

# A Sick Church by J Harold Smith

by J. Harold Smith

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*The church is sick because we are slow to believe, we have skeletons in our hearts, and we have become identified with the diseased things of this world.*

**Duration:** 26:36

**Scripture:** John 3:16

**Topics:** "Church Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

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## Description

This sermon addresses the spiritual condition of the church, emphasizing the need for self-examination and acknowledging the sickness within. It delves into the slow belief in God's promises, precepts, and warnings, highlighting the prevalence of sin and the need for repentance. The sermon also discusses the importance of returning to one's first love for Christ, moving beyond a 'milk diet' in faith, and rekindling a passion for God's Word, the lost world, and His work.

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## Transcript

Reading this portion of the Word of God this morning that I've just read, I want to use for our theme today, a sick church. I want to speak to you on the theme that is nearest to my heart. I believe with all of my heart and soul that if there's ever been an hour when we need to examine the condition of our church, the spiritual condition of our church, I believe it's in this hour.

And I do not believe that there can be a man or a woman that will honestly, sincerely, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, let God reveal to you the condition of our church, but what all of us will have to agree that something is radically wrong with us. I believe with all of my heart and with all of my soul that my church is sick. Now there are those, when we examine this subject and we speak to this subject, that say we are against the church.

I want you to know that I love the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if all of the armies of the world and all of the navies and all of the air forces of the world were to march against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, not even the gates of hell shall ever prevail against her. In all of her sickness, in all of her lack, in these days, she is still the greatest organism in all of the universe.

And I know, I know that the Lord knows far better the condition. Here he was examining the Seventh Church of Asia Minor, and the report that our Lord gave was one that would identify that church as being a sick church. I believe that we are living in the age of the Laodicean Church.

Along by the side of the Laodicean Church is the Church of Philadelphia. And we are in that hour at this very moment. Now you say, Preacher Smith, is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ really sick? Well, let's look first of all, and we'll find that the Bible says that the church, our hearts, are slow of heart to believe.

Do you remember those two disciples on their way to Emmaus? Our Lord had just come forth out of the grave, and they were sad of heart. And as our Lord walked along to the side of those two disciples, He said, Why are you so sad of heart? And they said, Are you a stranger in these parts? And do you not realize what has taken place in Jerusalem in the last three days? He whom we hoped would be the Deliverer, our the Messiah, was crucified. Crucified.

Three days ago. And as our Lord walked along to the side of them, He said, Oh, slow of heart to believe. To believe what? All that the prophets have prophesied concerning me.

Now we are always slow to believe what the prophets have prophesied, but we are slow to believe the promises of God. Not only are we slow to believe the promises of God, but we are slow to believe the precepts of God. Not only are we slow to believe the precepts of God, but we are slow to believe how God has said that there is going to come a day of punishment.

We are slow to believe what God has said about how He will provide the need for every child of His. We are slow to believe. Our hearts are slow to believe.

Now we are slow to believe according to the Word of God, but we are slow to believe what the Bible says about sin. We are slow to believe what the Bible says about Satan. We are slow to believe what the heart of the Bible declares about security, about our security.

I am safe in Jesus. We sing at a lot of our funerals the song Safe in the Arms of Jesus. I never have believed that that was a funeral hymn.

I always have believed that that was a hymn of victory and of assurance for all of those of us that believe and for the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we find that we are slow to believe what the Lord says about separation. Come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord.

Then our hearts are exceedingly wicked and all of the sins of the flesh that are listed in Galatians chapter 5, verses 19 through 21, I believe that we can find an illustration of them in all of our Baptist churches today. First of all, he lists the word and the sin of adultery. Second, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.

And I do not know a church of any size today but what you can go into that church and closely examine it and find somebody living in all of those sins. It's a wonder we ever have anybody saved. It's an amazing thing to me that we have any power at all with our hearts in the condition that they're in.

And then the Bible says that our hearts are full of dead men's bones. In Matthew chapter 23 and verse 27, Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye are likened to the whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. It would be amazing this morning if here in this congregation we could have every heart exposed exactly what it is.

