

## EP28: Revelation 2:1-7 (part 2)

### Religious Delusion & the Apostasy of Cain

In the first part of this letter, Jesus issued His appraisal of the church at Ephesus. And although they were very busy doing their work for Jesus and were extremely effective at those works, they simply were not His works. As such, they had departed, fallen away, or apostatized from their relationship with Jesus. They had left their first love.

What had gone wrong? They had stopped living by grace through faith—which is the vehicle by which God moves in-and-through our lives. Rather, they had become convinced that their works were in fact good and godly works. Yet, to live by grace through faith is that “*first work*” where we are believe with our heart, mind, soul, and strength that we are needy, and He is our **only** provision. Religion deludes us to this reality, and it tempts us to move from that place of 100% dependence upon God to a place where we ultimately confuse our works for His works.

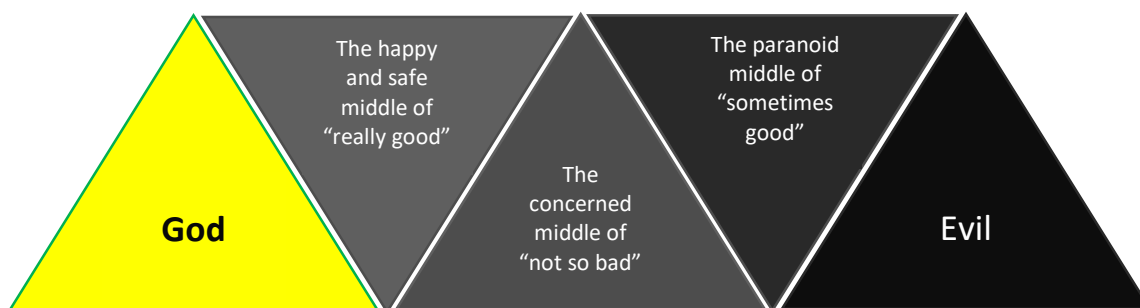
Let’s pick up the narrative with this issue of religious delusion. And please always remember that in the transcript which you can download at [threshermediagroup.com](http://threshermediagroup.com) there are some great graphics that help as they give a visual explanation of some key principles.

### The Religious Delusion of the Middle Ground of Goodness

Those in Ephesus convinced themselves that they were good with God because they were not doing anything “really” bad or blatantly evil and were living good Christian lives as advocates for the truth. This is **the apostasy of Cain** (which we studied in the book of *Jude*), the lust of the *flesh*, the never ceasing desire to be good for God and expect Him to be satisfied with our offering, with what we bring to Him.

But they were deceived by a lie; they did not take to heart that it is only the **source** of their thoughts, actions, and deeds that matter. **The source matters, the source is everything!**

### Illustration: The Middle Ground of Goodness



The middle ground of goodness may appease the conscience, but it is a religious delusion to equate any goodness of man with the goodness of God. In the illustration, I have juxtaposed God and Evil on opposite ends, and in between I have three segments of religious delusion in which we often live.

Close to God, there is the happy and safe middle of “really good.” Those people seem to have their

spiritual life together and do it well. This is probably where we would place the Ephesians.

The next segment is the concerned middle of “not so bad.” These people go to church and try to do what God wants, but are constantly struggling with their *flesh*, though they tend to keep things, for the most part, within the bounds of good and acceptable Christian activity. Still, the guilt, shame, and fear which assails their conscience tends to make them quite uncomfortable and nervous about their standing with God.

Then in the third segment there is the paranoid middle of the “sometimes good.” This depicts Christians who tend to be pretty attached to this world and the things of this world. They have said the sinner’s prayer, yet they are deeply afraid of God and how He might punish them for their bad behavior. So, they bank on the promise they have been told that they still have their golden ticket to heaven. After all, they said the “sinner’s prayer.”

However, since **Only God is Good**,<sup>1</sup> then only that which comes about by God living in-and-through our lives is innately good, all else is evil and therefore sin.

