

Audio Transcript of Sermon
October 24, 2026
The Church of Ephesus

Hello. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Tom Laign with Sabbath Bible Study. The Book of Revelation is for many a mysterious book. The imagery of the prophecies are fantastic and require us to consider things we have never seen with our own eyes, putting us in close company with the Apostle John who recorded what he saw as best he could, and then he wrote what today is the Book of Revelation to the seven churches in Asia, in what today would be the Republic of Turkey. Imagine the challenge for John who saw a beast rise up out of the sea having seven heads of blasphemy and ten horns, with it wearing a crown on each of the horns, and having a body like a leopard, feet like a bear, and having the head of a lion, all while powered by the dragon. After suffering what seemed like a fatal head wound to one of its heads and surviving, the world sees this beast as invincible. Imagine when he immediately saw another beast, but this beast arose out of the ground and had two horns like a lamb, and had all the power of the first beast. In his vision, John saw many unusual things, and those unusual things must have made it harder for him to write what he wrote.

He explained that he had this vision while on the island of Patmos, and that during this vision he understood he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and a voice behind him which spoke like a trumpet tasked him with writing down what he saw and sending it to the seven churches in what is today the Republic of Turkey. John wrote down everything he saw and heard with the exception of what was said by the seven thunders, because those words were to be sealed. To this day we don't know what was said, but whatever was said was not to be written down.

The Book of Revelation continues as a book that describes in prophetic detail what will happen in the end time, and a very dark future is presented, where the faithful are persecuted and eventually will be unable to buy or sell. It's a book where the final attempt by man to circumvent God and Jesus Christ is thwarted, and it is a book where no matter how scary things may get, in the end the faithful are given eternal life in a new heaven and a new Earth. Yet, it is a book that after initial passages begins with short messages to each of the seven churches. Over the next several weeks we will look at those messages, because even though they

were written to churches back then, there are lessons we can learn from these messages.

This week, we will look at the message to the church of Ephesus. When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, this was the city where the Ephesians were located. Paul's letter focused on topics like how through grace we are saved, and how that was made possible by Jesus Christ. Paul wrote of his ministry and the fellowship of mystery. He wrote of spiritual unity, spiritual gifts, and the need to be followers of God, to become children of the light. Paul also wrote of the whole armor of God explaining how spiritual warfare is real, and how we can use faith in this fight. Ephesians six verse ten.

Ephesians 6:10-17

10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Knowing we fight against spiritual wickedness in high places, let's read the message to the church of Ephesus in Revelation two starting with verse one.

Revelation 2:1-7

1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

- 2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:**
- 3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.**
- 4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.**
- 5. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.**
- 6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**
- 7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.**

That message was short but rich in content, and even though John recorded the words, the message is spiritual in origin. John wrote of people who are evil and false religious leaders who are liars. He wrote of the endurance of the people who do not give up. But he also wrote of the church leaving its first love and the need to return. As a consolation it was also recorded the church of Ephesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, and then the message concludes with a reminder of the need to overcome to have eternal life.

The church of Ephesus was praised for not bearing those who are evil. Since the Garden of Eden and the fateful decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mankind has lived in a world where both good and evil can be found, meaning those who pursue good can be living in close proximity to those who pursue evil, and that without vigilance, evil can overtake what is good. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and showed how a problem of Israel during the Exodus was that even with all of the direct divine intervention by God, they still lusted for what was evil. Paul reminded the Corinthians we should not lust after evil things. First Corinthians ten verse one.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

1. Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

- 2. And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;**
- 3. And did all eat the same spiritual meat;**
- 4. And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.**
- 5. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.**
- 6. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.**

The church at Ephesus did not bear them that are evil, and if we also do not bear them that are evil today, we cannot lust after evil things. In Philippians we are told we also must beware of people who do evil, and evil is compared to the concision using a Greek word used only in this passage. We have great affinity for those who are Jews because of a shared Biblical heritage, and Paul was warning against thinking of Christians as being Super Jews. Christians are Christians and Jews are Jews. There is no requirement for Christians to be better Jews than Jews are Jews, because our focus is on our relationship with Jesus. Philippians three verse one.

Philippians 3:1-4

- 1. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.**
- 2. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.**
- 3. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.**
- 4. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:**

When writing to Timothy, Paul connected the love of money to evil. In many translations, including the King James Version, this connection is incorrectly translated as the love of money is the root of all evil. It's more accurately translated as the love of money is a root of all evil. Evil can be derived from many sources, such as human lust, but money can also be a driving source of evil. First Timothy six verse one.

