



[Revelation 2:6](#)

(6) But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

[Revelation 2:15](#)

(15) Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
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Although prior studies on this phenomenon had been done, the church's interest in Nicolaitanism coincided with the breakup and scattering of the church in the early 1990s. Papers on the subject, often linked with ideas about the [heresy](#) of Balaam, circulated from hand to hand and across the Internet. One can even argue that these papers' definitions of Nicolaitanism spurred and intensified the scattering of the brethren.

In the main, these papers defined Nicolaitanism as the belief and practice of hierarchical government, the scapegoat for all the church's problems, with an emphasis on [tithing](#) and using a paid ministry. This definition derives from the meaning of the word *Nicolaos* in Greek: "conqueror of the people" (*Balaam* in Hebrew has a similar meaning). The authors of these papers on Nicolaitanism assumed that, since [God](#) names things what they are, the title "Nicolaitan" must therefore refer to a practice of abusive and dictatorial government and administration, which they assumed to be hierarchy. This assumption is based entirely on the authors' emotional reactions to their circumstances at the time—not upon biblical or even logical reasoning.

First, *Nicolaos* may have nothing to do with Nicolaitan [doctrine](#). Not every name in the Bible is significant spiritually. For instance, *Luke* means "white," and any spiritual connotation it has to him or his work is pure conjecture. Many biblical names are simple common names within the culture and time in which the person lived.

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Second, the meaning of *Nicolaos* is not necessarily negative. Although its natural connotation is "one who conquers the people," it can have a positive, possessive sense: "the people's conqueror," that is, a champion of the people, one who fights for the people's best interests. It may refer to a tyrant or despot, but it can just as easily speak of a popular hero.

Third, the name has a military association, not a governmental one. It primarily suggests conquering by might and strategy on the field of battle. Granted, such conquerors usually also governed as kings or emperors, but ruling is a separate activity from conquering, occurring as its consequence.

Fourth, this means that *Nicolaos* nowhere suggests any form of government. Those who believe the word to refer to hierarchy assume that a conqueror would rule as a tyrant or dictator, whether he is called king, emperor, president, chancellor, or first citizen. While this may be the rule, a few historical exceptions (for example, American military-heroes-turned-rulers George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses Grant, Dwight Eisenhower, etc.) prove this assumption faulty.

Finally, people can be conquered in ways other than "abusive and dictatorial" hierarchy. Socialist democracy in America and Europe has by mostly "benevolent" means cowed millions into a complacent and controllable herd. Populaces have been overcome by trickery, disease, famine, natural disaster, and their own sheer stupidity. Limiting Nicolaitanism to hierarchical government is arbitrary and subjective.

The Bible itself does not define Nicolaitanism. [Revelation 2:6](#) declares, "But this you [the Ephesian church] have, that you hate the deeds of the [Nicolaitans](#), which I also hate." [Jesus](#) later says to the Pergamos church, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate" (verse 15). While these verses provide no definition, they tell us three things:

1. Nicolaitanism is a belief system, like a religion or a philosophy.
2. Nicolaitanism results in ungodly behavior.
3. Christ hates it vehemently.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[Nicolaitanism Today](#)

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