

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES

**George Burnside**

Revelation 2:6, "Thou hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."

God loves, but He also hates. He hates sin because it is so deadly. "The wages of sin is death." Every true Christian must hate sin and deception.

Who were the Nicolaitanes? What was their doctrine that Christ twice stated He hated? Revelation 2:6, 15.

The Nicolaitanes were a group of professed Christians who believed in a community of wives. When "Thou shall not commit adultery" was quoted, their favorite reply was "We are not under law, but under grace." They claimed they were free from the law and that the Ten Commandments are not binding on Christians. "The Nicolaitanes were persons who excused certain forms of impurity, and made the grace God a cloak for lasciviousness. I believe the heresy was known in latter days as Antinomianism, which declares that grace is sufficient, and that life is of little moment." G. Campbell Morgan "The Letters of Our Lord." p. 23.

"The Nicolaitanes were the Antinomians of the Asiatic Church. The life and conduct were little thought of and the faith professed was everything." "The existence of a sect called Nicolaitanes in the second century is attested by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexander." The Commentary for Schools, Edited by C. J. Ellicott, DD.

"Their doctrines and lives were equally corrupt. They allowed the most abominable lewdness and adulteries, as well as sacrificing to idols; all of which they placed among things indifferent and pleaded for as branches of Christian liberty." John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament on Revelation 2:6

Nicolaitanes taught and practiced "Ritualism without spirituality, knowledge without practice. Justification by faith without holiness." Dr. Angus, Bible Handbook."

This dangerous heresy was being taught in the church of Ephesus, the church of the first century.

Jude 1:4, warns of ungodly men who were "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." Lasciviousness is "immorality" or "profligacy." The Nicolaitanes used the grace of God as an excuse for the violation of God's law – the moral law. They denied "the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude 1:4. The Nicolaitanes were willing to acknowledge Jesus as their Savior but not as their "Lord" and Master.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked "Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" It was this teaching of the Nicolaitanes in the first century that was still corrupting the church of Pergamos a few centuries later, (Revelation 2:15) that led to the changing of God's "Royal Law," the Ten Commandments. The second commandment that forbids the worship of images was dropped from the ten. When the binding

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nature of that commandment was emphasized, it was lightly brushed aside with “We are not under law, but under grace,” “Christians are free from the law,” “We enjoy Christian liberty.” The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was all too evident.

Alexander Bower, the historian, states that this argument was used at the Council of Nicaea, (AD 787) as follows: “They closed the session with an appeal of Anathema against all in general who did not salute, honor, worship, and adore the holy and venerable images, and against the Emperor Leo in particular, his son Copronymus, and the impious assembly of Judaizing bishops convened by the latter for the destruction of images, and the exaltation of the kingdom of Satan. The fifth session, held on the 4th of Oct., was opened by Tarasius with a declamation, or rather invective, wherein the Iconoclasts were compared to the Jews, Samaritans, Pagans, Mohammedans, Manicheans, etc. When he had done, they were declared by the whole assembly worse than Jews, Samaritans, or Mohammedans, because they destroyed images ignorantly, being strangers to Christianity.” “When the second commandment was alleged and other passages out of the Scriptures forbidding the worship of images, they were angry that words spoken so long ago to the Jews should be applied to Christians, as if the precepts of the Ten Commandments were not binding with respect to the Christians, and our Savior had come to destroy the law, and not to fulfil it!”

Again, in a note on this Mr. Bower says: “But by God himself, replied the emperor, we are expressly forbidden to make any graven images, to bow down to them-, or to worship them. The Jews were forbidden, answered Theodore; but the law given to them is not binding with respect to us Christians, else why should we not be circumcised as well as the Jews?” Facts For The Times, G. I. Butler, page 25 extract from History of the Popes, Volume 2, pages 157, 158, 159.

Thus the second commandment was dropped from God’s Eternal Ten Commandments. This led to further changes in this Royal Law and Daniel 7:25 was fulfilled. God says He hates this antinomianism and commended His people of the first century for hating it too. Revelation 2:6.

