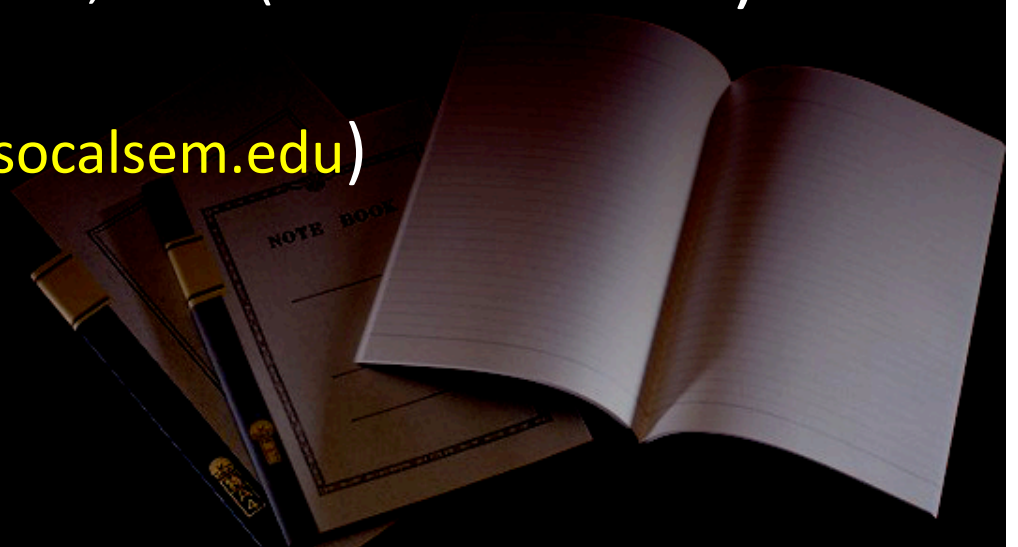


# The Ephesus Case Study for Safeguarding the Institution from Worldview Drift

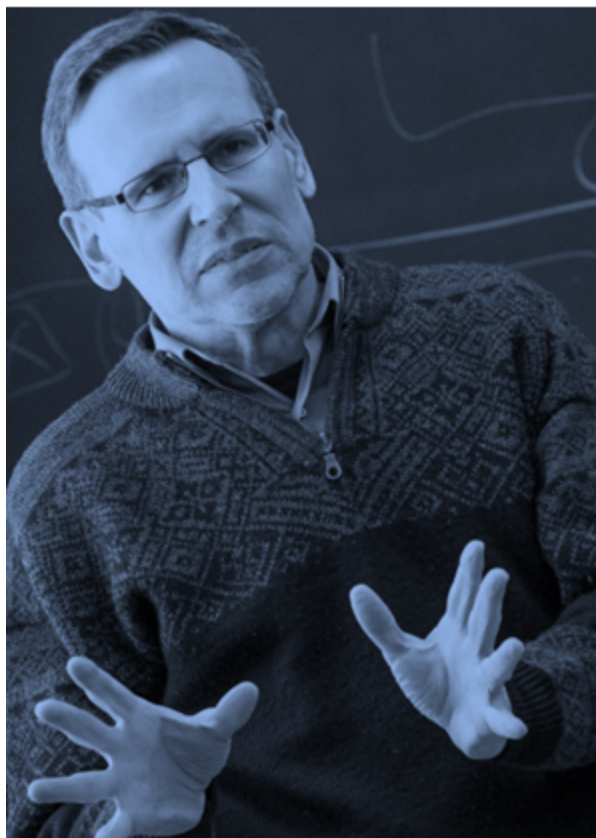
Christopher Cone, Th.D, Ph.D, Ph.D ([www.drcone.com](http://www.drcone.com))

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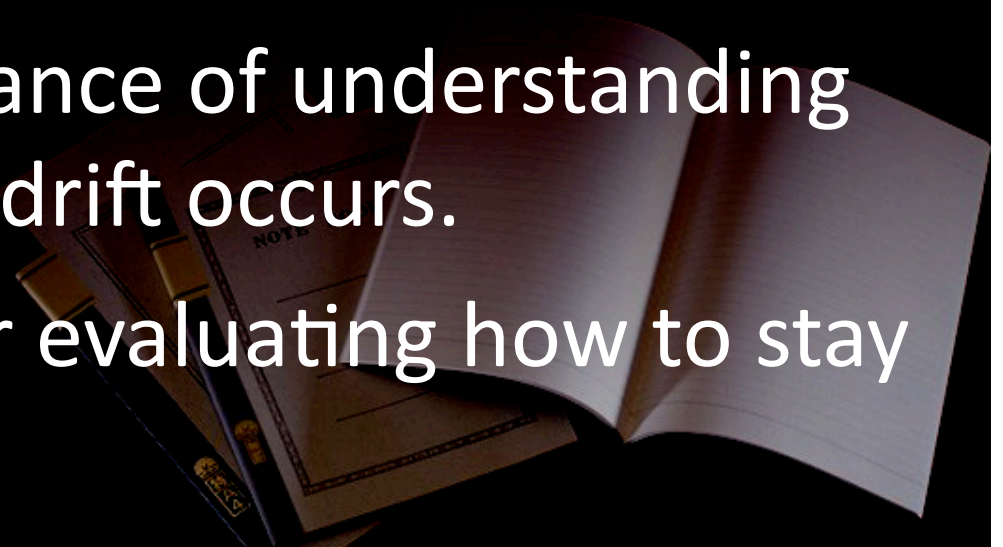


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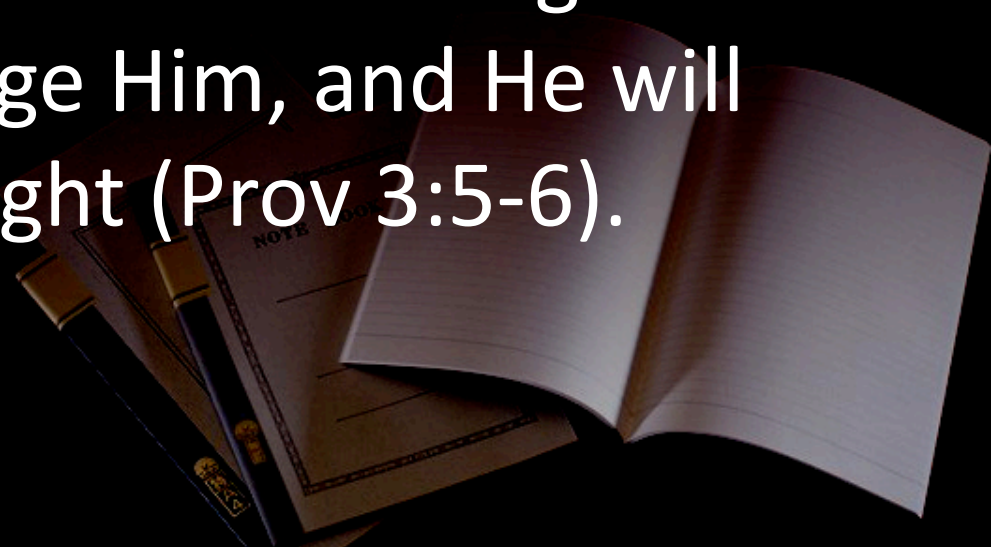
# Introduction

- The failure of the church at Ephesus illustrates how difficult it is to safeguard our institutions from worldview drift.
- They had every advantage, but within a generation failed catastrophically.
- Illustrates the importance of understanding how quickly and why drift occurs.
- Provides a process for evaluating how to stay on track.



# Premise

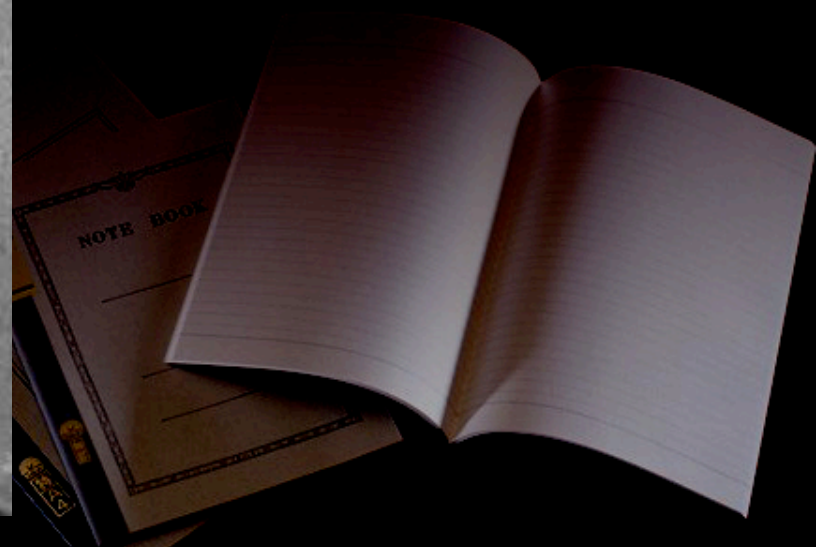
- Principles for sound leadership and healthy organizations are derived from the Bible.
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Prov 3:5-6).





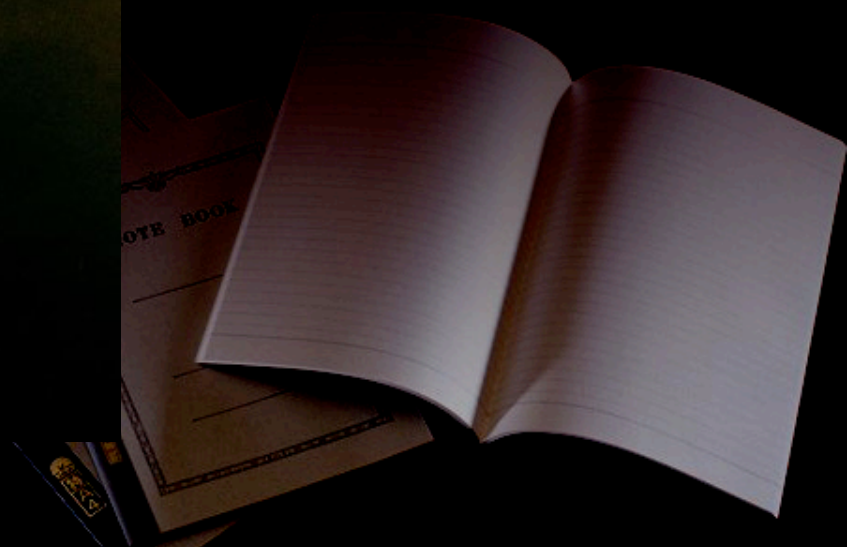
# Understanding the Problem

- Friederich Nietzsche: God is dead! We have killed him through science and discovery: He is no longer necessary. Churches are sepulchres...



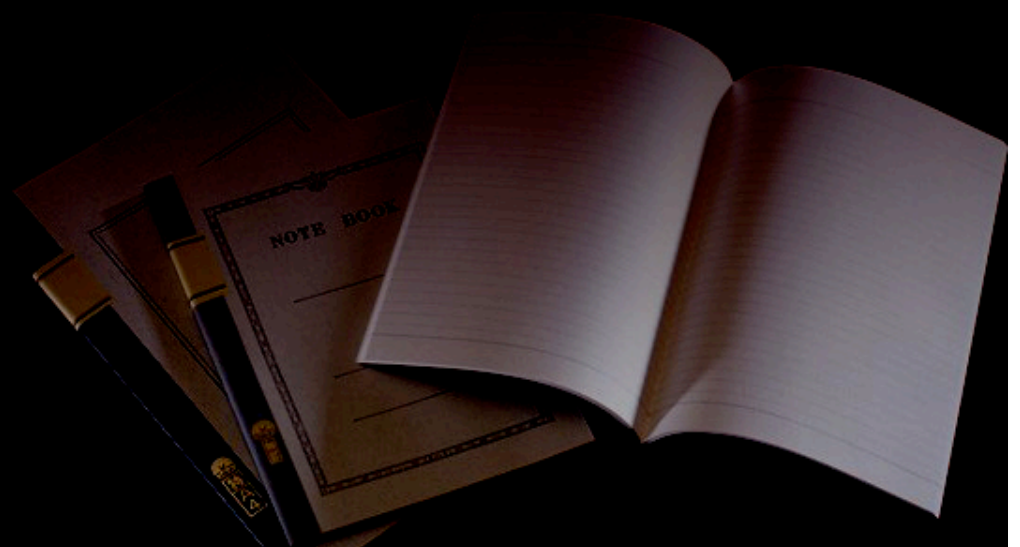
# Understanding the Problem

- Christopher Hitchens: Religion = humanity's first crack at understanding reality.



