

## Who Were the Nicolaitans, And What Was Their Doctrine and Deeds?

Revelation 2:6, where Jesus told the church of Ephesus, "But this thou hast [in your favor], that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Jesus was proud of the church of Ephesus for their "hatred" of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also "hated." The word "hate" is a strong word, so let's see exactly what it means. It comes from the Greek word *miseo*, which means *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. This is not just a case of dislike; it is a case of *actual hatred*.

The thing Jesus hated about them was their "deeds." The word "deeds" is the Greek word *erga*, which means *works*. However, this word is so all-encompassing that it pictures all the deeds and behavior of the Nicolaitans — including their actions, beliefs, conduct, and *everything else* connected to them. The name "Nicolaitans" is derived from the Greek word *nikolaos*, a compound of the words *nikos* and *laos*. The word *nikos* is the Greek word that means *to conquer* or *to subdue*. The word *laos* is the Greek word for *the people*. It is also 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*. It seems to suggest that the Nicolaitans were somehow conquering and subduing the people.

Ireneus 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 the Nicolaitans were the spiritual descendants of Nicolas of Antioch, who had been ordained as a deacon in Acts 6:5. That verse says, "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."

### Nicolas

Acts 6:5 tells us that this Nicolas was "a proselyte of Antioch." The fact that he was a proselyte tells us that he was not born a Jew but had converted from paganism to Judaism. Then he experienced a second conversion, this time turning from Judaism to Christianity. From this information, we know these facts 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 that 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 would seem to indicate that he was not impressed or concerned about the opinions of other people.
- 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 that he was very 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. We don't know if, or how many times, he shifted from one form of paganism to another before he became a Jewish proselyte. His ability to easily change religious "hats" implies that he was not afraid to switch direction in midstream and go a totally different direction.

According to the writings of the Early Church leaders, **Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying** that total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential. From Early Church records, it seems apparent that this Nicolas of Antioch was so immersed in occultism, Judaism, and Christianity that he had a stomach for all of it. 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.

Occultism was a major force that warred against the Early Church. In Ephesus, the primary pagan religion was the worship of Diana (Artemis). There were many other forms of idolatry in Ephesus, but this was the primary object of occult worship in that city. 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. In both of these cities, believers were lambasted and persecuted fiercely by adherents of pagan religions, forced to contend with paganism on a level far beyond all other cities.

It was very hard for believers to live separately from all the activities of paganism because paganism and its religions were the center of life in these cities. Slipping in and out of paganism would have

been very easy for young or weak believers to do since most of their families and friends were still pagans. A converted Gentile would have found it very difficult to stay away from all pagan influence.

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. It seems that the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was that it was all right to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn't be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian.

This, in fact, was the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans that Jesus "hated." It led to a weak version of Christianity that was without power and without conviction — a defeated, worldly type of Christianity.

God wants to make sure we understand the doctrine the Nicolaitans taught, so Balaam's actions are given as an example of their doctrine and actions. Revelation 2:14,15 says, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

When Balaam could not successfully cure the people of God, he used another method to destroy them. He seduced them into unbridled, sensual living by dangling the prostitutes of Moab before the men of Israel. Numbers 25:1-3 tells us, "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they [the daughters of Moab] called the people [the men of Israel] unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people [the men of Israel] did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor...."

Just as the men of Israel compromised themselves with the world and false religions, now the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was encouraging *compromise*. As you are well aware, compromise with the world always results in a weakened and powerless form of Christianity. *This was the reason Jesus "hated" the "doctrine" and the "deeds" of the Nicolaitans.*