

Checkin' Out My Walk

#10 - Pergamos - Doctrine of the Nicolaitans > God Hates It!

Rev. 2:12-17 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Millions of people go through the motions of worship each week but maintain a heart completely out of touch with God. We can meticulously avoid all overt acts of worldliness as we might define them, and still have a heart full of hypocrisy, criticism of others, jealousy, bitterness, envy, and preoccupation with the details of life rather than eternal treasures.

In Revelation 2:6 Jesus told the church of Ephesus, But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

No doubt the leaders of the Ephesian church protected their flock from these destructive heresies and kept their people from committing the same evil deeds.

Note: What the Ephesians opposed (the deeds), Pergamos is now embracing as a doctrine.

Hate comes from the Greek word *miseo*: *to hate, to abhor, or to find utterly repulsive.*

It describes a person who has a *deep-seated animosity*, who is *antagonistic* to something he finds to be *completely objectionable*. He not only loathes that object, but *rejects it* entirely. Jesus hated their "deeds" which is the Greek word *erga*, meaning *works*.

"Nicolaitans" is derived from the Greek word *nikolaos*, a compound of *nikos* and *laos*.

The word *nikos* is the Greek word means *to conquer* or *to subdue*.

The word *laos* is the Greek word for *the people*. It is where we get the word *laity*.

When these two words are compounded into one, they form the name *Nicolas*, which literally means *one who conquers and subdues the people*.

Revelation 2:14-15 " But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

THUS you also have them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

It seems Balaam's actions are given first as an example of the doctrine and actions of the Nicolaitans to make sure we understand the doctrine they taught.

When Balaam could not successfully curse the people of God, he seduced them into unbridled, sensual living by dangling the prostitutes of Moab before the men of Israel.

Numbers 25:1-3 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, Nicolaitans identifies the group who were teaching Balaamism. Note the words "thus ... in the same way" of verse 15. It seems clear they were subjugating the people to Satan's authority by teaching compromise with the world which always neutralizes the church and results in a weakened and powerless form of Christianity. The church loses its pilgrim perspective and adopts the viewpoint, values, priorities, and pursuits of the world.

The two most prevalent theories about the Nicolaitans and their deeds are:

1.) The Nicolaitans are the followers of a false teacher in the early church named Nicolas who taught believers it was permissible to live a life of sexual immorality and fleshly indulgence.

a. The Nicolaitans taught: in order to enjoy the acceptance of Roman society, the followers of Christ must compromise and adapt to their pagan communities.

b. The Nicolaitans campaigned accommodation to pagan society by eating food sacrificed to idols and by engaging in sexual immorality.

2.) Since the word Nicolaitan is made up of two Greek words Nikao and laos, which means, "to conquer the people," many commentators believe the Nicolaitans established a religious system in which a "religious elite" would rule over ("lord over") those of lesser rank.

This practice allowed a departure from teaching the Word of God to a methodology for enslaving the laity and corrupting them by religious rituals, traditions of men, and idolatry.

The Nicolaitans were conquering the people by bringing them under Satan's authority through influential teachers who were tolerating or even promoting evil or license to sin.

Their doctrine was a threat to the church.

In our study of the seven churches, we have gone from "murder" to "mixture."

Martyrdom tends to purify the church.

Mixture, a breakdown in Biblical separation into worldliness, putrefies the church.

Barclay writes, "It is also possible both explanations above could be equally true.

The blending of the truth of God with paganism and wicked pagan festivals and practices is an abhorrence to God. It is called religious "syncretism." "The Nicolaitans, like all deceivers who come from within the church, claimed 'not they were destroying Christianity, but that they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it.'"

Irenaeus and Hippolytus, two leaders in the Early Church who recorded many of the events that occurred in the earliest recorded days of Church history, said:

1. The Nicolaitans were the spiritual descendants of Nicolas of Antioch, who had been ordained as a deacon.

Acts 6:5 "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

2. Chief criteria for selection: They were men "...of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom..."(v. 3). Once they had been chosen, they were presented by the people to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them.

