

JESUS WANTS A WORD 03: The Deeds of the Nicolaitanes STUDY GUIDE

We have spent a couple of weeks looking at Jesus' message to the pastor of the church of Ephesus. We found that the church was full of good works, then we found that the church had fallen from its first love. This week, we will look at the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

Read Revelation 2.6. Did you realize that Jesus hates certain people's deeds? He doesn't hate people – but He does hate their actions, if those actions hurt people or hurt the person who does them. Now if Jesus hates the actions of the Nicolaitans, then we really need to find out who they are. That word "hate" is very strong in the Greek, it means to hate someone so much you want to attack it every time you see it.

Now word "Nicolaitan" is made up of two different Greek words: nikos and laos. Nikos is the Greek word for victory – but specifically a military victory. It means to conquer and subdue, it means to take over. It can be used in a positive way, but if you are taking over other people, hurting them, suppressing them and subduing them, then you are bullying them and pushing them down.

The word "laos" means the people, it is where we get our word "laity" from. The Nicolaitans are those ministers who subdue the people – the ministers who are subduing, putting down and bullying the people, and sadly there are definitely Nicolaitans in pulpits today!

Now Irenaeus, one of the earliest church leaders after the book of Acts finished, he tells us that the Nicolaitans followed the teachings of Nicholas of Antioch who was one of the first seven deacons ever appointed.

Read Acts 6.5. This verse tells us that Nicolas was a proselyte. This means he was a pagan who converted to Judaism, and then he converted to Christianity. So he had two conversions in his life – which leads us to certain conclusions:

- 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.

Now according to the early church leaders, what Nicolas taught people was a doctrine of compromise. He taught people that you can be a Christian and a pagan and a Jew. He taught paganism, Judaism, and Christianity and put them all together in one thing – and he never saw there was a problem with this bizarre concoction – believers could do the black magic from the Roman Empire, you could worship Diana and Jesus, you could worship any idols and Jesus.

Now the early church was at war with the occult – in Ephesus they worshipped Diana, and the idolaters nearly ran Paul out of town. Pergamos was a very evil city, one of the most wicked of all of history.

Now if you live in one of those cities, you could not escape paganism, if you were a new Christian, your family and friends were probably still pagans. A converted pagan would be surrounded by the influences of paganism.

Now Ephesus tells us Jesus hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, Pergamos tells us about how Jesus feels about their doctrines. Read Revelation 2.14-15.

So Nicolaitans are thriving in the two worst pagan cities of the world. Thankfully the Ephesian church hates their deeds and Jesus is happy, but Pergamos is allowing them in the church and Jesus hates that!

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans boils down to this – you can have a foot in both camps, it's ok to compromise. And Jesus hates that teaching, because it leads to a weak and powerful defeated Christianity. Nicolas was raised pagan, and maybe his parents were still pagans – or other family members – but for whatever reason he was tolerant of the occult and paganism. Maybe growing up in that environment may have caused him to think paganism is not too bad.

You see the truth is that if you stay with the old life, you will always be defeated. When you sin, when you get involved in the occult, in religion, in compromise, you will lose the power

of the cross in your life, you lose access to the power – that power is still inside you but it is obscured and you cannot see it.

The evil fruit and evil deeds from this evil doctrine of compromise encouraged people to sin and lowered the standards for a godly life – this is how Nicolas conquered the people, by teaching compromise. If you teach it is okay to live a compromised life, then no one would ever walk in their dreams. A preacher could defeat and conquer his entire church by teaching that kind of nonsense!

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.

Read Numbers 25:1-3. Just as the men of Israel compromised themselves with the world and false religions, now the “doctrine” of the Nicolaitans was encouraging compromise in the church. 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.

We often see hatred as a very negative thing! And a lot of the time it is. Read 1 John 2.9. If you hate your brother, you are in darkness. Read Proverbs 15.17. It tells us rather eat a dish that’s just herbs and spices with love, than a great feast with hatred. So you must not hate your brother, you must not hate your friends – in fact you cannot even hate your enemy! Love people! But we must at the same time hate evil. Read Psalm 97.10. We are told to hate evil. Read Hebrews 1.9. It tells us Jesus hates wickedness. So to be Christ-like we should hate wickedness. There are things you should hate as a Christian, and that includes people’s actions.

You see every pastor knows HE CANNOT CURSE YOU – you are blessed. You can never take a Christian down, they are sons of the Most High God. But, with a bit of skilful preaching – I can make you curse yourself. I can get you to beat yourself up.

So there are two elements – the bully conquering the people through his actions and the bad teaching that causes people to live in shame and defeat. The doctrines that mix up paganism and Judaism and the world, and then teach you that you live how you like with no consequences. That’s just not true – you will always reap what you sow.

