

Finishing Well

Lesson #37

Jesus Commends The Compromising Church

Sept. 20, 2023

Rev. 2:12-17 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast to My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The Word shows us that Satan's influence (evil) controlled the city.

It was one of the darkest, eeriest cities in the entire Roman Empire.

This church operated in the middle of a city chosen by Satan as his headquarters on earth.

1. The religious climate was not conducive to the Christian life. Pergamos symbolized secular power and civil religion working together to accomplish Satan's plan.

2. His power, being manifested and unleashed from this city, caused many in the church:

➤ To fall victim to Satan

➤ Become thoroughly engulfed in deception and even married to the world.

Remember: This church was without any apostolic ministry.

They had to meet the enemy on his own ground, and it was not easy.

Consider: This kind of compromise, NOT PERSECUTION, is the fastest and most effective way to destroy the church's life and testimony.

The Church in Pergamos was a true growing church waging an uncompromising war at the throne of Satan. Jesus commended them in Rev. 2:13.

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast to my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Consider: Faith is tested so it might be proven to be genuine. A faith that cannot endure trial is really no faith at all. True faith is not fragile, it is indestructible.

It survives everything - even the onslaughts of hell!

Held Fast To His Name

They were not ashamed of the name of Jesus, the most divisive name in history.

Major theological heresies arose which involved the Trinity and the Deity of Jesus Christ.

Revisionist history claimed that Christ's deity was invented at the Council of Nicaea in the 4th Century. It was not believed by the early church.

There are two main types of Apostasy.

- A falling away from key and true doctrines of the Bible into heretical teachings that claim to be "the real" Christian doctrine.
- A complete renunciation of the Christian faith, which results in a full abandonment of Christ.

The first form of apostasy starts with a denial of key Christian truths such as the divinity of Christ. This begins a downhill slide into a full departure from The Faith.

Type 2 almost always begins with type 1.

A heretical belief becomes a heretical teaching that splinters and grows until it pollutes all aspects of a person's faith. Satan's end goal is accomplished, which is a complete falling away from The Faith that was once delivered to the saints.

Jude: 2 Basic False Teachings For Which We Are To Be Aware & To Contend For

Jude 1:4 "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

II Pet. 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Certain men would bring about in the church a departure, an apostasy, in two directions:

- A Denial Of Jesus Christ and Blatant Immorality

Wiersbe: The first test of any religious teacher is: "What do you think of Jesus Christ? Is He God come in the flesh?" Anyone who denies this cardinal doctrine is a false teacher NO MATTER how correct he may be in other matters.

Truth: The Faith entrusted to God's people must be grounded in Jesus Christ.

Arianism - A heresy regarding Deity of Jesus Christ during this time period.

Questions: Was Jesus truly God in the flesh or a created being?

Is Jesus of "like substance" with the Father or of the "same substance" as the Father?

Arian View: Jesus was not fully divine although still related to God as a son to a father.

Root Problem: Arius, a presbyter (priest) from Libya announced, "If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not." He contended that Jesus Christ was a created being. Arius, given his view of God, logically concluded the following 5 things about the relation of God to Jesus:

1. The Son or the Word of God is not divine but created by God as the first act of creation. Jesus was the crowning glory of all creation.
2. The Son is not self-existent and cannot be God.
3. As a creature the Son or the Word must have had a beginning.
4. The Son can have no communion with, and indeed no direct knowledge of, His Father.
5. The Son must be liable to change and even sin [*treptos; alloiotes*].

A major misinterpretation in Arianism is the meaning of "firstborn." [Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15-20] Arians understand "firstborn" to mean:

- Jesus was "born" or "created" as the first act of creation.

John 8:58 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

John 10:30 I and My Father are one."

Jesus Himself proclaimed His self-existence and eternity.

John 1:1-2 tells us that Jesus was "in the beginning with God."

The net result of Arius' teaching was to reduce the Word (Jesus) to demigod.

- He Himself was no more than a creature in relation to God, the Father.

The controversy came to be expressed by two Greek words:

- homoousias: the Son is of the **same** essence as the Father
- homoiousias: the Son is of **similar** essence as the Father

Arius's Position: The Father existed before the Son.

There was a time when the Son did not exist.