Acts 6:5 tells us Nicolas was "a proselyte of Antioch." The fact he was a proselyte tells us:

1. He was not born a Jew but had converted from paganism to Judaism.

2. Then he experienced a second conversion > turning from Judaism to Christianity.

From this information, we assume these traits about Nicolas of Antioch:

- He came from paganism and had deep pagan roots, very much unlike the other six deacons who came from a pure Hebrew line. Nicolas' pagan background meant he had previously been immersed in the activities of the occult.
- He was not afraid of taking an opposing position, evidenced by his ability to change religions twice. Converting to Judaism would have estranged him from his pagan family and friends. It seems to indicate he was not impressed or concerned about others' opinions.
- He was a free thinker and very open to embracing new ideas and concepts. Judaism was very different from the pagan and occult world in which he had been raised. For him to shift from paganism to Judaism reveals he was liberal in his thinking, for most pagans were offended by Judaism. He was obviously not afraid to entertain or embrace new ways of thinking.
- When he converted to Christ, it was *at least* the second time he had converted from one religion to another. His ability to easily change religious "hats" implies he was not afraid to switch direction in midstream and go a totally different direction.
- Nicolas' deep roots in paganism may have produced in him a tolerance for occultism and paganism. Growing up in this perverted spiritual environment may have caused him to view these belief systems as not so damaging or dangerous. This wrong perception would have resulted in a very liberal viewpoint that encouraged people to stay connected to the world and conduct yourself any way you want.

According to the writings of the Early Church leaders,

1. Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential.

You needn't be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian.

2. It seems apparent Nicolas of Antioch was immersed in occultism, Judaism, and Christianity. He had a stomach for all of it.

3. He had no problem intermingling these belief systems in various concoctions and

saw no reason why believers couldn't continue to fellowship with those still immersed in the black magic of the Roman empire and its countless mystery cults.

4. "Tertullian reports the lust and luxury of the Nicolaitans; "impudent in uncleanness." He adds there was another sort of Nicolaitans, a satanic sect, called the Gaian heresy [worship of Mother Earth, which has reared its ugly head today] . . .

5. Clement of Alexandria referred to followers of Nicolaus as, 'lascivious goats.'

6. Irenaeus defined them as men who "lead lives of unrestrained indulgence.

7. Ignatius: "They affirm unlawful unions are a good thing and place the highest happiness in pleasure."

8. Hippolytus, adds that Nicolas "departed from sound doctrine, and taught the Gnostic belief of the irrelevance of physical things. (*Refutation of All Heresies*, 7.24)

9. Both Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.26.3; 3.10.6) and Clement of Alexandria (*Miscellanies*, 3.4.25f) consider Nicolas of Antioch to be the founder of the Gnostic sect known as the Nicolaitans. The last mention of Nicolas in the post-biblical, historical record is in the context of syncretism.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans appears to have been a form of antinomianism. (two Greek words, *anti*, meaning "against"; and *nomos*, meaning "law.") It is a belief based upon a recognition of the mercy of God as the ground of salvation, but it makes the fatal mistake that man can freely partake in sin because the Law of God is no longer binding.

It misapplies the meaning of God's gracious favor. It supposed that a mere intellectual "belief" in this truth had a saving power. James refuted this error in:

James 2:19-20 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

True faith is an active principle which works by love and it goes beyond a profession of belief. True faith produces action, as well as a desire for holiness and obedience.

(1 John 3:18, Titus 2:11-15, 1 Peter 1:15-16, Revelation 14:12)

Eph. 2:8-10 Salvation is a free gift, based upon God's grace alone. However, "we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Halley's Bible Handbook regarding Nicolaitans, "Sexual vice was actually a part of heathen worship, and recognized as a proper thing in heathen festivals. Priestesses of Diana and kindred deities were public prostitutes. The thing had been a troublesome question for Gentile churches from the start. . . Meantime great multitudes of heathen had become Christians, and had carried some of their old ideas into their new religion. . . Naturally there were all sorts of attempts to *harmonize* these heathen practices with the Christian religion. Many professing Christian teachers, claiming inspiration from God (spirit of divination), were advocating the right to free participation (perverted grace) in heathen immoralities. In Ephesus, the Christian pastors, as a body, excluded such teachers.