We talk about the skeletons that are in our closet but God here speaks about the skeletons that are in our hearts. What is that skeleton that's in your heart this morning? What is that thing that you have covered up

that you hope never will come to light and that nobody will ever find out about it? I remember I was holding a revival meeting down in South Carolina and one night after the service a dear lady came forward and she said to me, Preacher, 15 years ago I committed an awful sin. I was unfaithful to my husband and Preacher it's driving me crazy.

I'm gonna die. I've got such a wonderful husband, such a godly husband. He knows nothing about it.

What can I do about it? I said just ask God to get that skeleton out of your heart. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to wash that sin away with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and then make it up to your husband by being the best wife that any man could ever have.

She said shouldn't I tell him? I said no. No, don't break his heart. No, don't break his heart.

And that woman, I do believe, became one of the finest wives that I have ever known and treated her husband royally. While I was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas, one Sunday morning I gave an invitation. Down that aisle walked an officer in the United States Army followed by his wife when they came to the altar and I prayed with that officer.

He gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. His wife said, I am also lost. And I said, would you bow here and let me pray with you? She said, I can't.

Preacher, I can't bow. No, I can't ask God to forgive me. And she sat down on the front row.

We dismissed the services and she said, could I speak with you privately for a moment? We walked around the corridor to my office and went in my office and she said, I'll tell you the reason that I couldn't ask God to forgive me. She said, preacher, I participated in a murder five years ago. I was in the motel room when two other men killed a man and we threw his body in the Arkansas River.

And she said, I cannot be saved. I said, God can forgive you of that crime. We got on our knees and God saved her.

When she stood up, she said, call the FBI. I want to make my confession. Call the FBI.

In about two months she was expecting a little baby. Never will I forget that Sunday when the FBI agent walked into my office. We had sent in the meantime for a husband.

And my associate pastor, my wife, and that husband, and I were in that room with the FBI agent when that woman made that confession. Never will I forget when I saw him latch that handcuff around her arm and leave that expectant mother off to jail. Five months later, a judge called me one morning at 11 o'clock and he said, are you J. Harold Smith? And I said, yes sir, I am.

He said, we are in a trial here in St. Louis and a woman is being tried for participating in a murder. Do you know anything about it? And I said, yes sir. Five months ago that lady came to the altar, gave her heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and God saved her.

And she insisted on me calling the FBI and surrendered before she left that office. He said, that's the story that she just told me and I couldn't believe it, but you have verified it. He said, I'm going out there and sentence her for five years with a suspended sentence.

She has a little two months old baby. I want to tell you something, that woman could have lived and gone to hell with that skeleton in her closet. But I ask you, would it have been worth it? I believe with all of my heart that there's some people sitting here before me this morning, your conscience eats you like a worm.

And I believe that some of you sitting here before me this morning, and you'd rather be dead than almost live in the condition you're in. Why? Because of that guilty conscience. And I have a remedy.

It's the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when Jesus comes into your heart and redeems you and saves you, He not only forgives, but He forgets. And He wants you to blot that thing out of your mind and out of your memory.

I believe that the skeletons in the closet of the hearts of men is one of the things that's making us so sick in our churches today. Then the Bible says we have eye trouble. The Word says here in Romans 3, 3 to 18, there is no fear of God before their eyes.

When you can pass up your church like a patron passing up a tramp on the Lord's Day and go fishing or skiing. Or you can pass up the house of the Lord on the Lord's Day and attend to this matter or that matter and give God second place in your heart, you have eye trouble. There is no fear of God before your eyes.

And then the Bible says we have throat trouble. The Bible says that our throats are an open sepulcher. Our tongues are full of deceit.

There's some of you sitting right here under the sound of my voice. You'll come down and say to your pastor, Pastor, I really enjoyed that message. And before you get home you're criticizing about something you did or said.

You're a hypocrite. Your heart's wrong. The Bible declares that we are sick.

