking against it. The preaching becomes insipid and useless.

The result, in verse 21, "I gave her the space to repent of her fornication...God is always gracious...and she didn't." So he says, "I'll cast her into bed. She likes bed so much. I'll cast her into bed, only not the bed she thought. I'll kill her children with death, the bed of death, not the bed of adultery. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts, and I'll give unto every one of you according to your works." He says, "You better get this message, you people in Thyatira."

Now look what's happening here, just very briefly, but very potent. A church loses its love, and then it begins to attach its misplaced affections to the system. And once it begins to court the system, and it opens the door to allow the compromises of the world to enter in, then it has to tolerate sin, because the world is sinful, and if it's gonna compromise with the world, it's got to be tolerant of the world's sin. Pretty soon, where sin comes in it is like leaven, and 1 Corinthians says, "a little leaven will do...what?...it'll leaven the whole lump." And pretty soon, the whole church is engulfed in sin.

And then you know what you've got? You've got the church at Sardis in chapter 3 verse 1. It's the next step in the progression. You leave first love. You compromise with the world. Then you have to tolerate sin. And now you become Sardis, the church that is nothing but a program. He says, "These things that saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, the seven stars, I know your works. You have a name that you are living, but you are...what?...You're dead." We've just seen the death of the church. And the church lost its love, attached its affection to the world, tolerated sin, and died. But you know what? It doesn't know it's dead. It has a name that it lives. It's still the First So-and-So Church of Wherever, but it's dead. But it's busy being dead, very active for a dead thing. You know what it is? It's the church that's content with programs.

You know, Sardis was an incredible city. It was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. Did you know that? Have you ever heard the phrase "rich as Croesus"? Well, Croesus was the king of Sardis, one of the wealthiest cities in ancient history. It became a corpse, just like the church. Spiritual disintegration. They had dry-rot. They were dead, just like liberal churches today. Oh, they've got club activities and welfare activities and politics and book clubs and the social gospel and all of that, but they're like "The Ancient Mariner." Remember the lines of "The Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge where he says that "Corpses man the ship, and dead men pull the oars, and a dead man steers the vessel"? Such was Sardis, and such are many churches today: dead men in the pulpit and dead men in the pews. And the church died, but it still worships its forms, carries out its programs like people sailing the ship of the ancient mariner. Lots of activity.

The end of verse 2, it says, "I have not found thy works perfect before God," which indicates that they still had things going on, lots of works going on, busy place, busy being dead. There's no persecution here. You don't have any persecution, because this church is the world. Nothing to persecute. It's a spiritual graveyard, and its programs were nothing but grave clothes, which were a poor disguise for an ecclesiastical corpse.

Verse 4, he says...I like this...oh, verse 3, he says, "Remember how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief. And thou shalt not know what hour I will come on." And He did come, and He destroyed the church at Sardis, too. It's heartbreaking, isn't it, for the Lord? Really heartbreaking, all these churches that He'd begun and had to go back and destroy. But He says, verse 4, "Thou hast a few names." That's kind of sad, isn't it? "There's a few names, even in Sardis, that have not defiled their garments. And they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." You know what happened? There were just a few left. Deadness had taken over everything. And so our Lord says, "You better get it together, or you're gonna die." And they didn't, and they died. But there was a little remnant.

So our Lord speaks words of serious warning. The church that leaves its first love becomes the church that compromises with the world, becomes the church that tolerates sin, becomes a church content with form and ritual and organization. You see, once you've tolerated sin, you have no message. You can't preach the gospel, because it's all about sin. You can't teach the Bible, because

it's all about sin. So you just don't bother to do anything but deal with people on a personal basis socially.

And then you wind up being nothing more than the church at Laodicea, which is the church that is no church, verse 14 of chapter 3, "the dead apostate church." No reality at all. You don't even find a remnant here. Sardis was dead but had a few living. Laodicea is a church that isn't a church. It doesn't even have any people in it who are a part of the church, but it has a name, and it functions.

To the angel of the church at Laodicea write, "These things says the amen faithful, true witness, beginning of the creation of God, I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot." Now you know what cold means? Cold means totally indifferent, unmoved by the gospel, just the person who isn't interested, doesn't want anything to do with it, totally turned off, not a hypocrite, not faking religion. Just absolutely turned off. No interest at all. That's cold. Hot? That's being saved. That's somebody who knows Christ.

You say, "Well, what's lukewarm?" Lukewarm are professing Christians playing religious games, and that's what nauseates Christ. He says, "So then," verse 16, "because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." The most distasteful thing to Christ is religious Christian hypocrisy. This is the pretending people in the church of Laodicea, apostates who are no church, the humanist church, the church without God. Now he says, "You better buy some true gold," verse 18. True righteousness he has in mind.

"And you better get a white raiment, righteous deeds, and you better get some salve to put on your eyes so you can really have spiritual sight. I mean, you better turn around and look at this thing and look for real riches," because in verse 17, "You say to yourself, 'I'm rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.'" You ever notice how many liberal churches are wealthy? And they think that's, "Well, God must be in it. Look at all the money we have." And He says, "You don't know you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. And you better look for the true gold and the true white raiment and the true spiritual sight."

"Be zealous, therefore," verse 19 says, "and repent." I just warn you this morning as a pastor who loves you and who has poured my life into this church and will continue to do that as long as God calls me to do it. I warn you, because this is my church, as well as your church, no more mine than yours. And we need to be reminded that all it takes to end the testimony that God is beginning here, and I believe we're on the beginning of this whole thing, but all it takes to see this thing end is not some great outside attack, not some great persecution, but the loss or the dying of first love. And when love begins to die, then the church begins to turn its affections to the system. And then it begins to tolerate sin. And then it dies, and then it becomes apostate, and then Grace Community Church will be another stone quarry somewhere in Panorama City that used to be something.

And you know what, people? It'll all go back to how you love, because we will not love corporately any different than you love personally. When your love dies, we all die with it. So hear the words of the Apostle Paul, to love. And hear the words of Peter, to love fervently. Let's pray.

Our Lord God, again we are grateful this morning hour for the privilege of being reminded from Your book of the urgency of considering these truths. We think back to four years ago, when it wasn't like it is now. We could even see that on the chart we looked at. There weren't so many folks. And we

went through these same chapters then, and we thought that's something we need to hear again and again, probably every six months or so.

Thank You for bringing it to our attention again this morning, that when we have this great, great privilege, we have also a great responsibility, not only to make sure we love personally before You, but that we contribute to the total love of this congregation, that it might continue to be all that You want it to be. Thank You for every precious person here. Free up our own thinking and our own patterns of life to allow the love of God to flow through us for His glory. In the name of His Son we pray. Amen.

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