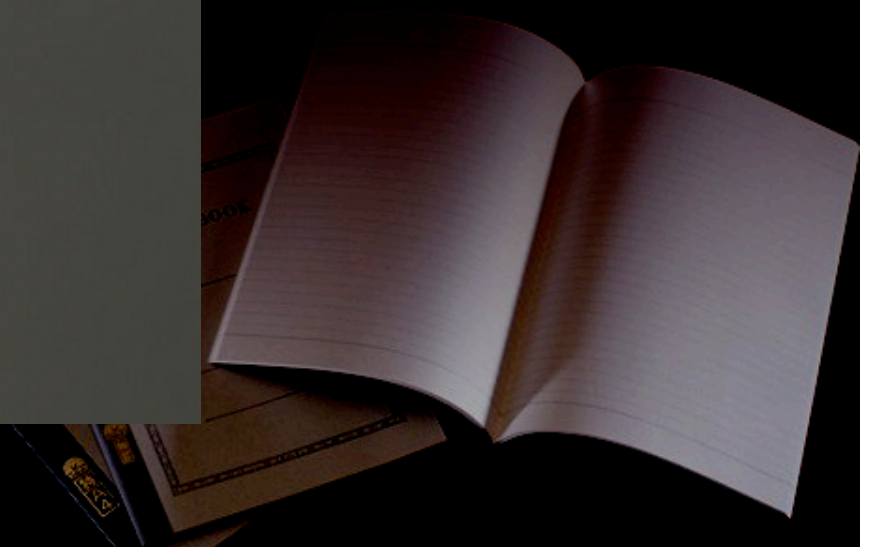
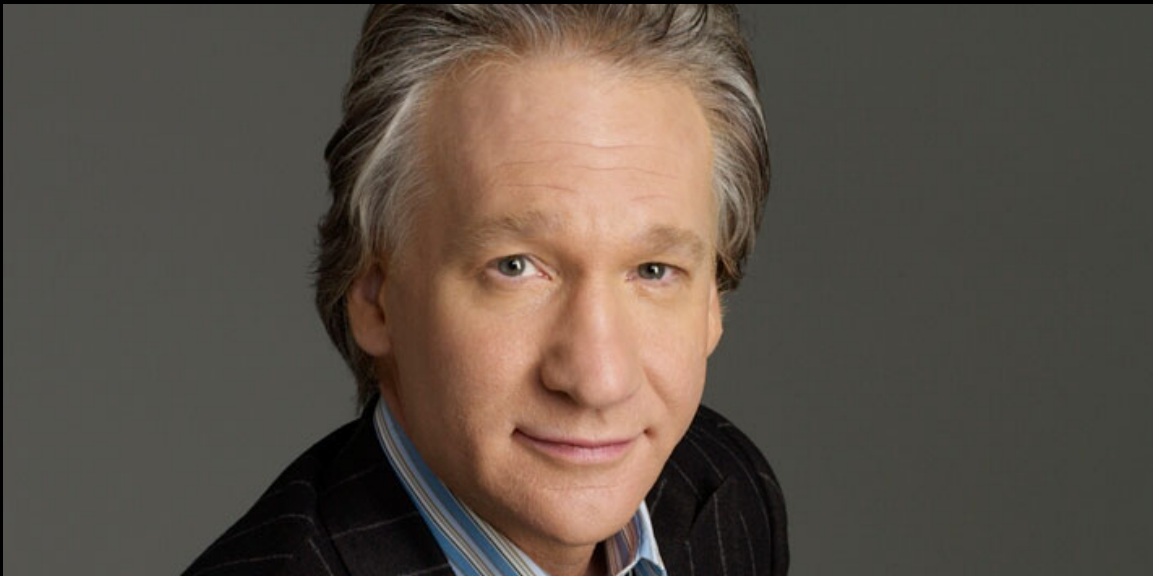
# Understanding the Problem

- Bill Nye: The Biblical story is bad economics



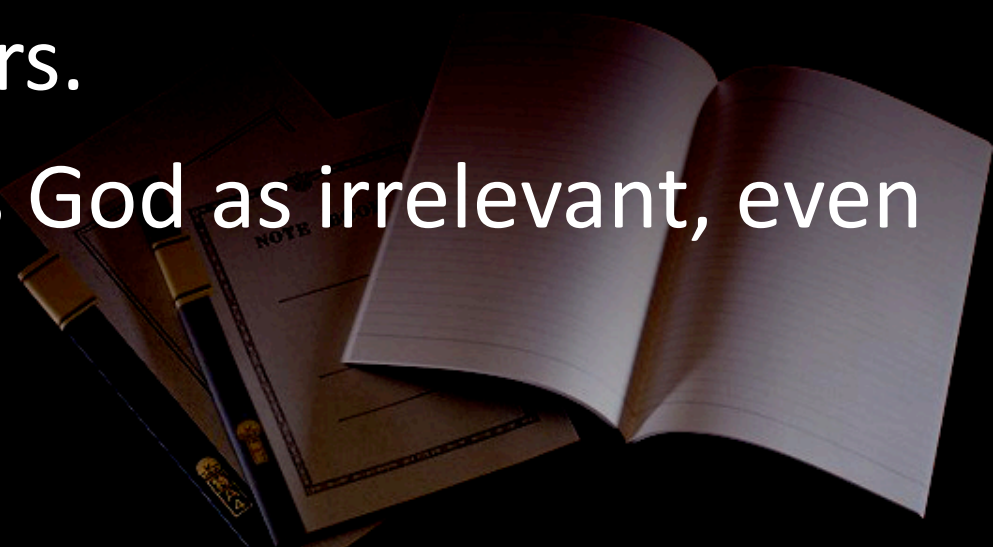
# Understanding the Problem

- Bill Maher: Christianity a mental disorder.



# Understanding the Problem

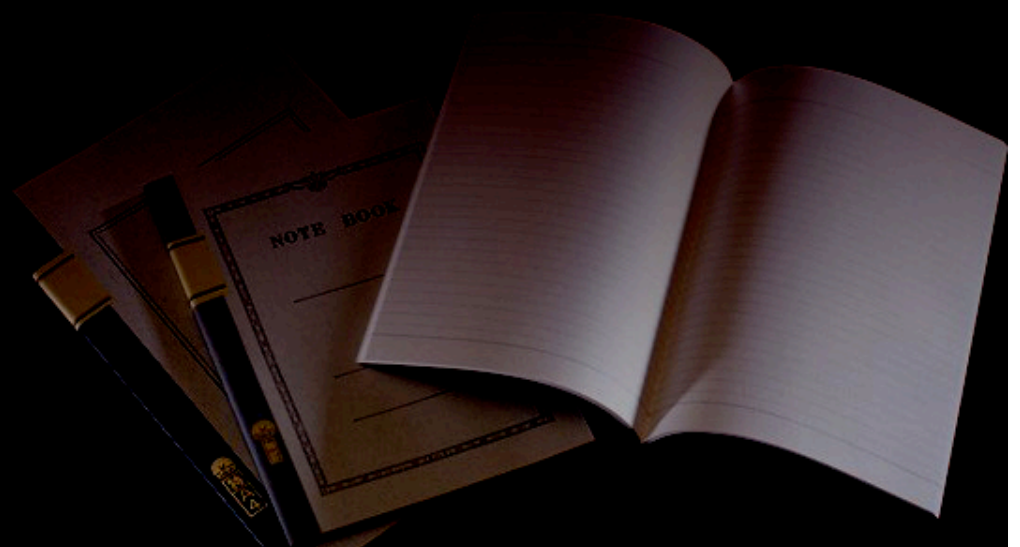
- In a very real sense, we are living in a post-Christian society.
- As we apply Nietzsche's declaration of independence from God, we grow more and more uncomfortable with any inclusion of God in societal matters.
- This generation views God as irrelevant, even sinister.





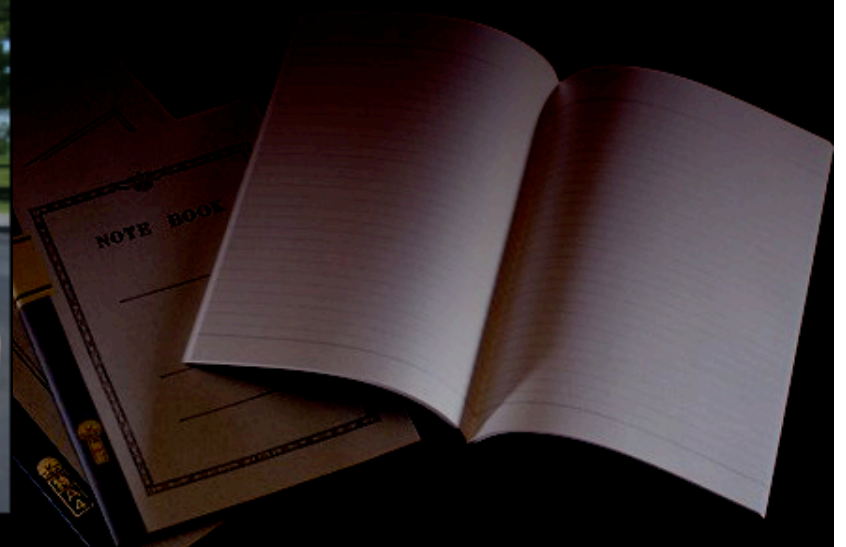
# The Hard Question

- When culture and dollars are running from Christianity, how can we as leaders of Christian institutions maintain a Biblical worldview without financially ruining our institutions?



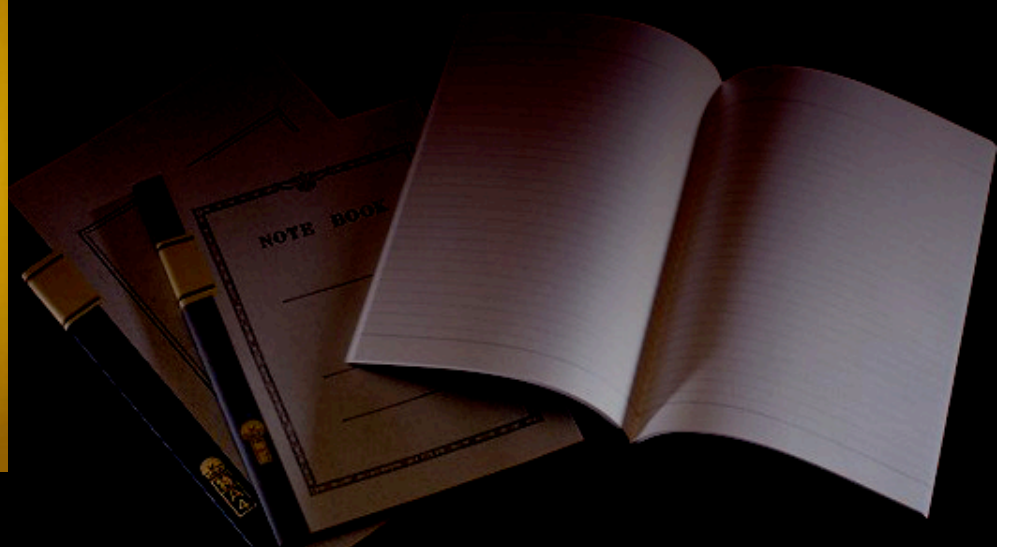
# The Problem Illustrated

- In 2013 Valley Forge Christian College ranked by Forbes as having 2<sup>nd</sup> worst ROI for students.