So if I went to a doctor and he said there's something wrong with your heart. If I went to a doctor and he said there's something wrong with your eyes. And I went to a doctor and he said there's something wrong with your stomach and something wrong with your ears.

Something wrong with actually with your hands. Something wrong with your feet walking in ways of wickedness. I certainly wouldn't come out of that office and declare to my wife that she had a well husband.

So do you agree with me that the church of our day is sick? The second question I want to ask and answer is why are we sick? Why are we sick? Number one, we have departed from our first love. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ as much as you loved him the day you got saved? You say yes I do. Do you love him more? You say well no I do not.

Then you are a backslider. If there was ever a time in your life when you love the Lord Jesus Christ better than you loved him this morning, to that degree you're a backslidden. Have you departed from your first love? Never will I forget September the 4th 1932 at 630 that Sunday afternoon.

Sitting on the front porch of my sister's home in Greenville South Carolina, she and her husband sitting immediately to my right in the swing. I was sitting there in that chair with my feet propped up on the banister and my sister, my oldest sister said, Harold you tried everything that the devil has to offer. Why don't you give Jesus Christ a chance in your heart? I snapped to attention.

I turned around to curse my sister and I saw the tears running down her face. I did not know that there was such a person as the Holy Ghost, but he got a hold of my heart. And before I knew what it was all about I was out of that chair down on my knees and for the first time in my life I was praying and asking God to forgive me and confessing that I was a sinner.

And in less time that I've been telling you about it, I was converted, I was saved. And I came up off of my knees with a love in my heart for Jesus Christ such as I've never known before. I had met the girl that I later married who is now my wife, my only one by the way, when I was 11 years old.

And she had been my sweetheart now for 12 years, never had another one, she was the only one. And in that few moments that I knew Jesus Christ, I loved him already more than I loved that girl that I intended to marry. She was thinking she was going to marry a doctor, a medical doctor.

And when God saved me that evening, I surrendered to preach on my knees at the same time. And I had to deliver that message to her that I was not going to be a medical doctor but going to be a preacher. And when I spoke to her in the living room about three hours later and told her that I was not going to be a medical doctor and that our planned wedding in December would have to be called off and this is September, that I was going to be a Baptist preacher, there was silence.

And the devil, the first temptation that I had from the devil was to tell this girl, you're just kidding, just tell her you're kidding, you don't want to lose her. But in those three hours that I'd been saved, I already loved Jesus Christ more than I loved her. And I said I'll give her up.

If she doesn't want to marry a preacher, I'll just give her up. And then I heard her crying. And I looked over in the tears running down her face and guess what she said? She said, ever since I was 12 years old, I've always prayed that if I ever married, I'd marry a Baptist preacher.

I want to tell you folks, that settled it. And since that hour, every day with me and Jesus has been sweeter. And this morning, I believe I can testify that I love Him better, better than I've ever loved Him in all of my life.

But if you departed from your first love, some of you wives know what it means for your husband to depart from his first love. While there was a time in your life when you couldn't have got up a little pair of steps like these right here unless He helped you. Now then, you can make it the best way you can.

Why, I tell you, He'd open the door for you to get in the car. Now then, 15 years later and five kids, He gets out there and honks the horn. And brother, I tell you, you have to make it the best way you can.

And by the time you drag the last little one in, He's a half a block down the street saying, you're the slowest woman I ever saw in all of my life. You know what's wrong with the bird? He's departed from his first love. Some of you men know what I'm talking about.

Your wife has departed from the first love. She thinks more of that little old pooch, little old poodle dog than she does you. She'll rub and kiss that little old dog, and if you touch her, she'll say, take your hands off of me.

She's departed from her first love. And then I believe there's a second reason that the church is sick, and that is we've been too long on a milk diet Now as you folks look up here at me this morning, I know you're not going to believe what I'm about to say to you, but it's true. There was a time in my life when I had to

live on nothing but milk.

I mean nothing but milk. Of course, that was the first three months of my life. But since then, I've been able to eat a hamburger and a hot dog and a T-bone steak when I could get one.