**We are delusional to ever think that our good can be His good in any increment.** God is perfect and He requires perfect works; thus, by definition, He is the only one who can do them.<sup>2</sup> Everything we do falls short of His standard of perfection, which give us the very definition of sin—to miss the mark.<sup>3</sup>

## There is Good and There is Good

By the way, I know that sometimes when we use words that have multiple meanings (like “good”) it can be confusing. For instance, God has said that His creation, including mankind, is good.<sup>4</sup> But He is making a statement on the fact that what He created is exactly what He wanted, and it is therefore good. Hence, He desires us and loves us and wants us to know Him in a very personal way. But the “good” we are addressing, in the statement that **Only God is Good**, is a statement on His perfection and righteousness, as well as on our abject inability to be perfect or righteous like God. The situation is so bad, that we cannot even try. Hence, the Spirit said:

### ***Romans 3:10-12***

THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

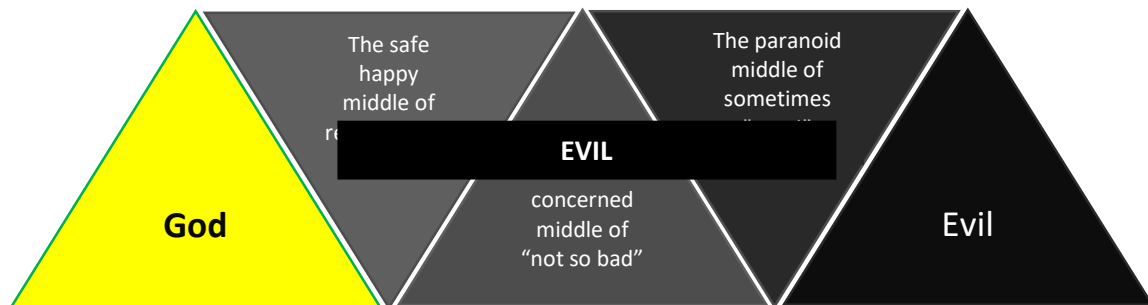
<sup>1</sup> **Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18**

<sup>2</sup> **Matthew 5:48**

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word “*hamartano*” translated “sin” means to miss the mark, as in an archer who does not hit the target.

<sup>4</sup> **Genesis 1:31**

## Illustration



## Whatever Does Not Derive from the Divine is Sinful and Evil

We must never forget, **the source matters; the source is everything!** Those who now live and exist in this delusional "***middle ground of goodness***" have fallen away. They left their first love and are apostate, for they are betting their lives and their eternity on a lie that they have something to offer God! This is the same harrowing truth which Paul communicates to the Galatian church.

### ***Galatians 5:4-10***

For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, ***you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.*** But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. **What is important is faith expressing itself in love {*agape*}. You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you.**

It does not matter what kind of religious work we perform, it does not matter how sincere and earnest we are (remember, intentions are worthless to God), nor how thoroughly convinced we are that we are doing "the Lord's will," our work must derive from trusting ourselves to Jesus, doing only what He **wants** us to do, and then, only **when** He wants us to do it, as that is the definition of a bondservant. Then our lives will produce a harvest of God's *agape* love as we bear the fruit of His Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, we only produce evil because that is all we can produce. Hence, no *flesh* will ever glory in His presence.<sup>6</sup>

We must never forget the **Design Point** of true Christianity, "*I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ in me.*"<sup>7</sup> And the pathway to the **Design Point**, is letting God put to death

<sup>5</sup> ***Galatians 5:22***

<sup>6</sup> See ***Romans 3:10-18, 20; Galatians 2:16; Psalm 143:2***

<sup>7</sup> ***Galatians 2:20***

everything in our being that stands in opposition to His rule in our lives—to Him being our **I AM**. It is how we come to abide in Him. After all, if we abide in Him and He abides in us, He will do His Father's work in-and-through our lives.<sup>8</sup>

Do we take this seriously? Do we hate the works of our *flesh*, especially our "religious" *flesh* as much as Jesus seems to hate them? Do we still justify the so called "good" works that we (or others) do because of the seemingly good outcome that they produce, regardless of whether we know if those works were sourced in God? Do we still do things for His namesake believing it makes us more acceptable to Him?

This is extremely hard to receive much less accept in our heart, mind, soul, and strength because religion runs so deep within our souls.