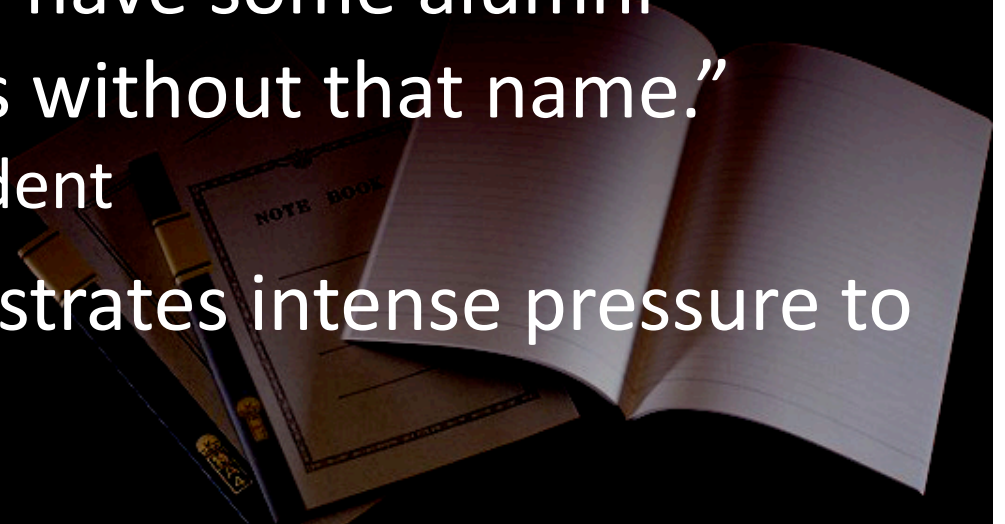
# The Problem Illustrated

- “Not surprisingly for a Christian school, students tend to earn degrees in religious studies, which don’t lead to the most lucrative careers.” – Susan Adams, Forbes



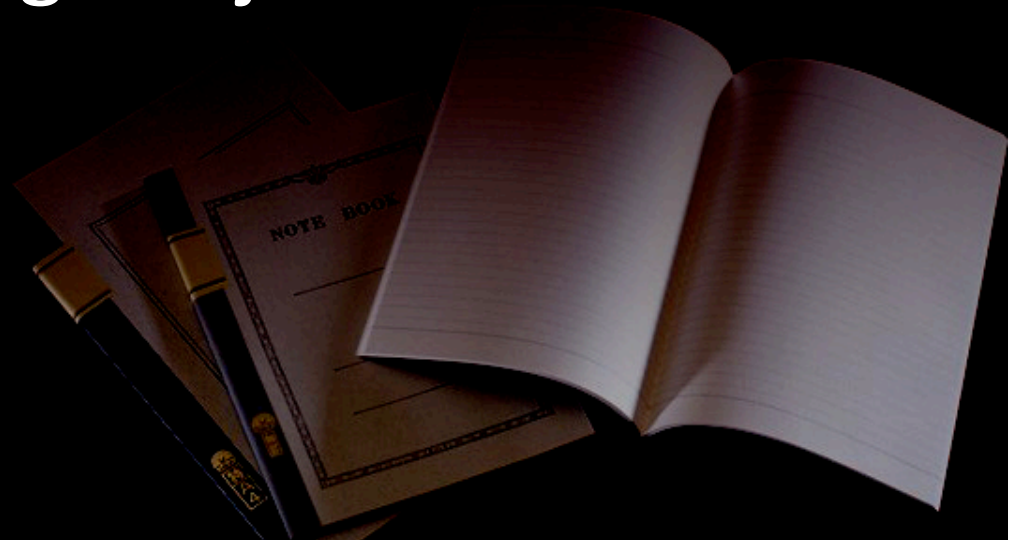
# A Trendy Response

- Valley Forge adopted a university model with neutral labeling: Valley Forge University.
- “Other names were discussed including Valley Forge Christian University. Unfortunately, the name Christian is not welcomed in some places in the world and even now, we have some alumni requesting their degrees without that name.”  
– Dr. Don Meyer, VFU President
- Not a bad move, but illustrates intense pressure to shift.



# The Problem in Brief

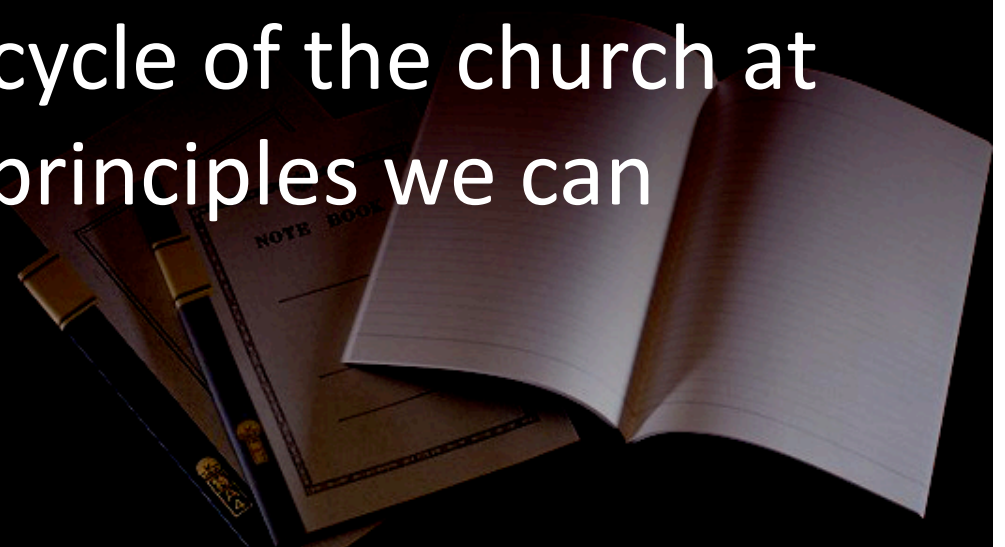
- Accredited education is very expensive.
- Christian education doesn't generally provide requisite financial returns.
- Most common reason college students give for enrolling: to get a good job and make money.





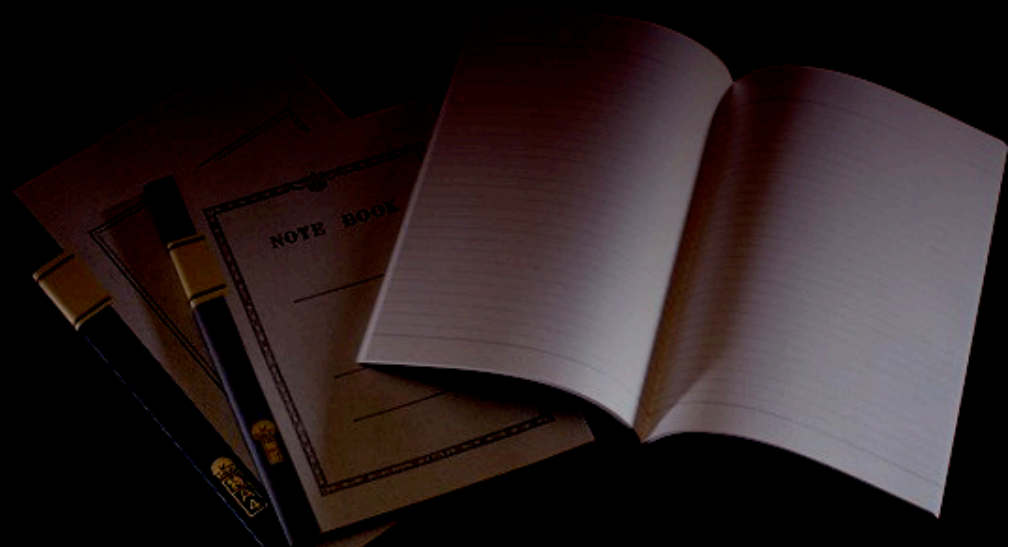
# An Important Question

- What strategies can leaders of Christian institutions employ in order to ensure that, even as they seek to wisely adapt to the needs of the day, they keep their institutions steadily grounded in a Biblical worldview?
- Let's examine the lifecycle of the church at Ephesus to see what principles we can discover...



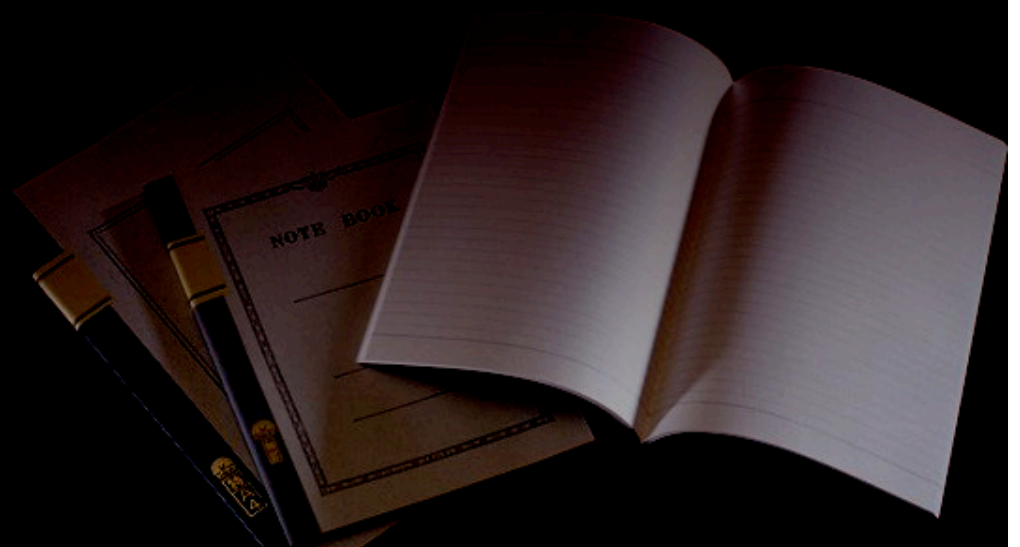
# The Ephesus Case Study

- We are first introduced to the city of Ephesus in Acts 18, where Paul entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews:
  - They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews (Acts 18:19).



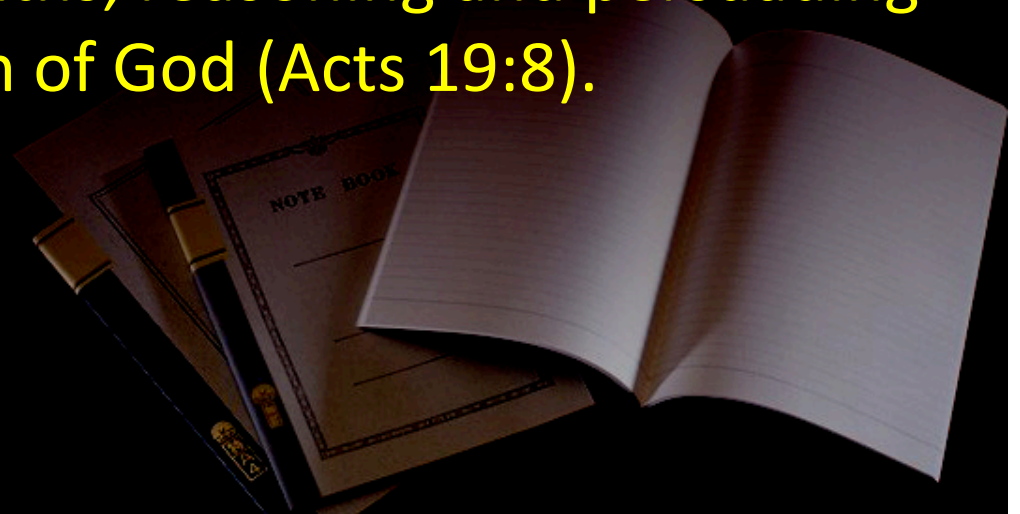
# Paul in Ephesus

- On a later visit to Ephesus, Paul found some disciples there.
  - It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples (Acts 19:1).