But in Pergamum and Thyatira, they tolerated within their ranks those who did." (p.694).

The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary, The Nicolaitans may be taken to be a heretical sect, who retained pagan practices like idolatry [such as image worship, observing pagan holidays like Christmas, Easter, Halloween, etc.] and immorality contrary to the thought and the conduct required in Christian churches" (p.548).

Numerous Bible scholars hold the following belief about the Nicolaitans:

1. They were comparable to those following Balaamism which advocated a mingled life style.
2. This doctrine advocated an extreme indulgence in sin, uncleanness, immorality and orgies based upon a perverted understanding of God's grace. It was an abuse of freedom.
3. Freedom of the Flesh - The Deeds of the flesh have no effect upon the health of the soul. Therefore, the deeds of the flesh have no relation to salvation.
4. Their doctrine - *Grace Gives Us A License To Sin* - led to a weak version of Christianity without power and without conviction - a defeated, worldly type of Christianity.
5. This kind of teaching would result in nothing but total defeat for its followers. When believers allow sin and compromise in their lives, it drains away the power of the Spirit resident in a believer's life.
6. The evil fruit of Nicolas' "doctrine" encouraged worldly participation, leading people to indulge in sin and a lowered godly standard. In this way he literally *conquered the people*.

Note: Many people think they're free in Christ to behave any way they want.

Our Salvation in Christ and our faith is not truly demonstrated to others or made stronger by trying to prove we can wallow in the world (sin) and still come away appearing to be clean! There have always been the Nicolaitans who in the name of perverted grace and ascended knowledge think they can live above God's standard.

There are always those of the way of Balaam who want to seduce God's people into idolatry, immorality and paganness and tell them > it's okay.

Compromise in the context of Christian beliefs is more than just making a decision to avoid conflict; it is a decision to choose immediate pleasure over the eternal pleasures offered by our Lord Jesus Christ. The root of compromise is in our lack of belief in who Christ proclaimed Himself to be. We compromise when we have no idea the eternal treasure we forfeit in an effort to be liked and approved.

Warren Wiersbe: Any theology that makes sin easy and divine punishment unimportant is NOT Biblical theology. God's judgment begins with His own people. (II Pet. 4:17)

Occultism was a major force that warred against the Early Church.

A great flaw of Western Christianity is its profound ignorance and trivialization of the occult with its related activities. The Scriptures not only confirm their reality and danger, but they also consistently condemn any association with them (Lev. 19:31, 20:6; II Chron.33:6; Galatians 5:19-20; Rev. 21:8).

It is significant that the "deeds" and "doctrines" of the Nicolaitans are *only* mentioned in connection with the churches in these two occultic and pagan cities.

Ephesus gives us an example of how occult practices were removed from the early church. Acts 19:11-20 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. ¹⁸ And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. ¹⁹ Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver.

²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

NO SYNCRETICISM (a blending of two or more belief systems) was allowed, as Christ alone was and is sufficient.

In Ephesus, Semiramis was worshiped as the great mother Diana, (primary pagan religion) the many-breasted goddess. [so she could nurse all the pagan gods who represent Tammuz]

She wore a tower-shaped crown symbolizing the Babylonian tower of Babel.

This form of mother-child worship was followed throughout all Asia and the world.

The Riot at Ephesus - Acts 19:23-34 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that *they are not gods which are made with hands*. ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

Note: Because of the size and dedication of the Ephesian church it became a threat to the idol-making industry in Ephesus. Led by Demetrius, a silversmith, his trade guild violently opposed Paul and the Ephesian church.

An angry mob formed and two of Paul's companions were seized.

²⁸ Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ So the whole city was filled with confusion, (population of about 250,000) and rushed into the theater(seats 25,000) with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. ³⁰ And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. ³¹ Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. ³² Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. ³⁴ But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Consider: This was a major uprising - nearly a full-scale riot - against Christ and the Gospel. Someone finally calmed the mob down by warning them they were in danger of punishment by the Roman authorities for public disturbance. Paul's friends would not allow him into the theater for fear he would be killed. This was certainly no minor event.

