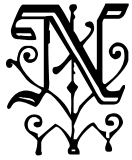




The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans



icolaitan¹ comes from two Greek words: *Nikao* which means to conquer, and *Lao* which means the laity. Nicolaitan means, "To conquer the laity."

Now why is this a terrible thing? It is terrible because God has never placed His church in the hands of an elected leadership which moves with political mindedness. He has placed His church in the care of God-ordained, Spirit-filled, Word-living men who lead the people through feeding them the Word.

He has not separated the people into classes so that the masses are led by a holy priesthood. It is true that the leadership must be Holy, but then so must be the whole congregation. Further, there is no place in the Word where priests or ministers or such mediate between God and the people, nor is there a place where they are separated in their worship of the Lord. God wants all to love and serve Him together. Nicolaitans destroys those precepts and instead separates the ministers from the people and makes the leaders overlords instead of servants. The problem lay in two words: "elders" (presbyters) and "overseers" (bishops).



History

Though Scripture shows that there are several elders in each church, some began (Ignatius among them) to teach that the idea of a bishop was one of preeminence or authority and control over the elders.

The truth of the matter is the word "**ELDER**" signifies who the person is, while the word "**BISHOP**" signifies the office of the same man. The elder is the man, Bishop is the office of the man. "Elder" always has and always will refer simply to man's chronological age in the Lord. He is an elder, not because he is elected or ordained, etc., but because he is OLDER. He is more seasoned, trained, not a novice, reliable because of experience and long-standing proof of his Christian experience. But the bishops did not stick to the epistles of Paul, but rather they went to Paul's account of the time he called the elders from Ephesus to Miletus in Acts 20. In Acts 20:17 the record states, "*elders*" were called and then in v28 they are called overseers (bishops). And these bishops (no doubt political minded and anxious for power) insisted that Paul had given the meaning that "overseers" were more than the local elder with official capacity only in his own church.

¹The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans <https://churchages.net/en/book/doctrine-of-the-nicolaitanes/>



To them a bishop was now one with extended authority over many local leaders. Such a concept was neither scriptural nor historical, yet even a man of the stature of Polycarp leaned toward such organization. Thus, that which started as a deed in the first age was made a literal doctrine and so it is today. Bishops still claim power to control men and deal with them as they desire, placing them where they so will in the ministry. This denies the leadership of the Holy Ghost Who said,

Acts 13:2, "... Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them."

It is clear that here it is the Holy Spirit of God who is calling Saul (Paul) and Barnabas out to minister as He has called them to do.

Matthew 20:25-28, "But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Matthew 23:8-9, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for One is your Father, Which is in heaven."

Looking Back at Ephesus

²In Miletus during his final journey to Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul sought to meet with the elders of the church in Ephesus. When the elders arrived, Paul warned them.

Acts 20:29-31, "For I know this, 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. Therefore watch..."

A few decades after this warning to the church at Ephesus Jesus commends the church for having heeded the warning about false teachers, but warning them in turn that unless they repent and return to loving God as they first did, their lampstand will be taken from them (Rev. 2:1-5).

They failed to heed Jesus's warning, and as you can see in the picture above Jesus made good on His words. The weed-covered desolation symbolizes the state of Christianity today in Turkey. Turkey, once the heartland of Paul's ministry, is 99% Muslim and devoid of Bible-based

² <http://israeljerusalem.com/ephesus-church.htm>

Christianity today. Can what happened in Ephesus happen again in these times that we live in? Truth be known, it has already begun in Europe and North America.



The church in Ephesus clearly loved people as we can see by Jesus' description of their works (v3) and of their ministry. They followed God's commands and were careful about what activity happened within the church (v2). However, there was something that burdened God's heart and Jesus' rebuke to the Ephesians is a clear call to return to the greatest commandment of loving God first.

The church changed its focus from what it had been, which was the love of God and people to now judging people based on their doctrine. Not that doctrine is bad, but that it is not the end goal. Doctrine is the declaration of what the church believes. Doctrine never trumps the love of God, and therefore a message of rebuke is given ... **RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE!**

The closing words of Jesus to the church at Ephesus were intended to motivate the Christians there to remember, to repent and return to their former acts of love. Jesus' final words to the church ends with a promise, (v7) "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

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

³ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-3-church-ephesus-lost-love>