There is no need to be confused over the wonderful truth of Grace. Every one who is saved, is saved by Grace. Ephesians 2:8,9. We are saved by grace through faith. It is the gift of God. It is not of works Grace is not limited to the New Testament, but it covers all time and spans all history.

The Grace of God in the Old Testament.

Titus 2: 11,       The grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men.”

Exodus 34:6,     To Moses, our Lord was “merciful and gracious.”

Exodus 25:21,    Upon the Ark was the Mercy seat and inside the Ark was placed “the testimony”  
The Ten Commandments.

Genesis 6:8,     Before the Flood, Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”

Genesis 19:19,   Lot, when saved from Sodom declared he had “found grace.”

Jonah 4:2,       Jonah said, “I knew that Thou art a gracious God.”

Psalms 77:9,     The Psalmist knew of God’s grace.

Exodus 33:12    “Grace”

Exodus 33:13    “Grace,”

Exodus 33:16    “Grace,”

Exodus 33:17    “Grace,”

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- Exodus 33:19      “Gracious.”
- Exodus 34: 6      “Gracious.”
- Zechariah 4:7     It shouts “Grace! Grace!” Yet some foolishly say there is no grace in the .Old Testament. In the Old Testament people were not saved by works, but solely by Grace.
- Acts 4:12          Salvation is only through one Name Jesus.
- Romans 4:6         David was saved without works.
- Revelation 1:5     In the Glory land, all will praise Jesus for salvation through His blood.  
Revelation 5:13, Revelation 7:14.

In the Old Testament all good men walked in faith and obedience.

- Hebrews 11:4        Abel’s faith and obedience,  
Hebrews 11:5        Enoch’s faith and obedience,  
Hebrews 11:7        Noah’s faith and obedience,  
Hebrews 11:8,9      Abraham’s faith” and “obeyed,”  
Hebrews 11:23-29,    “These all obtained a good report through faith.”

In the New Testament Faith and Commandments go together.

- Revelation 14:12    Faith of Jesus and the commandments of God.
- Romans 3:31         Faith establishes the law

Grace today proves the Commandments are still binding. No one needs grace or mercy if they have not broken the law. “Where there is no law there is no transgression.”

- Romans 6:14,15,     Sin is forbidden under grace.  
1 John 3:4,           Sin is the breaking of God’s law.

The saved man loves God’s Ten Commandments.

- Romans 8:7,           It is only the carnal mind that hates God’s commandments.

### EXTRA NOTES ON THE NICOLAITANES

“The doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made the law of God of no effect; that by “believing” we are released from the necessity of being doers of the Word. But this is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which Christ so unsparingly condemned.” Ellen G. White in “Signs of the Times,” February 25, 1897.

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love . . . . Is it the sin of the Nicolaitanes, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness?” Ellen G. White, in the “Review and Herald,” June 7, 1887.

Nicolaitanes, believed to be followers of Nicholas, one of the seven deacons in Acts 6:3,5, who abused the grace of God. He became a traitor to the Gospel. As Judas, one of the twelve became a traitor, so Nicholas one of the seven, corrupted the grace of his Lord.

- Psalms 1: 2,         A good man - “His delight is in the law of the Lord.”

- Isaiah 58:13,        God’s people “call the Sabbath a delight, for it is “the Lord’s day,” “My holy day.”

The keeping of the Commandments is solely the result of salvation

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- Romans 3:20,                No flesh is justified by law, and could not possibly be so.
- Romans 3:21,                Because all have sinned, therefore our only hope is "grace," God's mercy - His undeserved favour.
- Romans 6:23,                All are condemned because they have sinned.
- Acts 4:12,                  Therefore there is salvation in Jesus only.
- Saved Men Keep the Commandments.
- Matthew 19:17,              Jesus said, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments."
- John 14:15,                 Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."
- Revelation 14:12,         Jesus said, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."
- 1 John 2:3,                 We know we are saved if we keep His commandments, for only the saved can obey.
- 1 John 2:4,                 Claiming to be saved and yet breaking the commandments is a lie.
- Revelation 22:14,         The saved "Do His commandments."
- Matthew 1:21,              His name is Jesus, for He saves from sin - the breaking of God's Commandments. What a Saviour! What a salvation!