In the city of Pergamos, there were numerous dark and sinister forms of occultism, causing Pergamos to be one of the most wicked cities in the history of the ancient world.

For Christians in Pergamos, the constant temptation:

Compromise their Christian beliefs for social and political acceptance.

Christians refusing to adapt to pagan society were exposed to harsh ridicule and rejection.

This rejection from society set the table for the teachings of the Nicolaitans, a teaching which was the sort of leaven which could destroy the Christian community.

What was the main crime of this church? Spiritual fornication - or spiritual adultery!

Combining pagan practices and teachings with the Word of God, replacing the teachings of God's Word with corrupt, pagan deceptions and lies, straight from the bowels of Satan the devil!

Jesus warned: The Nicolaitans were influencing the church to indulge in practices which were contrary to the flourishing of their Christian faith.

The core of Christian people in Pergamos who were holding fast to the name of the Lord, to His person, not wavering on who He was, not denying the faith, firm in the gospel and believing it, were soft in dealing with error...serious error.

Nicolaitan Doctrine promoted dividing God's people into two classes: clergy and laity.

Prophetically speaking this happened during these centuries, and eventually evolved to the point where these men who were separating themselves as bishops and priests were pronouncing absolution over the people of God, forgiveness of sins, taking confessions, sending people to heaven, damning people to hell! They gained a triumphal victory or conquest over the laity. Members were compelled and forced to submit to the arbitrary dominion of men who have become that thing which God hates: Christ says: 'I hate it!'

I Pet. 5:1-3 "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **NOR AS BEING LORDS OVER THOSE ENTRUSTED TO YOU, but being examples to the flock**"

The problems with false teachings, false doctrines, and the spirit of Nicolaitan ministers and teachers, were foretold to become very serious and extreme in the "end of days."

I Tim. 4:1-2 "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

II Tim. 3:1-8 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

⁶ For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith;

Paul's warning to Ephesus: Acts 20:29-30 "For I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

Paul's warning to Galatia: Gal. 1:6-7 "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to PERVERT the gospel of Christ"

This was beginning to occur during the very FIRST generation and Age of the church!

The apostasy and heresy has developed and grown massively since that era, with thousands of Octopus-like tentacles reaching throughout the world.

The Nicolaitan condition is like a spiritual cancer which spreads and poisons cells, creates tumors and metastasizes until it spreads its lethal cargo throughout the whole body.

If it is not purged, it leads ultimately to death.

Today, the doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made God's law of no effect: that by "believing" we are released from the necessity of being doers of the Word. This is a doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Christ so condemned in Revelation.

James 1:22 "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

II Tim. 4:2-4 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Paul declared in Eph. 4:14 "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

The spirit of Nicolaus/Nimrod and religious deception is alive and well, and thriving in this end-time generation. The antinomian spirit, the attitude of lawlessness, allows sin to infest the church. When church members teach and practice > we are not obliged to keep the laws of God, SIN will inevitable break out vigorously. Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude and John warn against the encroachment of antinomianism or lawlessness.

The only way to recognize false teaching is to be intimately familiar with truth through the diligent study of the Word of God

Admonition: Rev. 2:16 "Repent or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

Don't tolerate or allow evil in any form. I Cor. 5:6 Paul says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened'. It festers and grows. There's no room for compromise.

You can never suppress error by compromising with it.

The sword of judgment is poised over their heads, and His patience is not limitless.

Jude 1:3-4 I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand." He bowed all the way to the ground. The Lord pulled a sword on Balaam; the Lord will come with a sword against a compromising church.

We need to use the two-edged sword to rightly divide doctrine, to sharpen our lives, and ultimately to judge ourselves by the Word of God.

The Lord says to Pergamos: "Sort it out, or I'll come and sort it out myself".

The moon was eclipsed one night, and said to the sun,

'Why do you not shine on me the way you used to?'

The sun said, 'I'm shining on you the way I always do, but the world has come between us'.