

Overall structure of Revelation 2 (AMP-VERSION)

Each letter follows a similar flow:

- Christ's self-description (who is speaking).
- "I know your deeds..." (what He sees).
- Commendation for what is right.
- Rebuke for what is wrong (except Smyrna).
- Call to repent or remain faithful.
- Promise "to him who overcomes."

Ephesus: Orthodox (authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine, or practice) but loveless (2:1–7)

Key AMP phrases: Jesus is the One who "holds firmly the seven stars" and "walks among the seven golden lampstands."

1. Commendation – Doing right! (vv. 2–3, 6)

- Works, toil, patient endurance.
- Intolerance of evil and false apostles, doctrinal discernment.
- Perseverance "for My name's sake" without growing weary.
- Hatred of "the works of the Nicolaitans," which Jesus also hates.

2. Correction (v. 4)

- "You have left your first love" (AMP: "lost the depth of love that you first had for Me").
- They did not lose love by accident; they walked away from it while maintaining busy ministry.

3. Command (v. 5)

- Remember: "the heights from which you have fallen."
- Repent: inner change of mind, will, and behavior.
- Repeat: "do the works you did at first."
- Warning: "I will remove your lampstand" (loss of true church status and presence, even if activity continues).

4. Promise (v. 7)

- To the overcomer: right to eat from "the tree of life... in the Paradise of God."
- Application: recover intimacy, not just activity; protect love while guarding doctrine.

"Busy hands, cold heart."

Call hearers to remember, repent, and repeat their early love-driven works.

Hatred of “the works of the Nicolaitans,” which Jesus also hates.

Historically, there is no single, firm “Jewish history” account of the Nicolaitans; what we have is mostly early Christian testimony plus some Jewish-context word studies, and these often connect the group conceptually to Balaam and compromise with idolatry and immorality.

Name and Jewish-background wordplay

- The Greek name “Nicolaitans” (from Nikolaos) can be seen as a Greek Equivalent of the Hebrew name “Balaam,” with both names built from roots meaning “to conquer” and “people.”
- In Jewish tradition, Balaam became a stock figure for someone who leads Israel into idolatry and sexual sin (Numbers 25; 31:16), so linking Nicolaitans with Balaam in Revelation uses a Jewish historical image of corrupt teaching that seduces God’s people.

Early Christian reports about their origin

- Several early Christian writers (Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Jerome, later Eusebius) say the sect was founded by **Nicolaus of Antioch**, one of the seven in Acts 6:5, who supposedly fell into error; they describe Nicolaitans as living in moral laxity and promoting compromise with pagan practices.
- Many modern scholars are cautious about this, noting that the link to Acts 6:5 may be later interpretation rather than solid history, and that the real connection in Revelation is more clearly to “the doctrine of Balaam” than to a detailed biography of Nicolaus.

What their teaching likely was, in Jewish-historical frame

- Revelation itself ties them to Balaam’s pattern: eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality—classic issues Jews faced living in pagan environments and then also faced in the mixed Jew-Gentile churches.
- Read against Jewish history, the Nicolaitans look like a group inside the church that did what **Balaam did to Israel: encouraged God’s people to relax Torah-shaped holiness – (The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)**, join in idolatrous meals, and accept sexual practices tied to pagan worship.

What we can and cannot say historically

- We can say with some confidence that “Nicolaitans” is a label for a faction in early churches that promoted accommodation to pagan idolatry and immorality, using imagery rooted in Israel’s history with Balaam.
- We cannot say with certainty, from Jewish historical sources themselves, that there is a documented Jewish sect called “Nicolaitans”; rather, Jewish history gives the Balaam background and the language roots, and early Christian writers apply that framework to explain this group.

“You have left your first love” (“lost the depth of love that you first had for Me”).

They did not lose love by accident; they walked away from it while maintaining busy ministry.

[Revelation 2:1-7](#) contains Jesus’ message to the [church in Ephesus](#), the first of seven exhortations to various churches in the Roman Empire. Ephesus had some unique challenges for a Christ-follower in that it was home to the Emperor’s cult and the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis ([Acts 19:23-40](#)). Because of these influences, the Ephesian believers had developed great discernment when it came to false teachers and heresy. **Christ commended them for this discernment, but He faulted them for having lost their “first love.”**

The first love which characterized the Ephesians was the zeal and PASSION with which they once embraced their salvation as they realized **they loved Christ because He first loved them ([1 John 4:19](#)) and that it was, in fact, His love for them that had made them “alive together with Christ.”**

So overwhelmed were they by the joy that came from understanding their former state—dead in trespasses and sins—and their new life in Christ, that they exhibited the fruit of that joy ([Ephesians 2:1-5](#)).