## The Woman who Rides the Beast

**Revelation 17** introduces us to this woman who rides the Beast—she literally has her seat on the back of the demonic spirit who will possess the man we call the Antichrist.<sup>9</sup> She is also called the mother of all harlots and mystery Babylon. The **Code** conveys that she is the spirit behind the religions of the world, especially the religion of Christianity. And she has infected everyone, without exception, as everything in our *flesh* so desperately wants God to be good with what we offer Him, just like **Cain**.<sup>10</sup> But God will have none of it. His standard is and always will be His perfection. Thus, it is only by His grace towards us that through faith we experience His life in us—the life that that will bear the fruit of *agape* love as we abide in Him and He in us.<sup>11</sup>

## Results do not Reveal the Source

One mistake we tend to make is that instead of looking to the source, we look to the results. We tend to judge things by their outcomes: who gets saved, who gets healed, who is using their gifts, the size of ministry, who is exposed as liars and false apostles, etc. But the quality of the outcome does not determine the quality of the work. We will see that “in spades” when we get to the letter to Sardis.

As we have studied, Jesus said that many will come to Him and say: “*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?*” “*And then I [Jesus] will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'*”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the quality of the outcomes does not determine the quality of the work. The fact that amazing things were done speaks of the mercy of God reaching out through these false workers to bless those who cried out to Him, much like He spoke blessing after blessing over Israel through the prophet Balaam, and to Balaam through his donkey.

**THOSE WHO LOOK TO RESULTS TO VALIDATE THEIR MINISTRIES HAVE BEEN “CUT OFF”**

<sup>8</sup> **John 14:10-14**. He will literally be the one to “do it.” See also **John 15:1-17**

<sup>9</sup> This imagery of the woman on the back of the Beast depicts that way the Beast will come to prominence, through religion, specifically the religion of Christianity—hence, the title “antichrist” not “antiBuddha” or “antiallah”.

<sup>10</sup> **Jude 11**

<sup>11</sup> **John 15:1-11**

<sup>12</sup> **Matthew 7:22-23**

FROM CHRIST" AND THE CROSS IS OF NO EFFECT TO THEM.

## Or Else: Removing the Lampstand

Continuing in **2:5**, Jesus commands them to repent, to completely change their direction, or else, as He says, *"I choose to now come to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place."*<sup>13</sup>

This Woman who rides the Beast convinces us that it is no longer **only** and **exclusively** about what Christ does for us, in us, and through us (the *"Substitution Principle"*), but it is about what we can do, or must do, for Christ. Religion teaches us (often quite subtly) that Christ did His work on the cross and now, in practical effect, it is time for us to do our work. He will be there with His grace to empower us and complete or fulfill where we lack, but we need to continue to grow in our part: our service, worship, giving, fellowship, outreach, our apologetics, and our patient endurance, etc.

But Jesus is so serious about this issue of "faith vs. works" that He commands them that if they do not repent, completely change their thinking and direction (as a matter of lifestyle), He will choose to now invade time and space and set into motion the things necessary that will eventually cause the church and their witness to the world (the candlestick) to be permanently removed from before Him.<sup>14</sup>

Again, I know how hard this is to process. After all, we have family and friends and a long history of our own participation in the religion of Christianity. We, therefore, have a hard time matching our sentiments to the sentiments of Jesus. For the most part we seem to just let things be, and we do not want to judge or cause any trouble, as that would be very "un-Christian."

But we must realize how many people **have fallen** from grace, though extremely busy for Christ, because they have bought into this heresy of the *middle ground of goodness*. And our studies in **Jude** taught us that we must judge, we must have discernment, we must not be deceived.

### *Sovereignty & Choice*

This passage brings a spotlight on the intersection between the sovereignty of God and our personal sovereignty, our freedom to choose. Utilizing the *subjunctive* in the phrase "unless you repent", Jesus clearly notes that they have a choice to repent, and He did not pre-determine their response. Although they left and had departed from *agape* love (from Him), they could still remember (in fact, He commands them to **now** remember<sup>15</sup>), and if they remember, they could choose to return.

Outside of time, the choice has already been made and Jesus knows what they will choose (He knows the beginning from the end), and He predestines their affairs accordingly. Within time, however, they must still work out their choice and decide if they love the "truth" more than they love the One who is the truth.

## The Nicolaitans

<sup>13</sup> "coming" is rendered in the *present middle indicative*; "remove" is rendered in the *future active indicative*.

<sup>14</sup> "repent" is rendered in the *aorist active imperative*

<sup>15</sup> "remember" is rendered in the *present active imperative*

**Revelation 2:6**

Yet this you do **now** have, that you **now** hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also **now** hate.

