
It's Time to Get Right With God!

By David Wilkerson

October 19, 2009 Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2, my italics).

This message is meant for all who have backslidden from the Lord. Backsliding is a biblical term that means "falling away, turning away, apostasy." According to the apostle Paul, who wrote the verse above, "*Today* is the day of mercy and grace." In other words: If you ever plan to believe, *that time is now*.

This statement by Paul is both an invitation and a warning. The warning is as follows: "Do not receive the grace of God in vain. Do not ignore, neglect or cast aside God's offer of mercy. Respond to it now, as it is offered to you."

Jesus warned that many believers would turn away and grow cold: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). His message is clear: Many who have been on fire for the things of God are going to fall away. They will drift into a spiritual coldness. And some will turn to their old fleshly ways. When will this happen? It will take place at a time Jesus called "the beginning of sorrows" (24:8).

All of the backsliding we see today — the turning away from faith to unbelief — comes at a time when you would least expect it. Rather, you would expect people to be drawing nearer to God. We are at the beginning of those days of "great sorrows" that Jesus referred to. Even prominent voices in the world agree: These are days of unspeakable wickedness, marked by uncontrollable greed, rampant sexual perversions, multitudes giving themselves over to addictions of all kinds, from drugs to alcohol to pornography.

I ask you: Is today the time to neglect the day of salvation? Absolutely not! If you ever truly loved and followed Jesus but now are cold and indifferent, the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. He is inviting you to come back to the merciful arms of Christ. With compassion, I urge you to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Some who have backslidden tell themselves, "I can get right with the Lord any time I choose. I'm just not ready. I'm not mad at God; I just need time with my friends, time to enjoy myself. I know God is loving and merciful. When I'm ready, I'll come to him. I'll know when that time is." I hear these thoughts especially among young people who are drifting away.

The Holy Spirit has compelled me to show you the danger of coldness. It is not that God turns aside from those who backslide; his grace is offered continuously. The blood of Christ toward sinners will never lose its power. But coldness has a powerful and predictable effect.

Spiritual coldness leads to hardness of heart. The term "hardness" indicates a condition that is beyond the influence of any gracious pleadings, any persuading from the Holy Spirit. It begins with coldness — a self-imposed exclusion from God, with no intention of obeying the call of his gospel. For those who continue in coldness to God's voice — who keep distant from the Holy Spirit — hardness is the result.

Paul refers to this when he says that prior to Christ's return, "There (will) come a falling away." He's speaking of a mass apostasy, to be followed by the release of an Antichrist spirit at that time (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Those who "receive not the love of the truth" (2:10) will fall under a great

delusion; they'll believe lies rather than truth. And those who turn away from him who is truth will fall into the "deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish" (2:10).

Hebrews offers this warning: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Dear one, I exhort you right now, as Hebrews instructs. We read earlier in this chapter, "Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as (Israel did), in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (3:7-8). "Let us hold fast our profession [of faith]" (4:14).

Holding fast to our faith is crucial. That's because the sin that hardens most is unbelief. Israel hardened their hearts "in the day of provocation...in the wilderness" (3:8). This happened during Israel's time of testing, when fiery trials had come upon them. During that difficult time, God's promises seemed to fail them. When it seemed the Lord was no longer answering their cries, they became peeved at him.

Something similar has happened to many Christians in this generation. I have talked to once zealous believers who now have hardened hearts. These are people who once walked faithfully with the Lord. They believed his Word, based their lives on biblical truth, were totally on fire for Jesus. Then a crisis came. They cried out to God from their desperate need, but their prayers were not answered on their time schedule. In anger they accused God, "You have failed me!" Today these people do not want to hear a word I say.

Others have been led away by associations with ungodly friends. God's grace is still available to them, his mercy extended, but over time the pleasures of sin have hardened them.

God help us in these uncertain days to "take heed," lest any of us become hardened in heart in the day of our trial! You may think you could never harden your heart. But difficult times and trials are guaranteed to come to all who follow Jesus; no one is exempt. Therefore, "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

Now is the time to get right with God because the present generation has lost their fear of him. Here is the road to destruction: when there is no fear of God left in the land. Scripture speaks again and again of the fear of God: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7). "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (8:13). "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (16:6).

Years ago I was invited to speak at Yale University. When I arrived I was warned that a group of demonstrators was in the audience ready to interrupt me on notice. As I stepped up to the podium, I saw some of those protesters holding signs.

My message that night was, "Hell: What It's Like and Who Is Going There." I preached exactly what Jesus said: "There will be weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth." As I spoke, there was total silence in the auditorium. The atmosphere grew heavy with conviction. Afterward, everyone filed out of the auditorium in stunned silence.

I will never forget that service. There was a true fear of God in that place, a reverential awe, even among those most resistant to the gospel. A well-known writer for *The New York Times* covered the

event. He later told me, “The place was so quiet, my pen sounded loud.”

As I walked through the lobby after the event, some of the protesters were still there with their signs. When they saw me, they turned away. They had no explanation for the majesty and holiness of God they had just encountered.

I tell you that those days of godly fear are long gone. Today Satan has unleashed a gospel of convenience. Now there are paid ads on New York City buses reading, “There Is No God — Enjoy Yourself!” On London buses, similar signs read, “There Is No God — Let’s Party!”

Why do such references to God persist over time? It is because humankind has never been able to fully shake off a fear of the consequences of sin. The world is nagged by the reality of a Judgment Day, a time of final accounting and a literal hell. The Holy Spirit has been faithful to warn every generation, no matter how fallen. And he is speaking right now.

When there is no fear of God, people have to invent a gospel of convenience. The world has concocted a gospel in which there is no God and therefore no heaven or hell. There is no afterlife with nothing and no one to answer to.