But I tell you, for those three months, I had to live on milk, nothing but milk. I was a baby. And there are multiplied hundreds of Baptists today.

There are many of you, I could have never grown an inch since God saved you. You're still a little babe in the crib. You're still on a milk diet.

God wants you to have some of his meat. God wants you to have some of his manna, as well as his milk. So we stayed too long on a milk diet, and as a result of it, we are sick.

And then there's a third reason why the church is sick today, and that's because we have become identified with the diseased things of this world. Never has there been a time when the church is wrapped up in the world like she's wrapped up in it today. We think more, brother, I tell you, of our golf score.

We think more, brother, of our softball team. We think more, brother, I tell you, of our basketball team. We think more of our sewing class.

We think more of our aerobics than we do of winning people to Jesus Christ. I believe that the fundamental purpose of the church is threefold. To preach the Word, the gospel.

To reach the lost and to teach the saved. Those are the three main purposes of the church. And to shun it and fail to do it certainly brings on a sickness.

I mean a serious illness. Now I would not be a good physician if I were your doctor. If I didn't give you the examination and then prescribe a prescription, a remedy, a cure.

And today, brother, I tell you, when those doctors write out those prescriptions, you just better be a millionaire or you're going to be in trouble. But this little wonderful remedy that I'm going to give you this morning will cost you nothing. First of all, the first ingredient that goes into this prescription is a love for God's Word.

You heard me right, a love for the Bible. If I were to ask this morning, it would be really embarrassing if I were to ask how many of you have already read the paper. If I were to ask some of you this morning, how many of you read the funny paper, the sports page, or the stock market? Many of you would lift your hand.

But if I were to ask you this morning how many of you have read some of God's Word before you came to the house of God, how many of you would flunk? This Bible says right here, and listen, the Word says here in Joshua chapter 1 and verse 8, This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Isaiah 55 11 says, So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.

It shall not return to be void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it. Revelation chapter 1 and verse 3, Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand. Do you really love the Word of God? The great battle in our denomination is not over who will be elected as

president of the convention, but the great battle is over the Word of God.

Do you really believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Do you believe it's infallible? Do you believe by thy truth it's inspired? And do you believe it's eternal? If you do not believe that, you are part of the reason that we are sick. And until you come to the place where you will accept the Word of God as the very God breathed expression of His will and of His heart, you're going to remain sick. The second ingredient that will go into this wonderful prescription is a love for God's world.

The Bible says here in John chapter 3 16, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have an everlasting life. I'm talking about the lost world. Do you know, my dear friends, that we have just about lost all of our love for souls? No longer do we have prayer meetings, all-night prayer meetings.

No longer do we weep o'er the erring one. I referred in my message last night to rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave. How long has it been since you wept over a lost soul? How long has it been since you cried over a lost loved one? Maybe they got in jail and you wept.

Maybe they were arrested and charged with dope and you wept. Or maybe they were instantly killed in an accident and you stood in the morgue and wept. But how long has it been since you got on your knees and really shed a tear for a lost man? Do we love God's Word? Do we love God's world? And then the third ingredient that will go into this prescription that will heal any sick church is a love for God's work.

It's so hard today to get men and women to really work in the vineyard. We sing a song that the table is set and the table is set will you go and work today in the vineyard of the Lord. The Bible says in Nehemiah chapter four verse six, so built we the wall and all the wall was joined together and the half thereof for the people had a mind to work.

Do you want to see this great church become a powerhouse such as she has never been? Do you want my dear friends to reach around the world with your missions and with all of the people that come here to this city every day reach multitudes of people that are visiting? The only way is to fall in love with the Word, with the world, God's world, and with God's work. And it will amaze even your pastor. It will amaze every member of this congregation what God will accomplish.

We have the same God that the first church had in Jerusalem. We have the same Christ. We have the same Holy Spirit.

We have the same scriptures. And think about the beautiful buildings that we have that they do not have. There's one thing lacking.

We do not have that power from on high. God help us as a church. God help us as the redeemed of the Lord to find the remedy, confess our illness, and turn to the great physician.

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