This entire sentence is rendered in the *present active indicative*. The one thing that comes with being obsessed with the truth, like the “Ephesian” church, is hating falsehood. And Jesus gives them kudos because He also even **now** hates the Nicolaitans. Yes, God hates.

We do not know a lot about the Nicolaitans, but we can discern a bit about them from their name, which literally means victory (*nike*) and people (*laos*)—victory of the people or power of the people. The name supports the idea that what people want is more important than what God wants. The people will have victory, the people will rule their own lives, the people will live in their own version of “freedom” and will not be ruled.

The Nicolaitans were commonly known as a sect of the Gnostics, and they taught a sort of “new age” form of grace. It is presumed by many that their philosophy was based on a corrupted view of the division between the spirit of man and his flesh (meaning his physical body). The idea was that the spirit of man became holy when he accepted Christ, but since man practically still sinned there must be a complete division in God's eyes between one's spirit and one's body. Thus, they taught that since God has forgiven us for the deeds done in the flesh (in our body), and our spirit is holy and undefiled by the body (because God calls us holy), we are free to engage in all manner of sexual sin, physical passions, and even idolatry.

The Nicolaitans believed the deeds of the body had no impact on the spirit of a man. It was an early form of Christian/pagan syncretism. This is captured in the sins of **Cain**, **Balaam**, and **Korah**, the lust of the *flesh*, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

The teaching of the Nicolaitans was a clever twist on the truth regarding the division of the spirit and the flesh, as Biblically, “flesh” has both physical and spiritual meanings. The same Greek word for *flesh* (“*sarx*”) is used to address the physical body as well as that dark and corrupted spiritual part of our being that is called our *Old Sinful Nature* (sometimes translated as “Old Self”) – the part of our soul that is always in active and aggressive opposition to the Spirit, and simply has no capacity to obey God.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, the Spirit is clear, if we walk in the Spirit, we **will not** carry out the deeds of the *flesh* because the Spirit will be ruling our physical, mental, and spiritual construct.<sup>17</sup> And if we **now** live in the Spirit, in the Spirit we should **now** walk.<sup>18</sup>

And keep in mind, the promise that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is only fulfilled in those who **do not** walk according to the *flesh* but according to the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> This does not magically occur because someone said the “sinners” prayer or decided that today they are going to be in the Spirit. It does not work that way.

If we are now walking in the Spirit, the Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies. In effect, our physical

<sup>16</sup> **Romans 6:6, 8:7; Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9**

<sup>17</sup> **Galatians 5:16-17**

<sup>18</sup> **Galatians 5:25**

<sup>19</sup> **Romans 8:4**

body will shed its addiction to the *flesh* and learn to be ruled by the Spirit, in which there is life and peace.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, those who are **in Christ** Jesus have crucified the *flesh* with its passions and desires.<sup>21</sup>

### **Romans 8:12-15**

So then, brethren, we are **now** under obligation, not to the flesh, to **now** live according to the flesh — for if you **now** live according to the flesh, you **now** shall **now** die; but if by the Spirit you **now** put to death the deeds of the body, you will make the choice to live. For all who are **now** led by the Spirit of God, these **now** are sons of God.<sup>22</sup>

## **Fiction Alert**

### **FICTION ALERT**

In the religion of Christianity, the philosophy of the Nicolaitans is alive and well, but it has mutated over the centuries such that it promotes not so much the lawless deeds of sexuality, **but the lawless deeds of spirituality**, which is a more subtle form of idolatry that is deadly. The religion of Christianity has become the largest peddler of “good works” that are lawless, licentious, and unauthorized by the Father, and motivated by *instinctual religious wisdom*, just as we studied in **Jude**. We will see this clearly in **Revelation 18**.

In this vein, the Nicolaitan philosophy of our day states that we are free to do what we want if we are doing it for God, and if it is Biblical or not blatantly sinful. This places man’s wisdom and man’s goodness on a pedestal equal to that of the Father’s will and His goodness. This is blatant idolatry of the “**ME**”, all disguised in good religion. Those who follow this doctrine **have fallen**. This form of **apostasy** is widespread and so prevalent that it marks a large part of the spiritual condition of the church of the **End Times**. This is a philosophy of the Nicolaitan that we must learn to **HATE!**

To walk in the Spirit, to be in the Spirit, to be in Christ (however we want to say it), we must now and continually let Him be our **I AM**, evidenced by the fact that He is the one who rules our heart, mind, soul, and strength such that we only do **WHAT** He tells us to do **WHEN** He tells us to do it.