Because of God’s great love for the Ephesians, they were “made alive in Christ” and that new life was exhibited in the passion of gratitude. That passion for the Savior spilled over onto one another and out to those in the culture they inhabited, corrupt as it was.

Jesus commends the Ephesians for their many good works and hard work. They tested teachers to see whether their professions were real; they endured hardship and persevered without growing weary. **But they had lost their warmth and zeal for Christ, and when that happened, they began to “go through the motions” of good works, motivated not by the love of and for Christ, but by the works themselves.**

What was once a love relationship cooled into mere religion. Their passion for Him became little more than cold religion.

Surrounded by paganism and false teachers, the Ephesian church would have had ample opportunity to correct false doctrine and confront false teachers. If they did so for any reason other than love for Christ and a passion for His truth, however, they would have lost their way. Instead of pursuing Christ with the devotion they once showed, much like a bride who follows her groom “through the desert” ([Jeremiah 2:2](#)), the Ephesians were in danger of falling away from Christ completely. This is why He warns those who have “ears to hear” to prove the reality of their salvation by returning to Him and rekindling the love that had begun to cool. No doubt there were among the Ephesians those whose profession was false and whose hearing had become dulled. He warns the rest not to follow them, but to **repent** and **return** to Him with the **passion they once had for Him**. We face the same challenges in the twenty-first century. There are few churches that aren’t subject to, and in danger of a certain amount of false teaching. But Jesus calls us to speak the truth in love, and to not let the frustration of false teaching overpower the love of Christ in us .

(Ephesians 4:15 Amplified Bible)

¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love [in all things—both our speech and our lives expressing His truth], let us grow up in all *things* into Him [following His example] who is the Head—Christ.

(Ephesians 4:31-32 Amplified Bible)

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor [perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, fault-finding] and slander be put away from you, along with every kind of malice [all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence]. ³² Be kind *and* helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave ^[a]you.

- **Remember: “the heights from which you have fallen.”**
- **Repent: inner change of mind, will, and behavior.**
- **Repeat: “do the works you did at first.”**

Our first love is the love Christ gives us for God and each other. We should be zealous for the truth, but that zeal should be tempered so that we are always “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” ([Ephesians 4:15](#)).

Promise (v. 7) To the overcomer: right to eat from “the tree of life... in the Paradise of God.”

The tree of life, mentioned in the books of Genesis and Revelation, is a life-giving tree created to enhance and perpetually sustain the physical life of humanity. The tree was planted by God in the Garden of Eden:

“The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye And good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil “ ([Genesis 2:9](#)).

The centrally located tree of life would have been easily accessible to Adam and Eve from any point in the garden. More details concerning the tree of life come after Adam and Eve’s sin:

“The LORD God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever’” ([Genesis 3:22](#)).

In his disobedience, [Adam](#) lost his eternal life. The tree of life in Eden must have had some role to play in maintaining the life of Adam and Eve (and possibly the animals). Adam would “live forever,” even in his fallen condition, if he had eaten the tree of life after his sin. God placed a sword-wielding cherub at the entrance to the garden specifically “to guard the way to the tree of life” (verse 24). It seems access to the tree of life would have prolonged Adam’s physical life indefinitely, dooming him to an eternity in a cursed world. It was a mercy that God kept us from the tree of life. By barring access to the tree of life, God showed compassion in His omniscience. Knowing that, because of sin, earthly life would be filled with sorrow and toil, God graciously limited the number of years men would live. To live eternally in a sinful state would mean endless agony for humanity, with no hope of the relief that comes with death.

By limiting our lifespan, God gives us enough time to come to know Him and His provision for eternal life through Christ but spares us the misery of an endless existence in a sinful condition.

In His great love, God provided One who would redeem fallen mankind. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world, but through another Man, Jesus Christ, redemption through the forgiveness of sin is available to all.

Romans 5:17 Amplified Bible

¹⁷ For if by the trespass of the one (Adam), death reigned through the one (Adam), much more *surely* will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in [eternal] life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Those who RECEIVE THE GIFT OF GOD the sacrifice of Christ on the cross will be resurrected to see **the tree of life again, for it stands in the middle of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem**, where it bears “twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. **And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2).**

In the eternal state, the curse will be no more (verse 3), access to the tree of life will be reinstated, and darkness will be forever banished (verse 5). Eden will be restored.

Promise (v. 7) To the overcomer: right to eat from “the tree of life... in the Paradise of God.”