1 Timothy 6:1-10

- 1. Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.**
- 2. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.**
- 3. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;**
- 4. He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,**
- 5. Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.**
- 6. But godliness with contentment is great gain.**
- 7. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.**
- 8. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.**
- 9. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.**
- 10. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.**

Not bearing those who are evil means we cannot be fooled by those who love money, who covet money, who would sacrifice their faith and Biblical teachings for money. Just because somebody may be better off financially does not mean they love money. Having money is not a root of all evil. The love of money is a root of all evil. If we find ourself the recipient of evil done to us, much like Alexander the coppersmith did much evil to Paul, that is not a reason to ever repay evil for evil. We do not repay evil for evil. We do not allow evil to overcome us and drive us from the faith. Instead we fight evil with good and overcome evil with good. Romans twelve verse seventeen.

Romans 12:17-21

- 17. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.**
- 18. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.**

19. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

We need to remember that God and Jesus Christ are against them who do evil, so we never repay evil for evil, and when evil is done to us, we seek to return a blessing, to seek peace, and to pursue it because the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and open to their prayers. First Peter three verse eight.

1 Peter 3:8-12

8. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

The church of Ephesus tried those who said they were apostles and found them to be liars. There is no place with God and Jesus Christ for liars, even if liars claim religious authority. Within the Bible, a book full of things to do and not do, we might think any of these if violated could keep us from the Kingdom of God. What we learn from later in the Book of Revelation in the vision of the new heaven, new Earth, and new Jerusalem is a list of people who are not allowed in. In this list are many we might expect like sorcerers, idolaters, murderers, unbelieving, whoremongers, and the abominable. But also included on the list are people like the fearful and all liars. The lake of fire awaits these people. Revelation twenty-one verse one.

Revelation 21:1-8

1. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

- 2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**
- 3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.**
- 4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.**
- 5. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.**
- 6. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.**
- 7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**
- 8. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**

A liar bears false witness. What they say isn't true. When Stephen the deacon was stoned to death, that was brought about by false witnesses who claimed he spoke blasphemy. When Stephen was preaching in the synagogue of the Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and those who would be Turkish today, they found themselves unable to refute what Stephen was saying. Instead of accepting that they could not refute what Stephen was saying and start believing, they convinced a few to simply lie, to implicate Stephen as a person who shamelessly spoke blasphemy against Moses and God. These liars caused the powerful religious elites to turn against Stephen as they claimed Stephen said that Jesus would destroy the holy place. When they looked at Stephen, they expected to see the guilty face of somebody who spoke blasphemy. Instead, they saw an angelic face. Acts six verse eight.

Acts 6:8-15

- 8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.**
- 9. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.**

- 10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.**
- 11. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.**
- 12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,**
- 13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:**
- 14. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.**
- 15. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.**

Lies began with Satan, who is a liar and the father of lies. When Satan speaks, he speaks for himself and his interests. People who live a life of lies live their life aligned to Satan and not God our Father. Because they live a life of lies, even when truth is presented to them, they interpret the truth to be nothing more than a lie. John eight verse thirty-nine.

John 8:39-47

- 39. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.**
- 40. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.**
- 41. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.**
- 42. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.**
- 43. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.**
- 44. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.**
- 45. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.**
- 46. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?**

47. He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Paul advised Timothy that the Holy Spirit led him to understand that in the latter times some would depart from the faith and be willing to be seduced while adopting doctrines of devils. These people are liars and their conscience is seared with a hot iron. What big lies will these latter time liars promulgate? They will forbid people to marry and command people to abstain from meats which God created to be received with thanksgiving. Today in the United States, marriage is at an all-time low and birth rates are declining, and some are suggesting we forgo meat to eat vegetable derived foods that taste like meat, or to eat meat grown in a lab. As the faithful we cannot control what this world does around us, but we can choose how we carry ourselves during these latter times, and we cannot speak lies. First Timothy four verse one.