**Yahweh** is our Great Shepherd,<sup>23</sup> the one responsible for leading our lives.<sup>24</sup> Thus, if He needs us to do

<sup>20</sup> **Romans 8:1-10**

<sup>21</sup> **Galatians 5:24**

<sup>22</sup> “obligation” is rendered in the *present active indicative*; “to live according to the flesh” is rendered in the *present active infinitive*; “if you now live according to the flesh” is rendered in the *present active indicative*; “you now shall” is rendered in the *present active indicative*; “die” is rendered in the *present active infinitive*; “put to death” is rendered in the *present active indicative*; “you shall choose to live” is rendered in the *future middle indicative*; “are led” is rendered in the *present passive indicative*; “are sons of God” is rendered in the *present active indicative*.

<sup>23</sup> **Yahweh Raah**

<sup>24</sup> **Isaiah 48:17**

something, He will ensure we know, and He will ensure that we are in place fully enabled to do all that He desires. But we should never take matters into our own hands appeasing our conscience by covering what we do with, “*in Jesus Name.*” And we should never presume that because He has something for us today, that we are to be doing it tomorrow. The Spirit is like the wind and switches the direction of His flow constantly.

### **John 3:8**

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

## **DO NOT BE DECEIVED, THE SOURCE MATTERS, THE SOURCE IS EVERYTHING!**

Now, of course, all of this is a process that comes when we let Jesus put to death everything in us that opposes Him being our **I AM** (which is another way of saying that we have decided to take **Step 2**) This is the pathway those who are “in Christ” walk; it is the pathway of much pressure or tribulation and is the only pathway that leads to life. Sadly, few find it.<sup>25</sup>

## **He Who Is Now Having an Ear**

### **Revelation 2:7**

He who is now having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit now says to the churches. To him who is now overcoming, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is **now** in the Paradise of God.

This little tag line that is traditionally translated as, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,*” is stated in each of the 7-letters, and is a message in-and-of itself. It is not to be trivialized. “*He who has an ear*” is the *present active participle*, hence, we can understand that those who can obey the command to “hear” are **only** those who are **now having** their being tuned to the Spirit and not to the *flesh* (especially their religious *flesh*).<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, those who are enthralled with their own goodness and their own religious efforts simply **CANNOT** hear. They may read the words, debate their understanding, study the Greek, and even teach the text, but they **CANNOT** hear because they are not now having an ear to hear what the Spirit now says to the churches.<sup>27</sup>

It is also important to take note that the Spirit is talking to the churches. Although the letter is personally addressed to those who were in Ephesus and to those who even now are in an Ephesian type

<sup>25</sup> **Matthew 7:14**

<sup>26</sup> Rendered as an *imperative* – a command

<sup>27</sup> “says” is rendered in the *present active indicative*



church (one with the same blindness to the difference between His works and their works), it is a message for every church to embrace and not forget.

The next statement, “*To him who is now overcoming (or having victory)*”<sup>28</sup> is a direct slap in the face of the Nicolaitans, as the Spirit uses the same root word (Greek: “*nike*”) to make His point. And being in the *present active participle*, we know that this speaks not of our final conquest, but to every moment of our now.

What are we to now be overcoming? That tendency within our being which pulls us into religion, syncretism, apostasy, and the indulgence of the *flesh* to perform all manner of lawless, licentious, and unauthorized religious works “in Jesus’ name”—all of which are rooted in our *instinctual religious wisdom*. We are to now be overcoming the lust of the flesh, **the apostasy of Cain**, that desire to be good for God and have Him accept what we offer to Him.

We overcome by our faith, “*For whatever is born of God now overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.*”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, when we bet our lives on the truth that **Only God is Good**, and turn to Him, and keep turning to Him, and keep turning to Him, with our heart, mind, soul, and strength, knowing that only in-Him-and-through-Him do we have any goodness, then we will know what it means to now be overcoming and to be having victory.<sup>30</sup>

Only then will we have the ears to now be hearing what the Spirit now says to the Churches. Otherwise, we will continue doing what we have always been doing, “serving the Lord” (hopefully, the sarcasm is noted).