Where does Jesus figure in this gospel of convenience? He is very much a part of it — but it is another Jesus altogether! This is a different Jesus, a “tolerant” person who is presented as the essence of human love. He embraces all religions, accommodates same-sex marriages, declares there is no such thing as good or evil. There are no sinners to this Jesus — and so there is no mention of sin, not even deviant behavior. His message is that you do not need to change because there is nothing wrong with you. There simply is no judgment or wrath in him.

Paul called this “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6). And he warned that those who preach it “would pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7). As you might imagine, it is a seductive gospel, appealing to many. And multitudes, especially young people, are caught up in it. This explains why growing numbers of Christian youth accept same-sex marriages. Even many evangelical churches are adopting this seductive gospel. It is all happening just as Paul warned: “Many will come under delusion, believing a lie to be the truth!”

The world may cast aside the Bible and reject the real Jesus, God’s own Son. The world may also deny there is a heaven or hell. There will always be a denial of Christ’s resurrection, as well as our own resurrection from the dead by the power of God. But Jesus himself said that after death there will be a day of judgment. He warned of a literal hell where there will be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. He said that in hell darkness can be felt, that the worm never dies, meaning the conscience.

You see, merely saying there is no God, no hell and no Judgment Day does not change the reality of any of these things. What an unimaginable terror it must be to wake up in eternity to find it all to be true. Paul gives this warning: “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1–2).

Here is a clear warning from God to all backsliders today. It is a mercy call. It is as if a messenger stands alongside the wide road to destruction, crying, “Turn back! Turn around! The road you are walking on leads straight to destruction.” That message is true love and mercy.

Now is the time to get right with God because Jesus is coming very soon. All who believe in Jesus know in their hearts the time is close. Christ spoke much about it. It's true that no one knows the exact hour when he will return. Jesus himself said as much. Yet he also described clearly the things that will happen just prior to his coming: "There will be wars and commotions, and many will come claiming to be Christ. But do not be terrified; the end is not yet" (see Luke 21:8–9).

"Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.... And *then* shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (21:10–11, 27, my italics).

When will we see him coming? Jesus says it will happen when "men's hearts (fail) them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: *for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*" (21:26, my italics). Some scholars say this passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But that couldn't be, because the world at that time didn't see Christ coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The truth is this passage is one of the surest signals to us that Jesus is coming soon. Think of the shaking that's taking place today. The world is being shaken economically, morally, with natural disasters, with terrorism, with nuclear threat from rogue nations. What is the effect of this massive shaking? It is beyond doubt: People are more fearful than ever.

Amazingly, we don't hear much preaching about the coming of Jesus. Some preach that he will come but not in our time. Others preach, "The church has to take dominion first, and that could take thousands of years." (This belief is the foundation of what is known as "dominion theology.")

Jesus warns us about such thinking. He says, "If that servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming" (Matthew 24:48). Paul echoes this: "We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

All of these passages speak of *expectation*. According to Paul, it is expectation that causes us to abound in the true works of God: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, *always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (15:58, my italics). We are to always abound in the work of the Lord, with the point of occupying until he comes.

When I first began preaching as a teenager, I delivered sermons about the coming of the Lord. Later, when I came to New York City in my twenties, I preached on the streets to addicts and gang members about the coming of Christ. I preached about the righteous fear of God, that the Lord will not be mocked, and about living with the daily expectation that Jesus will come when least expected. Since then I have preached this message all over the world. And I will continue to preach it until I die!

Jesus tells us very clearly: "Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps burning...and be like men who are waiting for the return of their master.... Blessed are those servants on alert when he comes. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord will find watching when he comes.... And if he shall come in the second watch...be ye ready: for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect him" (Luke 12:35–38, 40).

The Holy Spirit is calling us to wake up and surrender all to Jesus — now, today! This is the same call

that was given to Israel years ago: “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments...Shake thyself from the dust, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money” (Isaiah 52:1–3).

Hear what the Spirit is saying to you *today*. Isaiah’s message was directed to Israel, but it is meant for everyone in this messianic age. Think about it: Like Israel, you are God’s beloved — and you, too, have been held captive long enough. You have been in chains for too long. The devil has no claim on you. He did not die for you.

It is time for you to get up out of the dust. If you will take a step of faith — if you will come to the throne of mercy and grace — those chains *will* fall from you. I exhort you today: Get up from the dust of fear! Up from the dust of despair! Up from the dust of unbelief!

You belong to Jesus. He has a claim on you. But you must make the first move. He won’t force you to get up. You must rise up and loosen yourself. Rise up today!

Some years ago, I stood face to face with the vicious Mau Mau gang in Brooklyn’s Fort Greene projects. As I told those hardened young people about Jesus, a young gang leader named Nicky cursed me. My first message to Nicky Cruz was these four words: “Nicky, Jesus loves you.” That is always the first call of the gospel of Christ: “Jesus loves you.” There is mercy, forgiveness and healing, available by faith to all who come.

But there was also a second call to Nicky and his gang. That call came later, at a meeting of several gangs at the old St. Nicholas Arena. I told the young people gathered there, “You have heard the gospel. Now you know that Jesus loves you. But you also have to know that you can be changed. I ask you to get up — right now, today. Come forward and give everything to Jesus.”

That was the beginning of change in so many young people’s lives, changes that have resounded down through generations to this very day.

Let me now show you the hope we are given. The Lord said of Israel, “My people are bent to backsliding from me... How shall I give thee up?” (Hosea 11:7–8). “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him” (14:4).

This was all spoken before the Cross, before the shed blood of Jesus. Today, here is the invitation. If you have heard it before, hear it anew *today*: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mathew 11:28–30).

I urge you today, right now: Just come. Believe. Find rest for your troubled soul. God promises to meet you. Amen!

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