# Three Months in Ephesus

- In addition to teaching them, he made a practice of entering the synagogue for three months, where he proclaimed, reasoned, and persuaded regarding the kingdom of God.
  - And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).



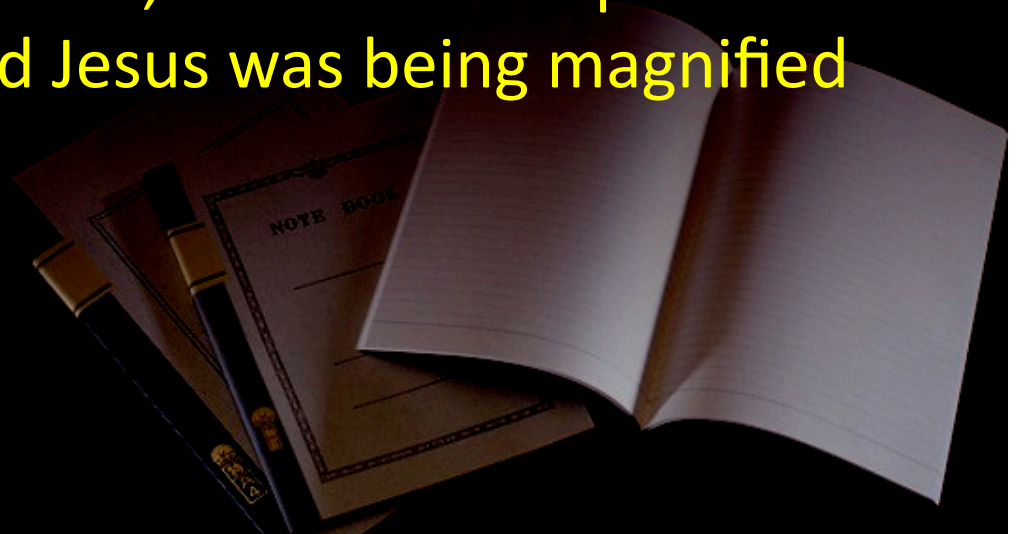
# Two Years of Reasoning

- Some responded very harshly, causing Paul to move away from the synagogue with those who became disciples, taking up reasoning with them at the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) for a duration of two years (Acts 19:10).
  - But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10).



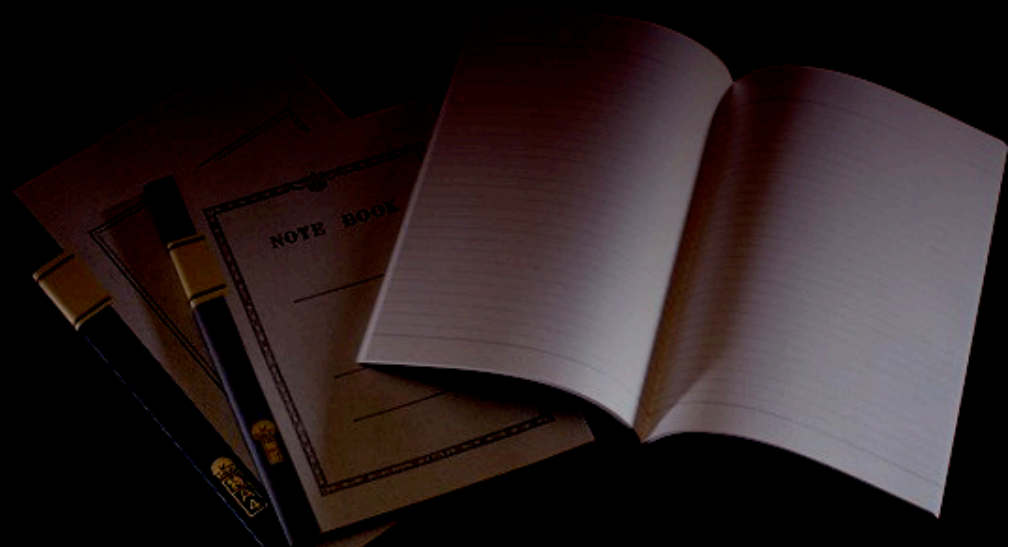
# Effective Ministry

- During this time, God worked miracles through Paul, causing many to magnify Christ (Acts 19:11, 17).
  - God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul...This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified (Acts 19:11, 17).



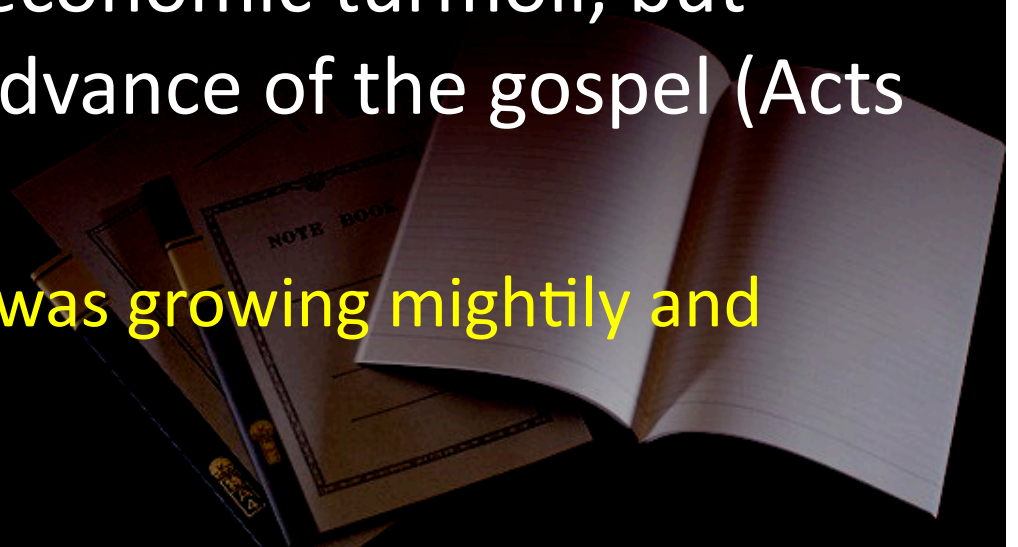
# Persuading Against Idolatry

- God used Paul mightily to persuade many to turn to the Lord from idols (Acts 19:26).
  - You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all* (Acts 19:26).



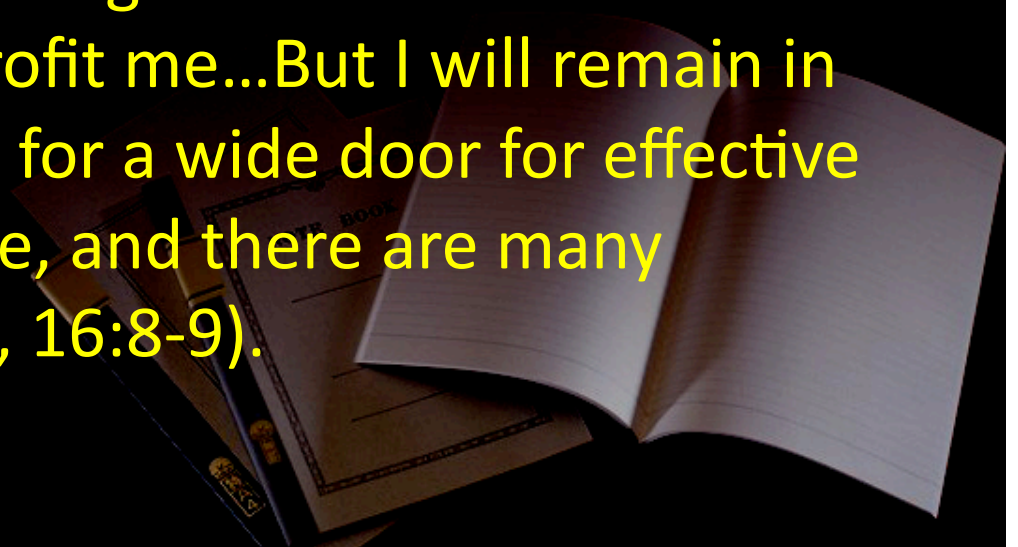
# Large Scale Conversion

- This large-scale conversion caused a significant disturbance there. Ephesus, a key port city in Asia Minor, was noted for its commerce related to the worship of Artemis (or Diana in Latin), the premiere goddess in Ephesian culture (Acts 19:18-20:1).
- Paul's ministry created economic turmoil, but resulted in a powerful advance of the gospel (Acts 19:20).
  - So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (Acts 19:20).



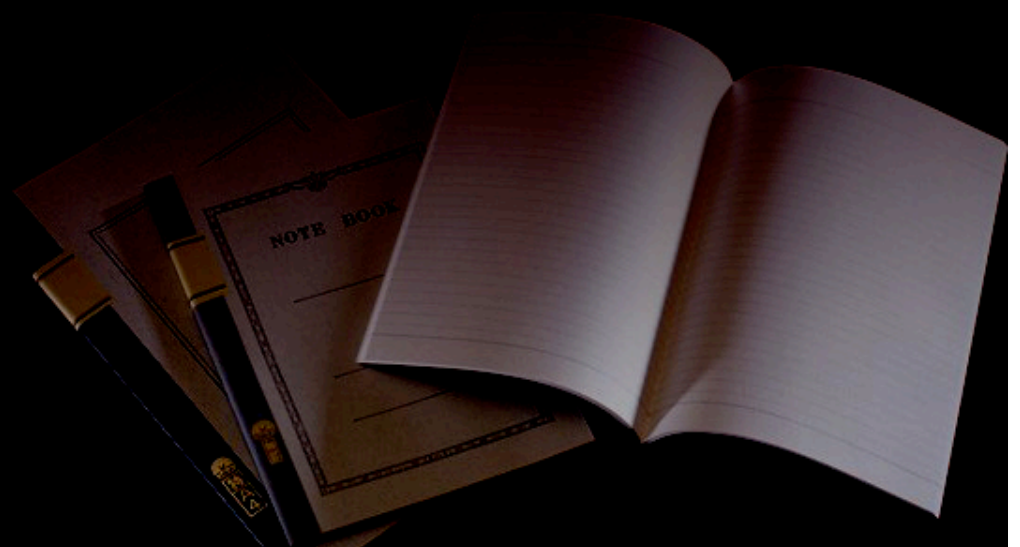
# Not Without Battles

- Writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus, he observes that he had many battles at Ephesus, but at that present time the climate was ripe for the gospel – a wide door had opened for service there, still there were many adversaries.
  - If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me...But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (1 Cor 15:32, 16:8-9).