## The Promise: Eat of the Tree of Life

God promises to those who are now overcoming that He will grant to them to eat of the tree of life which is **now** in the Paradise of God. This is a promise of deep, intimate, and delicious fellowship with Jesus, and a promise for our here and now (our **Eternity Now**) as well as for our **Eternity Then**.

To “eat” is in the *aorist* tense and not the *future* tense. Thus, it speaks of the overall experience that is to mark the life of those who are now overcoming. However, since “*will grant*” as in “*will grant to eat*” is rendered in the *future active indicative*, we know that this is a firm promise given not to the general population of those who call themselves Christians, but for those who are now overcoming.

And the Paradise of God connotes images of a peaceful garden, tranquility, and rest (almost a return to Eden). But it also speaks about our eating from the one who is life—Jesus.<sup>31</sup> He is the fruit that we get to enjoy as we enter the believers rest and cease from our works.<sup>32</sup>

I also want to note that in addition to mocking the Nicolaitans, God is also mocking those who worship the goddess Diana, as there was a sacred cypress tree associated with the Temple of Artemis. That tree did nothing for anyone except perhaps look pretty when it was in season; whereas the tree of life, Jesus

<sup>28</sup> “overcomes” is rendered in the *present active participle*

<sup>29</sup> **1 John 5:4**. Note: “overcomes” is rendered in the *present active indicative*

<sup>30</sup> See **Psalms 16:2; Isaiah 26:12**

<sup>31</sup> **John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-12**

<sup>32</sup> See **Hebrews 4:1-13; Romans 4, 9:6-13, 11:5-6; Psalm 46:10, 49:7-9**

Christ, is always in season and always gives life to those who abide in Him (they bear much fruit).<sup>33</sup>

And just in case you might be confused, yes, we were “*created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*”<sup>34</sup> But since these are “good” works, and **Only God is Good**, this is therefore a reference to His works that He will do when we simply abide in Him as a branch clings to the vine, trusting Him alone as our source of all life and godliness, as our **I AM**.<sup>35</sup>

This is somewhat clarified when the Spirit, in reference to Jesus, said that He “*gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*”<sup>36</sup> And, of course, this has overtones to the *Design Point* and the *Substitution Principle*: His life in ours (*possession*), doing His work in ours, fulfilling His word, such that if we ask anything in His name, He will do it.<sup>37</sup> And this stands in contrast to those “lawless deeds” that we tend to do “in His Name”.

### **Hebrews 4:9-11**

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. **For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.** Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

It is time to set down our own works and all our efforts to do it right for God. This did not turn out so well for Cain, and it will not turn out well for us either. The only works that matter are His works. You and Yours will never match up to His’ My and Mine.

## **Lampstand Removed**

Today Ephesus is nothing but ruins, and there is nothing in the ruins to suggest there even was a church in that city. There are ruins of a theatre, a stadium, fragments of temples and sacred places scattered around, but there is no evidence that the church ever existed. Apparently, they did not repent, they did not change their minds, even after John returned to them and taught them in the final stages of His life. The thought of it is beyond sobering.

They received a personal letter from Jesus; yet they could not shake off the **apostasy of Cain** and their love for their religion. They were fully convinced that God owed them something for all their good work, labor, toil, patient endurance for His namesake, and so on. They could not shake their “ministry” mindset; therefore, God did exactly as He promised. He removed their candlestick, their church, and their witness to the world.

With that said, even though the physical church of Ephesus was destroyed, the church of Ephesus in form and function is alive and well today, and it will experience the same judgment. There are those who love the truth and diligently and vigilantly fight for the truth, but they have no relationship with **Yahweh’s**

<sup>33</sup> **John 15:1-11**

<sup>34</sup> **Ephesians 2:10**

<sup>35</sup> **See 2 Peter 1:3**

<sup>36</sup> **Titus 2:14**

<sup>37</sup> **See Galatians 2:20; John 14:14**

*agape* love. They have departed and have substituted their work for God for the grace of God (comprised of His works in-and-through them).

God is calling His church to repent and to continue in repentance, and to always be found living in repentance. Each of us must be sure that we are now having ears to be hearing what the Spirit now says to the churches. This comes by our now overcoming that tendency in us to exchange the grace of God that we first knew in love for the **works of our hands**, for the **apostasy of Cain**.