1 Timothy 4:1-5

- 1. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;**
- 2. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;**
- 3. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.**
- 4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:**
- 5. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**

We cannot allow ourselves to be liars through hypocrisy. Fear cannot be part of our life if we have perfect love because perfect love casts out fear. We have love for others because through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ love was shown to us so that we can have eternal life. With this promise of eternal life, we cannot say we have love for God if we hate any other person, because how could we love God whom we have not seen if we hate people who we do see. Not being a liar means if we say we love God, we must love other people. First John four verse fifteen.

1 John 4:15-21

15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19. We love him, because he first loved us.

20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

The church of Ephesus was praised for having borne their cross for the name of Jesus, and what this means is they gave themselves no excuse to walk away from the calling they were given. Whether good or bad, easy or hard, they stayed with Jesus. For them, there was no person or situation more important than Jesus Christ. They were willing to forsake all to follow Jesus Christ. Luke fourteen verse twenty-five.

Luke 14:25-33

25. And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

The church of Ephesus would have understood never walking away from Jesus Christ, but they also would not have walked away from others of the faith during that other person's time of trouble. They would have borne the infirmities of the weak and would have understood that the relationships we have within the household of faith are not about pleasing ourselves, but to edify others in the faith. Instead of seeking to tear down others within the faith we seek to build up, to strengthen the household of faith. Romans fifteen verse one.

Romans 15:1-4

1. We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

They would have also understood that we are individually responsible for ourselves, even knowing that within the household of faith we ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. While we are willing and able to help others in their time of need, we never seek to be a burden to others. We bear our own burdens. Galatians six verse one.

Galatians 6:1-5

1. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

- 4. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.**
- 5. For every man shall bear his own burden.**

The church of Ephesus would have had patience. Patience involves waiting and sometimes we prefer not to wait at all. As Christians we want the return of Jesus to happen soon because we see a world full of problems, and we know the return of Jesus is needed to solve those problems. What Jesus taught when it comes to end time persecution is that through patience, we possess our souls. When times are very difficult and challenging, the impulse might be to react very quickly. Jesus tells us to have patience. If we lack patience during challenging times we could abruptly just walk away from the faith, and that is something we cannot allow ourselves to do, so patience is needed. Luke twenty-one verse twelve.

Luke 21:12-19

- 12. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.**
- 13. And it shall turn to you for a testimony.**
- 14. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:**
- 15. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.**
- 16. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.**
- 17. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.**
- 18. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.**
- 19. In your patience possess ye your souls.**

Hebrews tells us to run the race that is set before us with patience, to look to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith who chose death so we could live. We cannot abandon the faith and all who died and who live in the faith when times become tough for us. Hebrews twelve verse one.

Hebrews 12:1-2

- 1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,**
- 2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

The church of Ephesus labored, meaning they put in work to preach the gospel and advance understanding of the Kingdom of God. They worked so people could be saved by Jesus Christ and be part of eternal life to come. They worked so that faith which can seem like a mystery to some, could be understood, and they worked so gentiles could have hope of eternal life. Paul also labored for these same reasons as he explained to the Colossians. Colossians one verse twenty-three.

Colossians 1:23-29

- 23. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;**
- 24. Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:**
- 25. Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;**
- 26. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:**
- 27. To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:**
- 28. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:**
- 29. Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.**

The big problem with the church of Ephesus is they left their first love. If you are married, that would be like leaving your spouse, whether to live by yourself or with somebody else. There is never a reason to stay in an abusive relationship, even if you are married, and leaving your first love does not imply you need to

stay in an abusive relationship. In an abusive relationship, the abuser has already left their first love, because love does not lead us to act abusively. If you are in an abusive relationship, remember the person who is the abuser has already left their first love. In Proverbs we can read that the expectation is that marriage is for life, that a man rejoices with the wife of his youth. Proverbs five verse eighteen.

Proverbs 5:18

18. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.

Spiritually, we do not walk away from the faith and our calling. There is no other name under heaven by which a person may be saved. Acts four verse ten.

Acts 4:10-12

10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

We need to remember that not every religious idea is of God. We are to try the spirits to see whether they are of God because there are many false prophets. We cannot walk away from truth because we like a person who does not preach truth. We need to remember we are of God having the spirit of truth, and those who do not preach truth have the spirit of error. We cannot leave our first love for the spirit of error. First John four verse one.

1 John 4:1-6

1. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

In the message to the church of Ephesus, Jesus praised them because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Who exactly were the Nicolaitans, we are not sure. Aside from their name mentioned to the church of Ephesus and the church in Pergamos, we know nothing about the Nicolaitans. What is said about the Nicolaitans is based on the ideas of historians and scholars who do not always agree.

