

“Remember, Repent, Return”

July 5, 2026

Understanding the Magnificent Church at Ephesus

‘I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’

Revelation 2:2-7

Our Central Truth today is about the tendency of churches and individual Christians to stray from orthodoxy as difficult times rise in society.

Part One: A Lesson from The Church in Ephesus

I. Discovering the Church

- A. About AD 95

- B. The Birth of the Church at Ephesus

- C. Roll Call of Pastors

II. Describing the Church

- A. A distinguished history; a solid foundation; excellent leadership

- B. Doctrinal purity

- C. Zealous workers

- D. Summary observations:

Founded and nurtured by key apostles like Paul, John, and Timothy, it serves as the first of the seven churches addressed in the Book of Revelation.

The story of the Ephesian church is one of the most thoroughly documented congregations in the New Testament. You can read about its origins and growth in Acts 16-20.

Foundation: Planted in about AD 54 by the Apostle Paul during his second and third missionary journeys. He stayed in Ephesus for about three years—longer than in any other city during his travels.

Key Leaders: In addition to Paul, the church was mentored by early Christian figures including Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, and the Apostle John.

Cultural Impact: The church caused significant economic disruption to the local pagan trades—such as the silversmiths who profited from making idols of the goddess Artemis—sparking a city-wide riot.

E. Biblical Significance

The Epistle to the Ephesians: Paul wrote this famous New Testament letter to this congregation to encourage unity, outline the theology of the church, and guide believers in spiritual warfare.

The Book of Revelation: In Revelation 2:1-7, Jesus dictates a specific letter to the Ephesian church.

III. Diagnosing the Church

The Message of Revelation

Strengths: Christ praised the church for its hard work, perseverance, and intolerance of evil and false teachers. They dealt with the occult, and John eventually cast down the temple, altar, and part of the wall of Diana's temple.

Weaknesses: Despite their doctrinal purity, they were heavily rebuked for abandoning their "first love"—a loss of their initial passion, devotion, and love for God and each other.

The Warning: Christ warned them to repent and return to their original practices, or He would remove their witness and influence. Diagnosing the Church

A. First love had been lost somehow.

1. Because iniquity abounds

2. Because of delays in God's agenda

3. Ecclesiastes points out the tendency to lose passion when God delays what we think is justice.
 4. When we believe the wrong report (Elijah: "I alone am the only prophet left.")
 5. Self-focus: When our heart ceases to "wonder," our hearts begin to "wander." (ex. David & Solomon - "Rejoice with the wife of your youth, and let her breasts (her embrace) satisfy you at all times (Be all you need).
- B. A result of Cold Love: "They were as straight and solid as a shotgun barrel, but they were also as cold and empty.

What happened between AD 55 and AD 95

1. They lost the sense of wonder.
2. Theology has a tendency to shift from being God-centered to being "us-centered" or "comfort centered, or even "miracle/healing centered."
3. They forgot to sharpen the ax.
4. They focused on what needed to be done instead who needed to be worshipped. (Mary and Martha)

What happened afterward...R E M O V A L

Part Two: A Lesson from the Church in Nazi Germany.¹

Lutzer details seven things that almost always occur when a nation forgets God.

1. When God is separated from Government, judgment follows—especially upon arrogance, self-righteousness, and compromise.
2. The economy suffers or even collapses.
3. Things long recognized as evil suddenly become legal. What was good is now considered bad. What was bad in now good—even preferred.

¹ From a book by Erwin Lutzer - "When a Nation Forgets God: 7 Lessons we must learn from Nazi Germany; 2010 Moody Press. Chicago

4. The propaganda machine peddles lies.
5. The government, not the parents, become responsible for a child's training.
6. God will raise up heroes...and martyrs.
7. The church will be faced with a choice - "Who is Lord?"

Part Three: A Prescription for Christians in America Today

1. **Remember**
2. **Repent**
3. **Return**
4. **Repeat**