# A Farewell

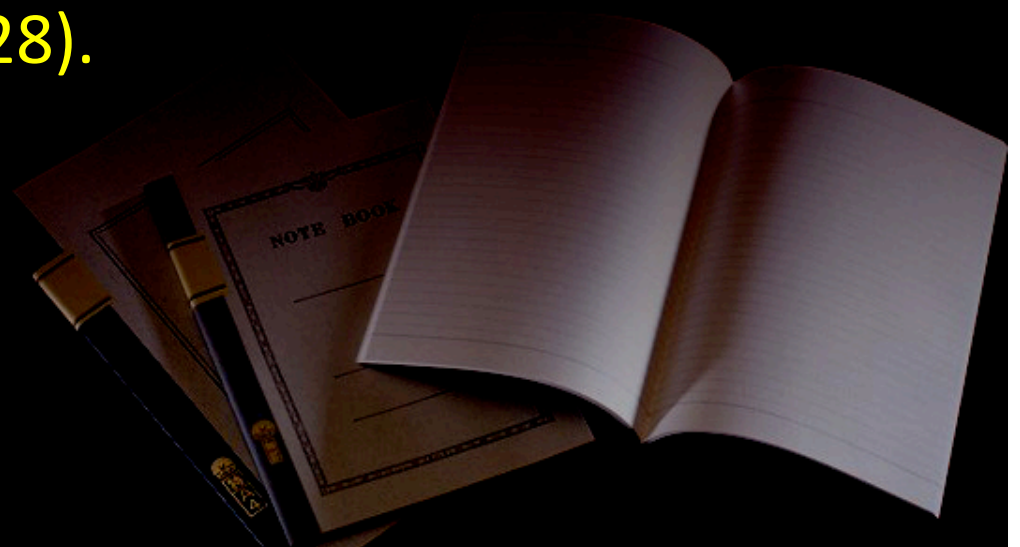
- Later, Paul sailed past Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem.
  - For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).





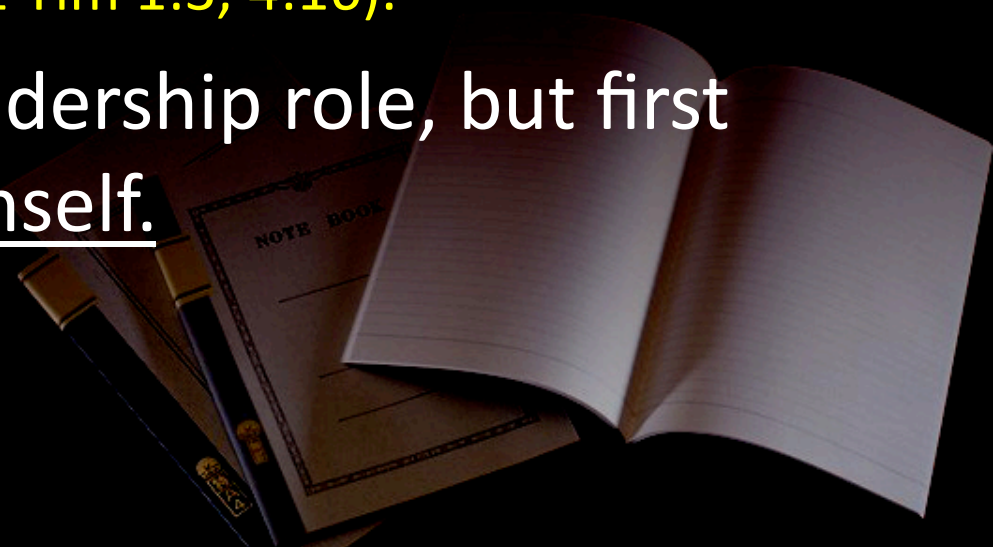
# Charging Leadership

- He called the elders of the church at Ephesus, and offered them a farewell of sorts, charging them with these words:
  - Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).



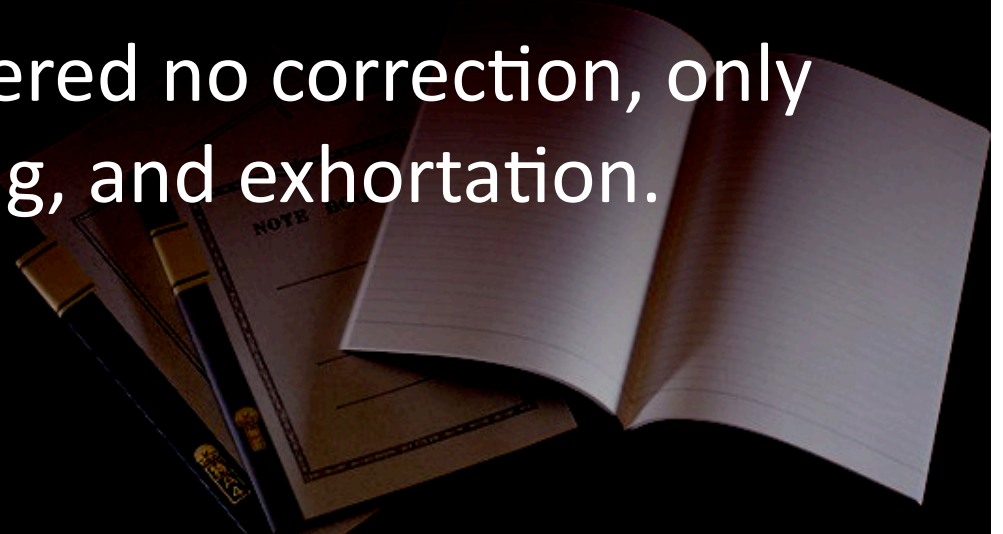
# Next Generation Warning

- This exhortation was very similar to his later warning to Timothy while Timothy was ministering in Ephesus at Paul's direction (1 Tim 1:3):
  - As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines...Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching. Persevere in these things... (1 Tim 1:3, 4:16).
- Timothy was in a key leadership role, but first responsibility: guard himself.



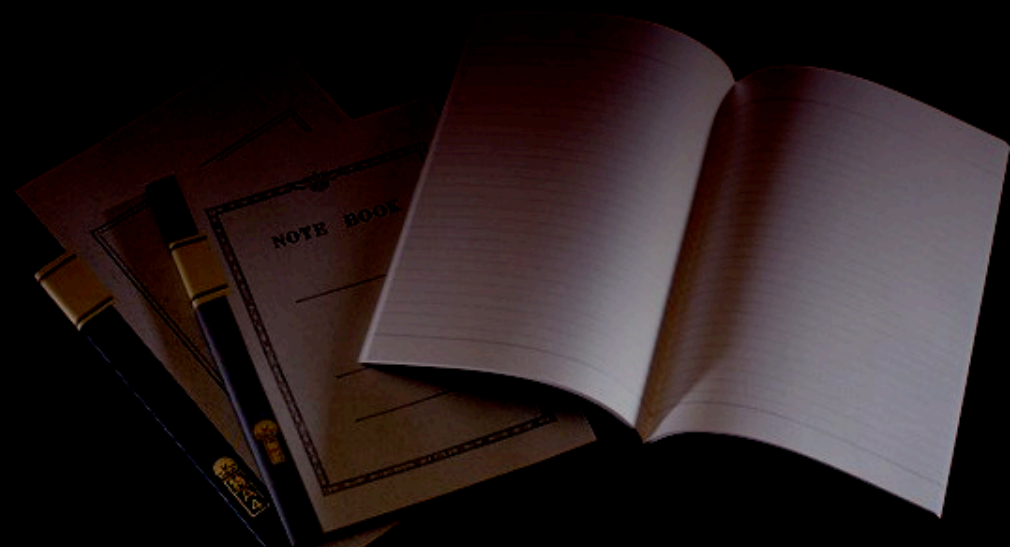
# Ephesus Well Established

- Later, Paul sent Tychicus (2 Tim 4:12), perhaps as a follow-up to an earlier visit, may have later delivered Paul's letter to Ephesus (Eph 6:21), which Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, specifically the faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:1).
- The letter indicates conditions in the church were encouraging, as Paul offered no correction, only encouragement, teaching, and exhortation.



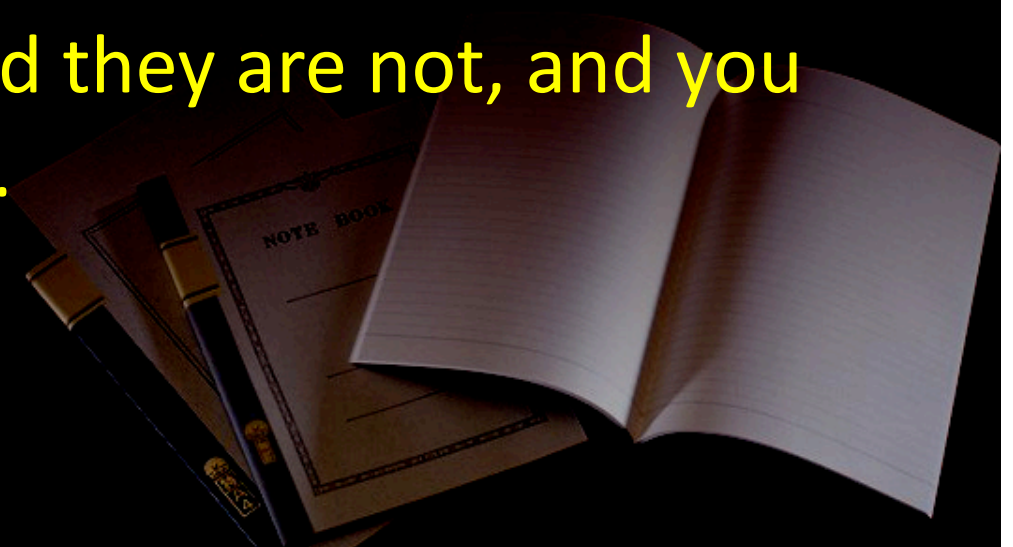
# Assessment: Ephesus

- The final direct Biblical references to Ephesus arrive roughly less than thirty years later, as John is told to write the book of Revelation and to send it to Ephesus and six other churches (Rev 1:11). That book contains a section specifically addressed to the church at Ephesus:



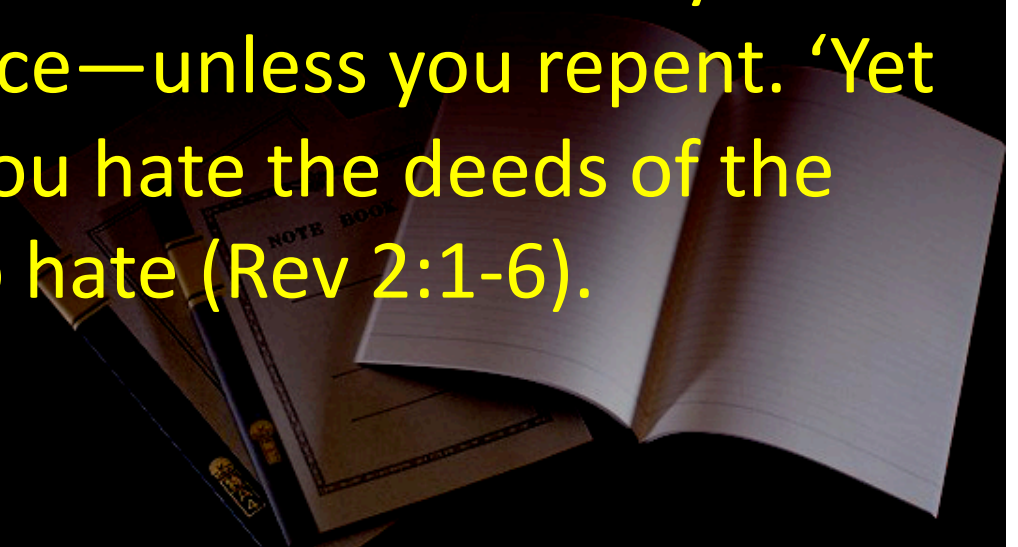
# Assessment: Ephesus

- “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false...