**WHATEVER DOES NOT DERIVE FROM THE DIVINE IS SINFUL AND EVIL.  
THERE IS NO MIDDLE GROUND OF GOODNESS.  
THE SOURCE MATTERS – THE SOURCE IS EVERYTHING!**

## The Darkest of Dark

We will find that the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira are admonished for the way in which they chose to assimilate with their immoral and idolatrous culture. Their issues of “sin” are far more “straight forward” to our Christian mindset and ever so easy to judge and condemn. But the issues which Jesus addresses at Ephesus and Sardis are far more dark, deceptive, insidious, and incestuous, since their issues are wrapped tightly in the packaging of good Christianity. Especially in Ephesus where they abandoned the *agape* love that they had once known and exchanged it for service, obedience, duty, discipline, holy habits, perseverance, and so on. And worse of all, they no longer knew the difference.

Good behavior oriented “Christianity” is a poison that kills in a remarkably interesting way. It is not like blatant immorality where the impact on your soul and your conscience is poignant and extremely hard to ignore. Good religion and behavior oriented “Christianity” cleverly seduces people to believe that they are in the right, that they are good and pleasing to God, and that they know God just because they are busy “doing” things for God and are part of a system which supports and reinforces all that they do.

Besides, they see real benefit, real results, and blessings coming from their ministries and acts of service. Obviously, that must mean {sarcasm noted} they did and are doing something right. But they do not know Him, for they have abandoned Him, and are fallen. Their lives do **NOT** bear the fruit of His *agape* love.

In more ways than I can enumerate, behavior oriented “Christianity” strips away the grace of God (the fundamentals of the ***Substitution Principle***) from the gospel of **Yahweh Tsikdenu** being our righteousness and our life.<sup>38</sup> In practice, though not necessarily in teaching, grace is taught as the means to salvation but not as 100% essential for every single part of our lives every moment of our lives. Jesus is not there to sweep in where we fail and when we fail, for the truth is that we live in abject failure; it is the condition of our *flesh*. Thus, we need His grace always in every single aspect of our lives.

Ironically, if truth be told, most people really do not want Jesus to be a part of every single area of their lives every moment of their lives. He is far too intrusive and demands far too much; after all, **He wants it all!** His goal is possession, and He does not like to share.

---

<sup>38</sup> See **Romans 1:16-17**

One problem, however, for many believers is that He (Jesus) seems to never quite fulfill His promises. It seems He just keeps people waiting and waiting and stringing them along. This is the reason so many of His promises are errantly understood to be something gained in eternity (**Eternity Then**) and not a now experience (**Eternity Now**). Hence, it is easier to choose the gospel of licentiousness or lawless deeds. Therefore, instead of learning to be utterly dependent upon God, they muster up their best efforts to serve Jesus and stand strong for Him, just as the religious system prescribes.

But this is beyond offensive to Jesus. The cross, the sacrifice of His life, was not just about our going to heaven; it was about our salvation from everything within us that is not God. It was about **complete substitution**: all of Him for all of us (the true doctrine of grace). It was about Him being to us and for us everything such that the demands of the Father, the demands for perfection, are perfectly met in us by Him and through Him.

We must be careful not to think that this letter to Ephesus deals only with weird ancient belief systems (the Nicolaitans); rather, they speak to us and this generation of believers who are trapped (or imprisoned) in the impotency of the “religion” of Christianity, where people hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power to live in the unrestrained freedom of the Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

This pandemic of wrong belief and unbelief was the backbone of the message in **Jude**. In the last days, people will turn the grace of God into licentiousness (lawless deeds) – into the means to live how they want to live without regard for their need to be found in grace (100% needy in every aspect of their life every moment of their lives). And they will do it all “in Jesus’ name”.

We must reject this lie and instead trust God to be our good, to do our work, and to be all that He needs us to be. As the Psalmist said about **Yahweh**, “*I have not good besides you*”; and the prophet Isaiah said, “*Yahweh, you will establish peace for us, since you have performed for us all our works.*”<sup>40</sup>

### **Matthew 6:23**

And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

Let’s stop here and pick up in the letter to Smyrna.

<sup>39</sup> **2 Timothy 3:5**

<sup>40</sup> **Psalm 16:2; Isaiah 26:12**