

Why the Christian Church in America is Declining (Part 3)

Background and History of the Church at Ephesus

Ephesus was one of the world's great cities and seaports during that time. Its harbor was on the Aegean Sea across from Athens, Greece. Paul left a maturing, healthy body of believers.

Part One: Christians must develop or regain our sense of urgency for three reasons:

- **The Imminent Return of Jesus Christ – In His Words**

*“But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.
Matthew 24: 36*

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. Rev 3: 11

- We must have a **greater sense of urgency for the lost...**
Jesus' Mission should be ours!

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
Luke 19: 10*

- **A greater sense of urgency to be working His plan instead of our own**

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28: 19-20*

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1: 8

Part 2 – You have left your first love...

Paul's Commendation: The book of Ephesians was one of Paul's prison epistles or letters. It was written while he was under house arrest in Rome around 62 AD.

*"For this reason I too, having heard of the **faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints...**"* Ephesians 1: 15

Paul's Warning: We know this continued to be a problem because of Paul's words to Timothy when he was leading that church. (1 Timothy 1: 3-7)

*"Just as I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, to remain on at Ephesus so that you would instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to useless speculation rather than **advance the plan of God, which is by faith**, so I urge you now...Some people have strayed from these things and have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions".*

The Revelation. Jesus began this amazing, and sometimes mysterious, revelation to John,

Jesus' Commendation

"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; and **you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary.***" Revelation 2: 2-3

Jesus Condemnation *"But I have this against you, that **you have left your first love..**"*.

What was their **first love** to which Jesus referred? Let's look back at some of the first words in Paul's letter to this church.

*"For this reason I too, having heard of the **faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints...**"* Ephesians 1: 15

- Their faith in the Lord Jesus was so strong—obvious and apparent
- Their love for all the saints—other Christians. In many good commentaries and texts on this verse, this one is said to be the most obvious. Why?

Part Three – How to Avoid Having Your Lampstand Removed

There are eleven "love one another" verses in the Bible—all in the New Testament.

Jesus used that phrase 3x in two consecutive verses. That meant it was most important only behind loving God.

am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another." John 13: 34-35

The "one another" was other Christians—not unbelievers. Isn't that strange? If the church is to be viable and sustainable, we have to begin by loving other Christians – brothers and sisters in Christ; joint heirs with Jesus. Isn't it easy to

love other Christians? Apparently not.

The Apostle John also wrote these strong words of warning and rebuke to Christians: **This is the most serious accusation in the Bible for Christians within the church.**

If someone says, "I love God," and yet he hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother and sister whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 1 John 4: 20

The question is how we show that love for one another to one another.

Jesus told them how to resolve their issues and the Consequences of not doing so.

*"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**." Revelation 2: 5*

The How-to: *repent* Again for emphasis, He said it twice.

The Consequences: Jesus said failure to do so = their "***lampstand***" ***being removed***.

What did that mean? What would be the consequences for a "loveless" church? Many commentaries agree and none of it is good. The most common theme is that:

Jesus would no longer be present in such a church – the Holy Spirit would have "left the building." The church would exist no more in God's eyes.

Remember where Jesus was when John saw Him at the beginning of the Revelation:

"in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man" Rev 1: 13a

Apparently, the church did not heed His warnings as it disappeared. What once was among the greatest Christian churches did not exist anymore. And we know the entire country of Turkey – once a Christian stronghold – became, and still is, a Muslim country.

Warning for the church today. *What Jesus demanded of them; He demands of us.*

The question for the Christian church today is this: *What part of Jesus' warning indicts us?*

Invitation to Unbelievers: Jesus' words, "Come." Just as you are, God is waiting to receive all people who come to Him with repentant hearts confessing their sins – ready to receive Christ as Savior because He is the only way back to God our Father. (John 14: 6)

For Christ's sake,

Walter