# Assessment: Ephesus

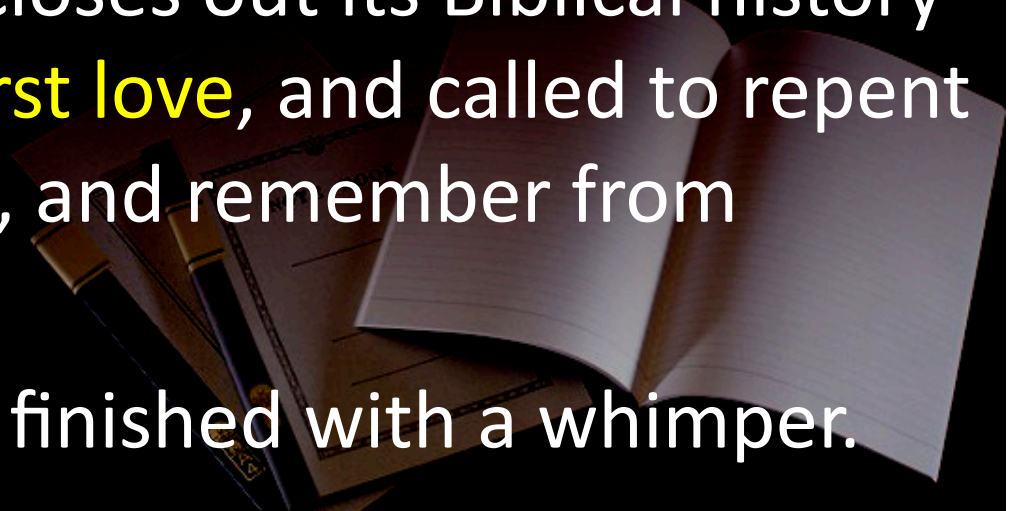
- ...and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate (Rev 2:1-6).





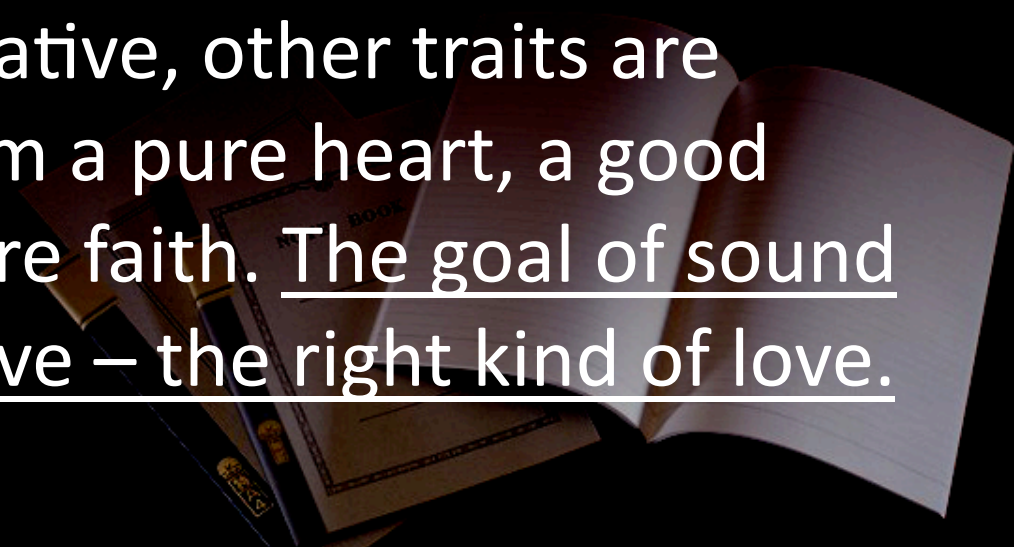
# Ephesus Postmortem

- Commendation for: deeds, toil, perseverance, discernment, and hatred of the right things.
- Sadly, they are indicted for a critical error: they had left their first love.
- The Greek for *left* is *aphekes*, to *quit* or *give up*.
- The church at Ephesus closes out its Biblical history having **abandoned its first love**, and called to repent – to change their minds, and remember from whence they had fallen.
- Started with a roar, and finished with a whimper.



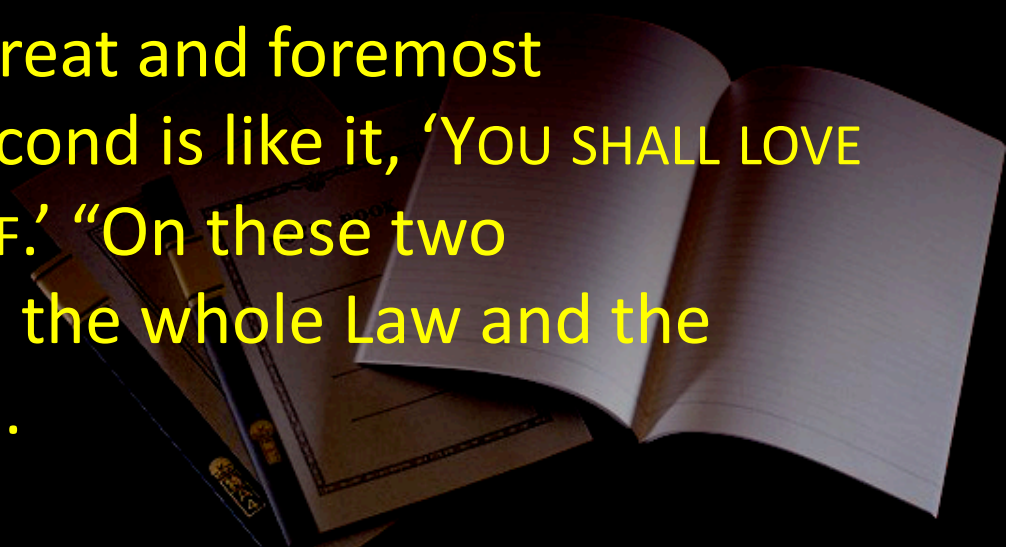
# Priorities?

- It seems that the church at Ephesus had maintained a focus on doctrinal soundness, yet when we examine the *expected result* of doctrinal soundness, we might reconsider:
  - “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5).”
- *Love* = predicate nominative, other traits are describing the love: from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. The goal of sound instruction is, simply, love – the right kind of love.



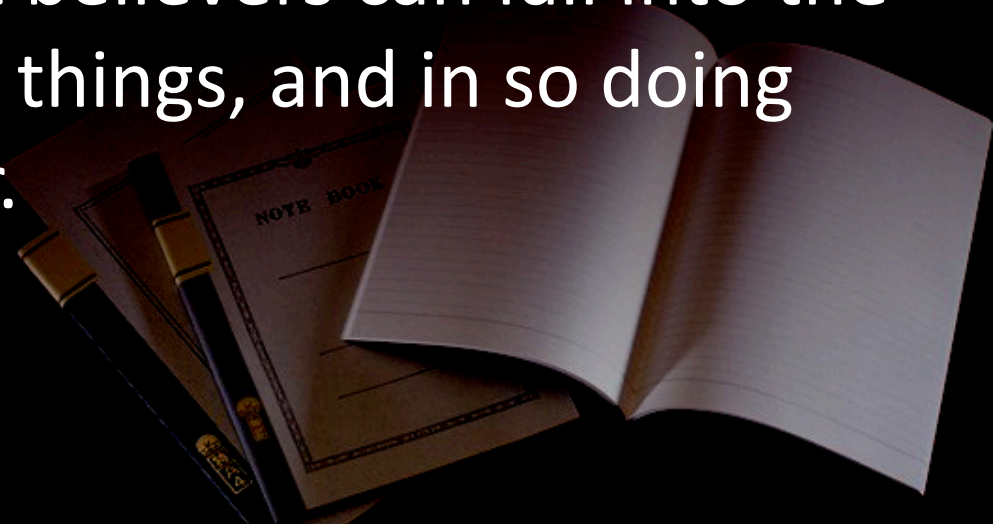
# Priorities?

- We understand that our order of priority in expressing love is for the Lord first, and then for each other. The result of sound teaching is love for Him and love for people.
  - And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ “This is the great and foremost commandment. “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Mt 22:37-40).



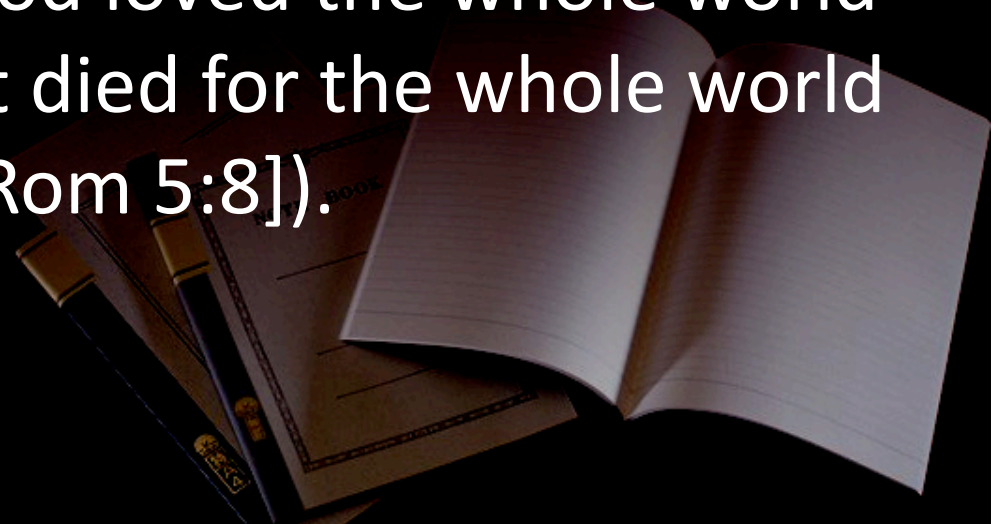
# The Warning

- The threat we face, then, is not losing truth for truth's sake, but losing truth and in the process losing our love for Him. That is the very essence of idolatry. John warns believers of idolatry, saying
  - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him (1 Jn 2:15).
- His warning is clear, that believers can fall into the trap of loving the wrong things, and in so doing failing to love the Father.



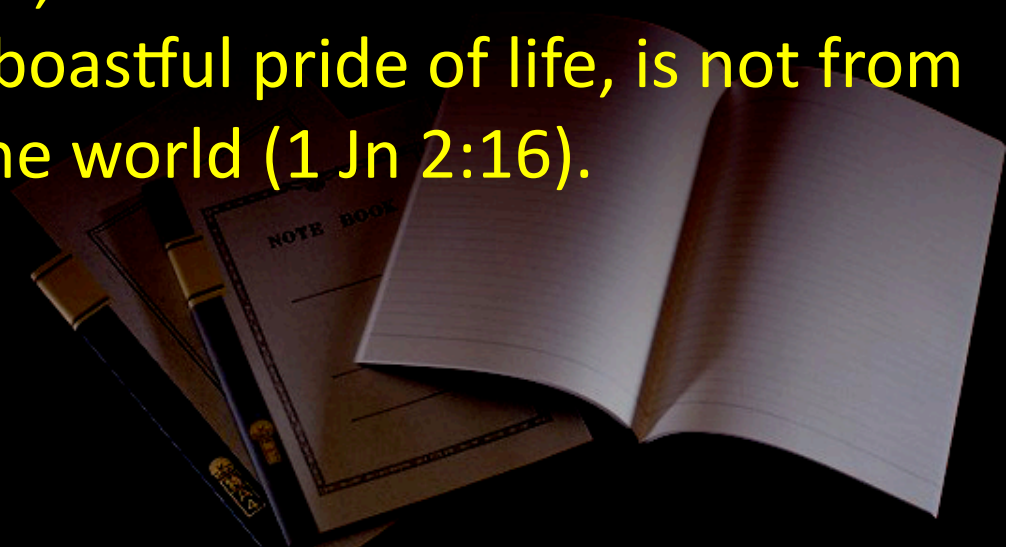
# What the Warning *Is Not*

- John is certainly not suggesting we should not love the people in the world.
- He was present when Jesus exhorted his listeners to love their neighbor (in the story of the good Samaritan, Lk 10:29-37).
- John also records that God loved the whole world (Jn 3:16), and that Christ died for the whole world (1 Jn 2:2[compare with Rom 5:8]).