Some have looked to the Greek language to derive meaning from the name, with scholars looking to the Greek words *nikao* meaning to conquer or overcome, and *laos*, meaning people, resulting in the name Nicolaitans which means something like to conquer or overcome the people, which to scholars suggests a group which tried to establish a hierarchy with the church, and/or possibly the establishment of an authoritarian agenda. When we consider the meaning behind Nicolaitans to conquer or overcome the people, that indicates conflict and confrontation. If there was agreement, there would be no need to conquer or overcome people and that reasonably leads to several possible conclusions.

First, Nicolaitans could have been big on confronting non-believers and using strong language to compel conversion to the faith, even if belief was lacking. Today, when people have negative views of Christians, especially in countries where Christianity is the dominate faith, the negative views are frequently tied to Christians trying to force their views on non-believers. Second, looking internally within the household of faith, Nicolaitans could have believed the need to tightly control the brethren to the point the brethren were essentially conquered by the ministry. Within this scenario, the brethren surrender a great deal of autonomy to the ministry.

Within the Church of God, we know about the second resurrection, so there is no urgency to coerce people to the faith to be saved. We recognize that God will call people according to His timing, and not ours. We also know there is a difference

between respecting the ministry as leaders of faith and surrendering autonomy to the ministry. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to surrender autonomy to the ministry, but the Bible does show the need to have respect for ministers as leaders of faith. That respect is focused so that we stay true to the faith and are not carried about with diverse and strange doctrine. Hebrews thirteen verse seven.

Hebrews 13:7-9

7. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

9. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

We follow their lead in faith; about things we hope for but have no evidence to support. How we live our life each day is up to us, and we should live our life aligned to what the Bible teaches. But there is so much in life that is a matter of personal preference. When the ministry strives to control how we live our lives or they make decisions for us that are a matter of personal preference, they have overcome the brethren. The ministry should be empowering the brethren in the faith, so that if the ministry tragically died off tomorrow, the brethren would be able to spiritually continue. The ministry cannot overcome and conquer the brethren hoping to empower them in the faith.

My background is in public education as a special education teacher. Children with disabilities needing specialized instruction become the students of special education teachers, and from a central office perspective an easy way to see the effectiveness and quality of special education teachers is to look at the number of students. When a special education teacher's class size goes down in greater proportion than any other decline in enrollment, and that decrease in enrollment cannot be attributed to anything else, it almost always means a closer look needs to be given to that special education teacher to see exactly what is happening. Here's why. Parents of students who receive special education services talk. They compare notes and opinions, and if a teacher is not meeting their needs, those students end up elsewhere. They might go to another school, district, or even be homeschooled, but when there is a problem with the special education teacher

student numbers for that teacher tend to decrease. Throughout the Church of God there are decreases in numbers, and it's important for senior church leadership to verify if it is a problem with the ministry or if it is something else.

Some look at the name Nicolaitan and draw the conclusion that conquering the people connected them to antinomianism, and antinomianism is a belief that Christians are under grace and free from laws and back then that meant Christians could participate in pagan practices with its sexual immorality. We can read what Paul thinks of this in Romans six verse one.

Romans 6:1-2

- 1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?**
- 2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?**

Others connect the term to Nicolas of Antioch, who was one of the seven deacons chosen in the Book of Acts, yet there are still others who dispute this. Whoever the Nicolaitans were, we don't know, but an overreaching ministry and teaching that Christians through grace can do whatever they want is wrong.

Finally, the church of Ephesus was praised for its patience, its ability to endure, even though they also left their first love, which seems like a contradiction. We can remember the words of Hebrews which tells us to run with patience the race that is set before us, and look to Jesus Christ, lest we somehow think the burden on us is more than His sacrifice. We cannot allow ourselves to grow weary in the faith where we spiritually faint. Hebrews twelve verse one.

Hebrews 12:1-3

- 1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,**
- 2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.**
- 3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.**

The church of Ephesus did many things right, but it left its first love. It was urged by Jesus to return to its first love, or its candlestick would be removed. We cannot allow ourselves to be tossed around with strange and diverse doctrines. We must stay true to the faith, to the first love, we have been given.

Thank you for joining us today. God-willing we'll get together next time on the Sabbath. Until then, thank you for joining us today.