

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP (LESSON 64)

FIRST PRIORITY IN DISCIPLESHIP. The church at Ephesus was one of the seven churches John wrote to in the Book of Revelation (2:1-11). It was the most mission minded church in the New Testament. It surpassed Jerusalem and Antioch as a sending church. Ephesus became the new capital of Christianity. Halley cites its influence. "So many people became converts to Christ that almost overnight the church became one of the most powerful influences in the city and soon one of the most famous churches in the world. It became the mother church of Asia Minor. In many cities of the region, the Christian churches included large and influential elements of the population, and Ephesus was the queen of them all." Timothy lived in Ephesus for quite some time after Paul died. He was eventually martyred there. John spent his later years in Ephesus, and for much of that time he was the lead pastor of the church. The church at Ephesus was blessed with Paul, Timothy, and John as their pastors at different times. Paul wrote three letters to the church at Ephes (including the two epistles to Timothy). One might wonder if there has ever been a church more blessed with solid Bible teaching and effective discipleship training. But after everything that Paul, Timothy, and John taught them, Jesus said there was something lacking. "Nevertheless you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). Their faith and their works were admirable, but something was missing (2:2-3). Jesus was missing. They fell out of love with Jesus. Jesus was in the church but not first. Disciples loved Him, but not most. They did the right things for the wrong reasons. They talked about Jesus, but didn't talk much to Him. The church at Ephesus got used to Jesus. They got over their radical love for Him. The church at Ephesus didn't lose their first love; they left it (Revelation 2:4). Their relationship with Jesus became rote. It was a marriage where the bride became bored. Matters of faith became perfunctory rather than personal. Passion for Jesus was gone. Halley comments: "This was their failing. They no longer loved Him as they once did. They were becoming indifferent, half-hearted...This hurt Christ." Their relationship with Jesus cooled. They worked for Christ, but work with love became duty. When that happened the disciples at Ephesus ceased being radical.