# What the Warning Is

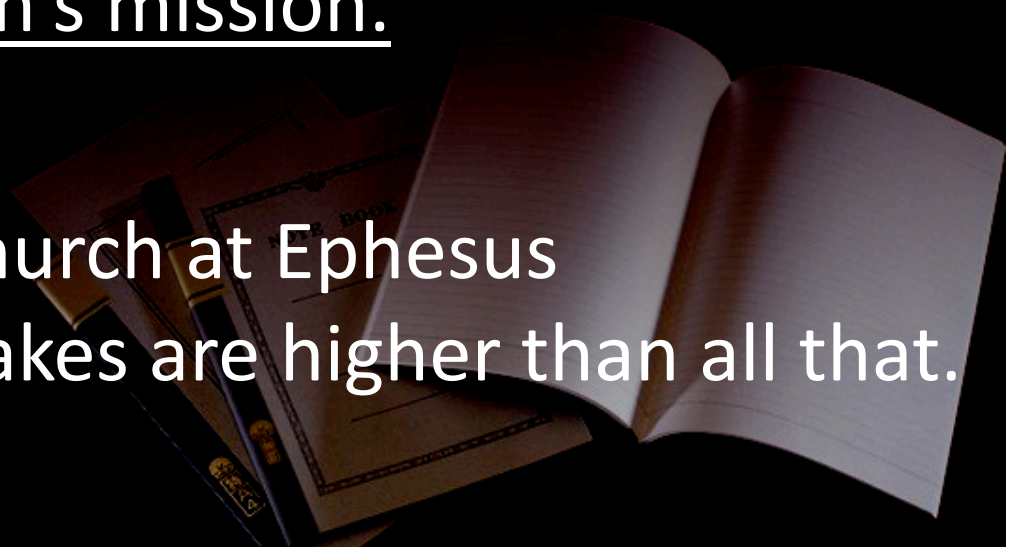
- John is cautioning against the world system – the course of this world (e.g., Eph 2:2), and the things in that system that lead us astray – the lust of the flesh and the eyes and the boastful pride of life (1 Jn 2:16).
  - For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world (1 Jn 2:16).





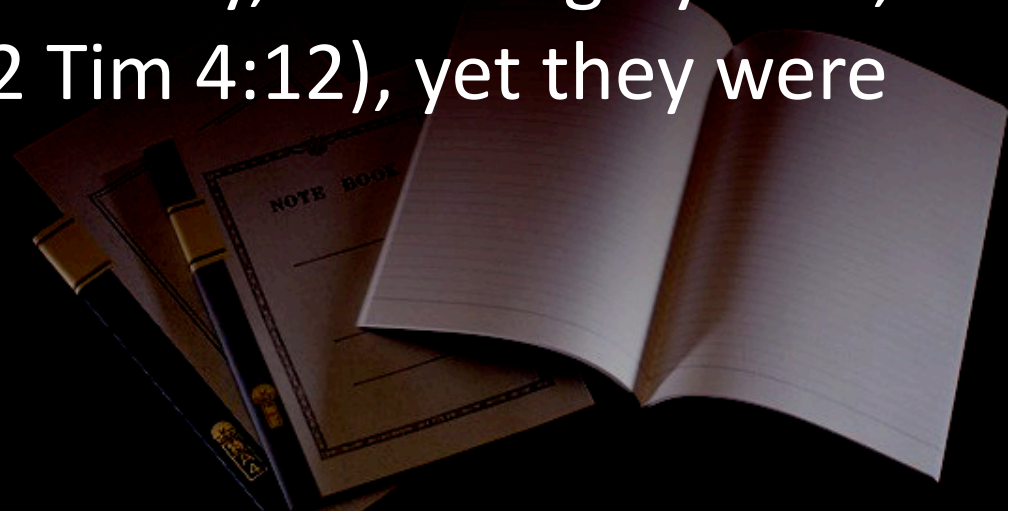
# What the Warning Is

- If we are loving these things, then we are not actively loving the Father.
- Holding fast to the Biblical worldview is not about maintaining tradition nor even simply about upholding the institution's mission.
- The case study of the church at Ephesus underscores that the stakes are higher than all that.



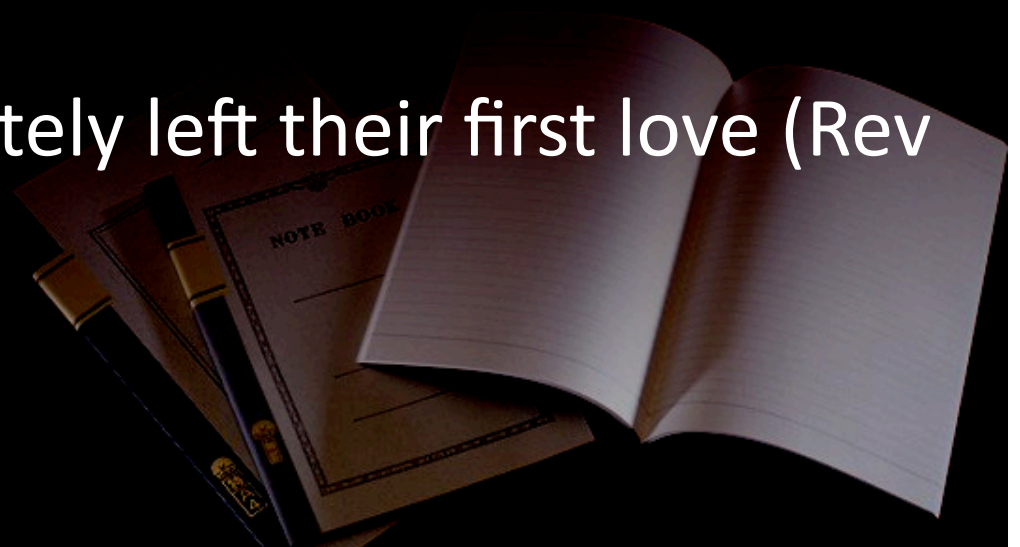
# 7 Facts

- 1. The church at Ephesus was surrounded by and under constant threat of idolatry (1 Cor 16:8).
- 2. Leaders were warned of present dangers (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor 16:8, 1 Tim 1:3).
- 3. The Ephesians had every advantage with excellent teaching and ministry, including by Paul, Timothy, and Tychicus (2 Tim 4:12), yet they were not too mature to fail.



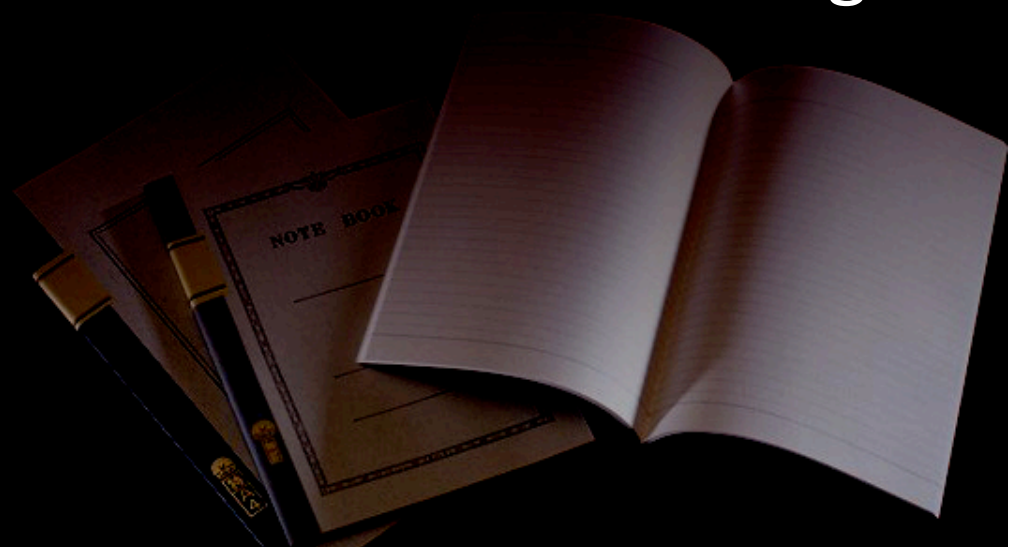
# 7 Facts

- 4. Leaders were given precise instructions for how to avoid the danger (Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 4:16).
- 5. Leaders were warned to guard themselves *first* (Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 4:16).
- 6. Leaders were warned to guard the flock (Acts 20:28).
- 7. The Ephesians ultimately left their first love (Rev 2:4).



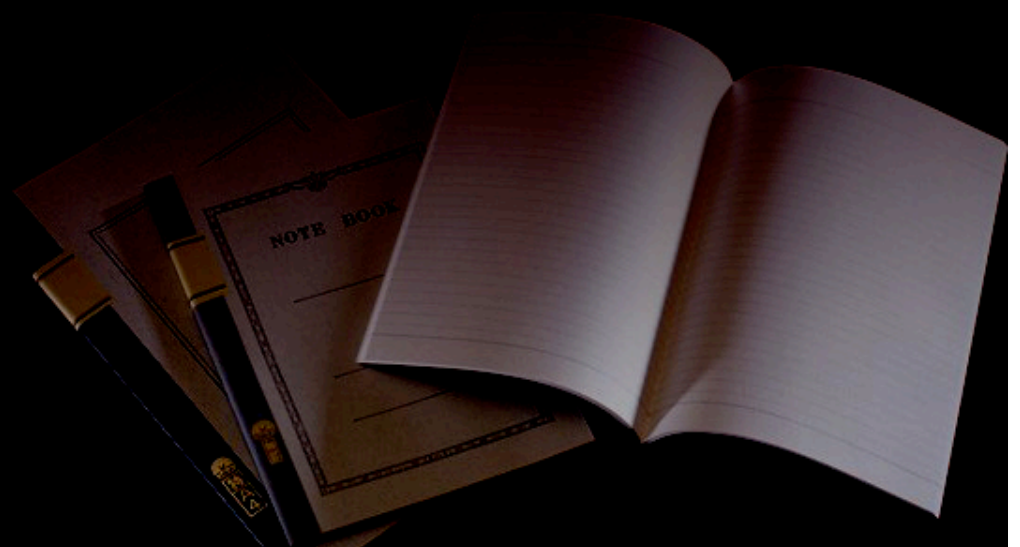
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 1. What pressures and threats would cause us to quit our first love? If our institutions were to fail, what went wrong? If we can offer an objective post-mortem analysis before the failure takes place, then we have a much greater opportunity to avoid the tragic failure. This is one of the obvious advantages of a SWOT analysis.



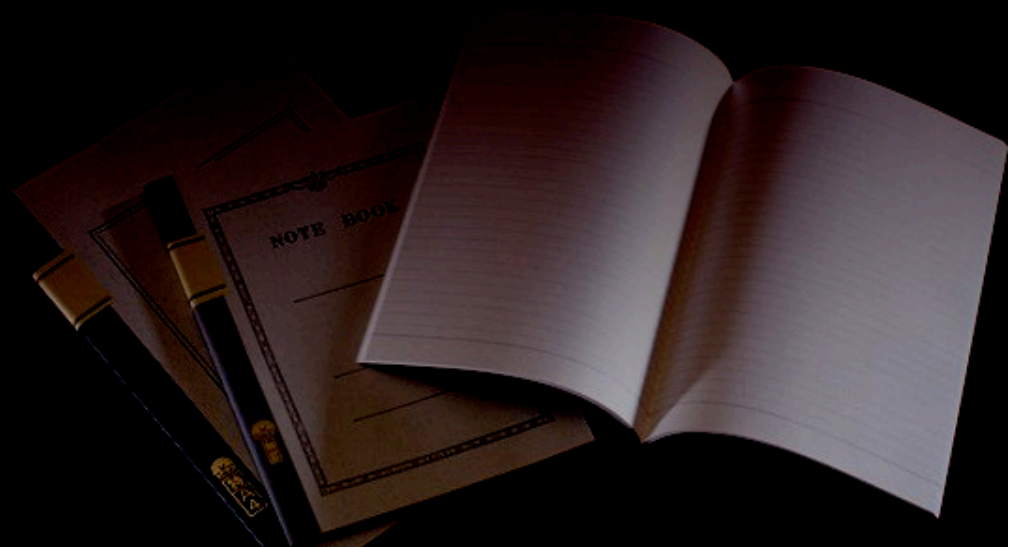
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 2. How are we warned of the present dangers? How does the Bible specifically warn us in light of the pressures and threats we face? Are there leaders or anyone in our institutions who are raising concerns? Are we listening?