But the truth is that the only person whose words can snare you is you! If I can get you to declare that you are a worm, then I can lead you into defeat. Balaam learned this – he could

not defeat the people directly head on, but through bad teaching and seduction he got them to beat themselves up and conquer themselves!

This is what Balaam taught. He told the people – it is all grace. Sex before marriage, that's fine – you should do that. And there actually are churches teaching this and condoning this and calling it grace. That is not grace, it is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and you should hate that kind of teaching!

Now I believe in grace, I believe in the unconditional love of God, I believe that God loves you no matter what. I will never change that point of view. But the truth is some Israelites choose life, and live – others choose death and die. You have to make choices in life – you have to choose!

Now if you have made bad choices, the good news is that you can change your choice. There is power to be free! If you are involved in sex outside of marriage, or idolatry today, God loves you but He hates your deeds. Why? Because those deeds cause you to walk in defeat in life.

Some ministers today are saying Islam is the same as Christianity, and it is not. They are totally different. Catholicism is not the same as Christianity. The truth is you must be born again. If you do not realize this, you will be defeated in life. If you do not call God Father through the blood of Jesus, we are not family!

If you are worshipping statues – even statues of Mary, you are not my family. You are an idolater. I love you, but LIKE JESUS I have to hate your deeds. We must stop blending paganism into Christianity. We need to stop praying “smash their teeth in their mouths” – that is paganism. We need to stop staying up all night praying 2 Chron. 7.14 because that is Judaism. We need to stop selling and buying trinkets – there is no magic soap or oil or water from the holy land that will make you smarter and wiser and holier! That sort of thing obscures the cross, and it is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans – it is the teacher taking victory over the people and bringing them into subjection, forcing your church members and it is wrong. Jesus hates that action, that deed!

Now, Jesus told the church in Pergamos that the two areas of seduction were fornication and idolatry – specifically food eaten to idols, referencing what Balaam did to the people of Israel.

Now, in the New Testament – you can eat whatever you want, it's a different covenant. You eat and drink to the glory of God, and we are told: do not call unclean what God has made clean. You can eat halal, eat kosher, eat food that has been offered to satan – if it's in my body, it is clean. Read Mark 7.14 and 15.

So, to update Balaam's behaviour to the New Covenant, it's not eating food sacrificed to idols that is the problem – it is speaking idolatry with your mouth. Now some people will think "I don't have a statue to Molech in my living room, this cannot be my problem!" but the most common warning the New Covenant against a sin is actually against Scripture.

Read 1 John 5.21

So still idolatry is an issue we must guard ourselves from today. It means to turn our back on God, and going somewhere else for help, for strength, for prosperity, for healing. Read Colossians 3.5. Greed is a form of idolatry, whether greed for food or greed for possessions. If the acquisition of money is above hearing God's voice in your life, then that is idolatry. God is not against you making money, but He is against money being your lord and god, and what motivates and leads you. Not because God hates your prosperity, actually He delights in it – but because God knows that there is no material thing that can actually make you happy. Only His love and goodness can. If you go to the idol, it can't help you – it cannot fill the void, but Jesus can.

We idolize people, celebrities, science, we idolize all sorts of things. We need to turn to the Lord for our strength, hope and wisdom.

The other issue that caused the people to bring themselves to defeat was fornication, which is defined as any sex outside of marriage. This is one of the number one ways I see people destroy themselves. Read 1 Cor. 6.18-20. Fornication causes people to quit on church, quit believing on God, get offended easily, and messes up people's entire lives unless they address it.

The Bible says to flee from it. This word means to run as fast as you can, and go into hiding. It's the word used for Joseph taking Jesus into Egypt (Matt. 2.13), for Moses running from Pharaoh trying to kill him (Acts 7.29)

Read 1 Cor. 10.14. So, we need to flee from sexual immorality, and flee from idolatry. We need to stay away from these things they will destroy our lives. Anyone who teaches otherwise is teaching you how to be defeated, it is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and Jesus hates that kind of teaching.

We need to deal with this and stand up and stop compromising!

QUESTIONS

1. Did you realize Jesus hates some people's deeds? How does hearing that make you feel or respond?

2. What does the word Nicolaitan mean?
3. What three religions did Nicolas combine to make his doctrine?
4. What is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, and why does Jesus hate that teaching?
5. What did Balaam do when he could not curse the people of God? How did he bring them into defeat?
6. Name three things we should not ever hate, and two things we should hate.
7. How can someone make you curse yourself and bring yourself into defeat?
8. What would you say to someone who says that because God's love is unconditional, they can act how they want and there are no consequences?
9. Why do you think some ministers are teaching that all religions are the same?
10. What examples of modern Nicolaitan practices and doctrines have you encountered, if any?
11. What sort of idols do we have in the modern church and age?
12. What should be our response to sexual immorality and idolatry?
13. What about this message encouraged, inspired or challenged you?