# 7 Principles and Questions

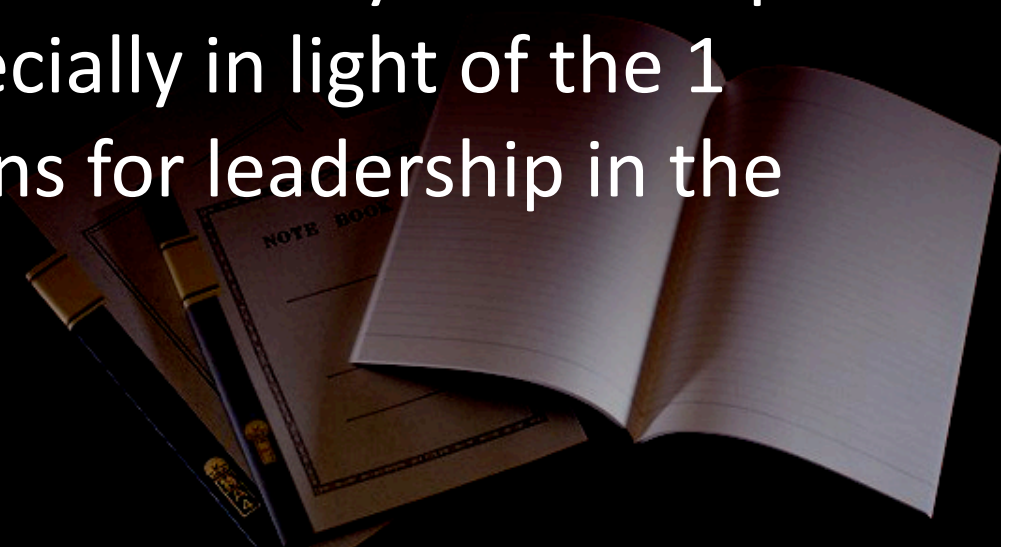
- 3. What advantages do our institutions have, and how have these advantages insulated the institutions from the looming specter of idolatry? Are these advantages making us complacent? If so, how?





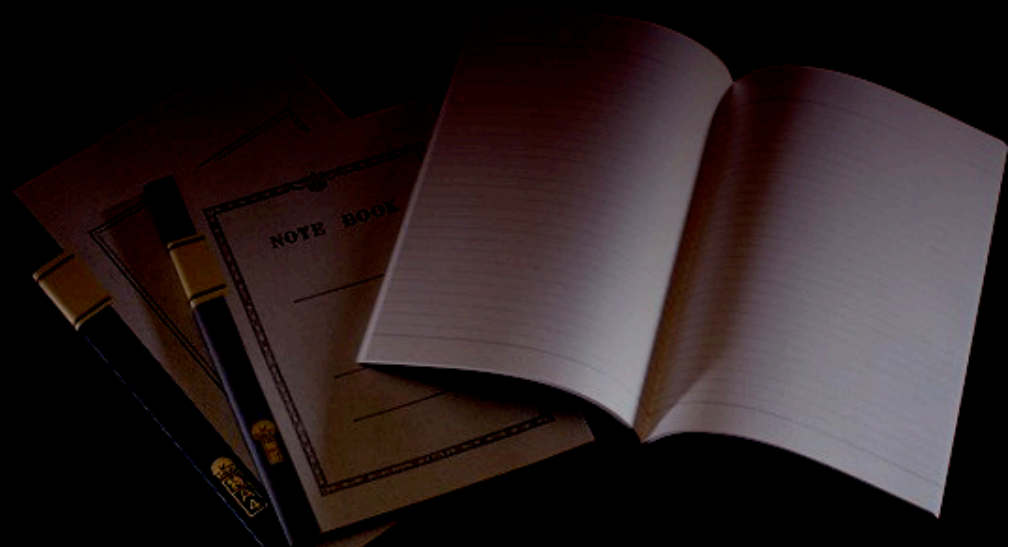
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 4. What specific instructions are we given for responding to the present dangers, and how can we apply those? For example, fiscal responsibility is a virtuous and necessary pursuit, but is there a danger of focusing too much on financial gain? If so, how does the warning of 1 Timothy 6:6-11 impact our fiscal policies – especially in light of the 1 Timothy 3:3 qualifications for leadership in the church?



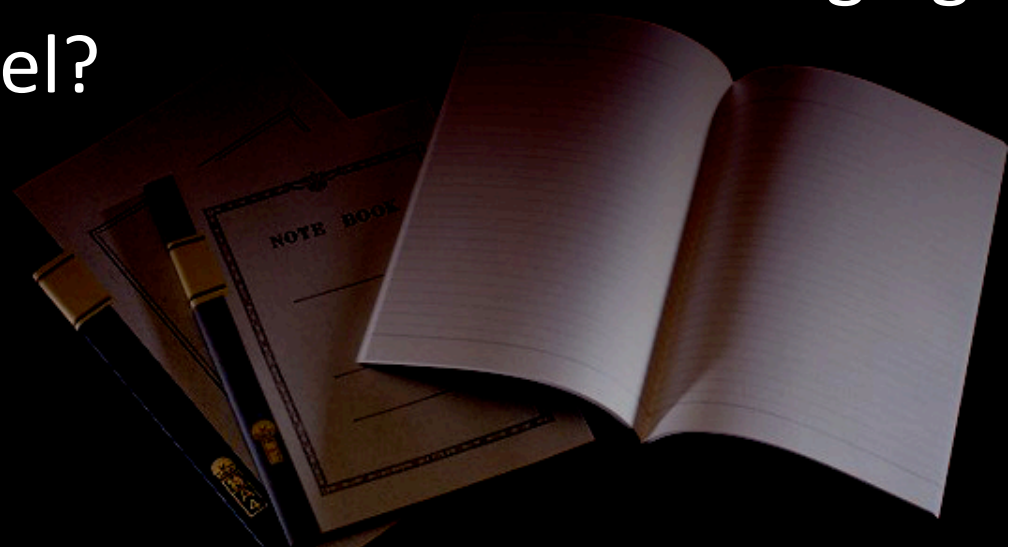
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 5. Are we as leaders guarding ourselves first? Are we modeling what our institutions are trying to produce? Are we focusing on our own personal spiritual integrity and growth?



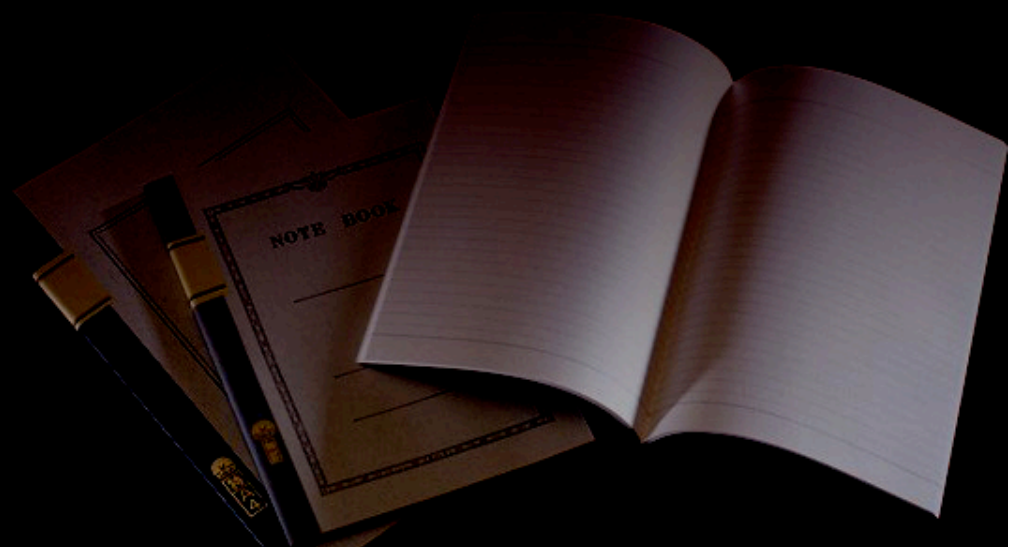
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 6. Are we as leaders guarding the flock? Are we protecting our constituency by making the right hires and retaining people who are committed to the same worldview core? Are we committed to academic models and student services that encourage quality spiritual life? Are we encouraging discipleship at every level?



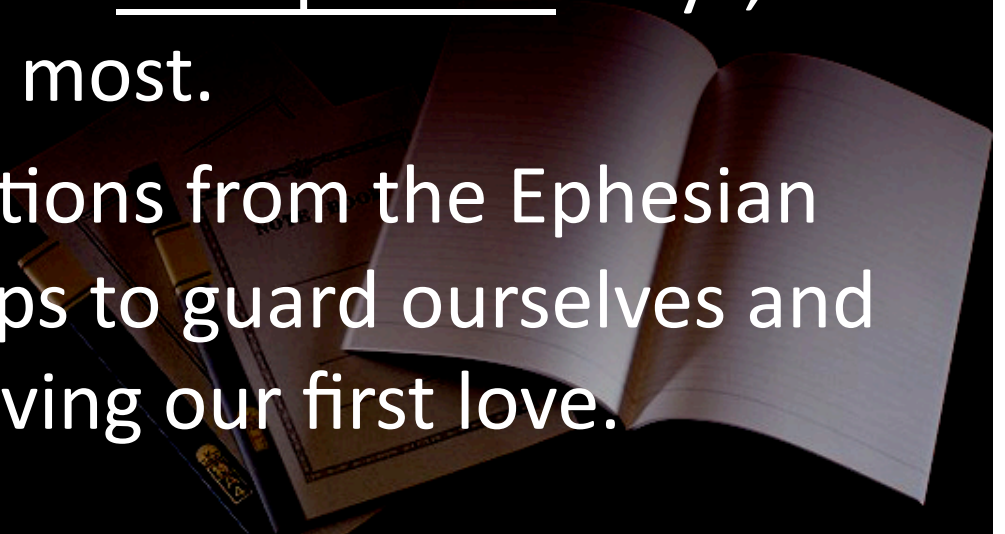
# 7 Principles and Questions

- 7. Are we moving closer to or further from our first love? In short, we need to have the right priorities, and not focus solely on the mere survival of our institutions. These institutions exist for a reason, and not simply to continue to exist. Self-defense is not our highest calling.



# So What???

- The Ephesian failure invites us to consider are we *willing* to fail in some areas (financial, popularity, respect in the academic community, etc.) in order to maintain faithfulness in what matters to God (Jn 12:25).
- If we are unwilling to fail in unimportant ways, we *will* fail where it matters most.
- Let's ask the seven questions from the Ephesian failure, and consider steps to guard ourselves and our institutions from leaving our first love.



# So What???

- What are the threats?
- How are we warned?
- What advantages help and hinder?
- What instructions for specific response?
- Are leaders guarding themselves?
- Are leaders guarding their constituency?
- Are we moving closer to or further from our first love?