Arius was clever & did his best to get the people on his side, even going so far as to compose little songs that taught his theology, which he tried to teach to everyone who would listen.

His winsome nature, asceticism, & revered position as a preacher also contributed to his cause.

Result: The controversy spread all over the empire. Christians could be heard singing a catchy tune that championed the Arian view: "There was a time when the Son was not."

In every city, wrote a historian, "bishop was contending against bishop, and the people were contending against one another, like swarms of gnats fighting in the air."

Constantine Gets Involved: Word of the dispute made it to the newly converted Emperor Constantine the Great, who was more concerned with seeing church unity than theological truth. He told the bishops, "Division in the church is worse than war." He feared the church dispute would cause disorder within his empire. To settle the matter, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea, first general council of the Christian church, in 325 AD.

Of the 1800 bishops he invited, about 300 came (all expenses paid).

Constantine's Charge To the Council: Define the nature of God For All Of Christianity and eliminate confusion, controversy, and contention within the church.

Athanasius, a champion of the faith rose up to defend the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He attended the Council of Nicaea at 27 years of age

He fought against Arius, arguing his view denied the Trinity.

Christ is not of a like substance to God, but the same substance.

To Athanasius this was not splitting of theological hairs. Salvation was at issue: only one who was fully human could atone for human sin; only one who was fully divine could have the power to save us. To Athanasius, the logic of New Testament doctrine of salvation assumed the dual nature of Christ. If Christ does not share an eternal Godhood with the Father, then our salvation would be impossible for creature cannot redeem creature. "Those who maintain 'There was a time when the Son was not' rob God of His Word, like plunderers."

His quotes:

- "Jesus that I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God."
- "He became what we are, so He might make us what He is."

The Arian view was presented by Eusebius of Nicodemia, who was quite confident that once the Arian view was clearly and logically stated, the Council would overwhelmingly vote for them. He stated how the Son was created out of nothing from the Father and different in nature and essence from the Father. The reaction was not acceptance; it was considered blasphemous. "Eusebius was shouted down ... his speech snatched from his hand, torn to shreds, and trampled underfoot."

The Bishops argued, fought, and eventually wrote out an early version of the Nicene Creed.

Ruling of the Council: (1) The Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures teach, was the same substance as the Father, God of very God.

(2) They affirmed the apostles' teaching regarding the person of Christ > the one true God and the Second Person of the Trinity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

(3) Arianism was condemned > false doctrine

(4) The council, led by Alexander, condemned Arius as a heretic, exiled him, and made it a capital offense to possess his writings.

Nicene Creed that affirms Christ's divinity: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father."

Since the end of the apostolic age, Christians had begun debating these questions: Who is the Christ? Is He more divine than human or more human than divine? Was Jesus created or begotten? Being the Son of God, is He co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, or is He lower in status than the Father? Is the Father the one true God, or are the Father, Son, and Spirit the one true God? The bishops at Nicaea voted to make the full deity of Christ the accepted position of the church. The council did not invent this doctrine.

Rather, it only recognized what the Bible already taught.

Constantine was pleased peace had been restored to the church. However, it was short-lived. Controversy was widely discussed in the early church from A.D. 318 to 381.

Required 18 councils before it was fully settled:

- The Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 & ended with the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. Arius may have died centuries ago, but his spiritual children are still with us to this day in the form of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who deny Christ's true essence and person. Sadly, until Christ returns, and every spiritual enemy has been removed, tares such as these will be present among the wheat.

Challenge From: Athanasius - Fought for Deity of Jesus Christ

Athanasius, a renowned Christian theologian, Church Father, the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, was the 20th bishop of Alexandria, and served 45 years [June 328 - May 373].

"Black Dwarf" (short, dark-skinned Egyptian) was the tag his enemies gave him.

Over 17 years were spent in 5 exiles ordered by 4 different Roman emperors.

There were 6 more incidents when he fled Alexandria to escape people seeking to take his life.

He became known as "Athanasius contra mundum" > Athanasius against the world.

Yet in the end, his theological enemies were "exiled" from the church's teaching, and it is Athanasius's writings that shaped the future of the church. In one letter, Athanasius listed what he believed were the books that should constitute the New Testament.

"In these [27 writings] alone the teaching of godliness is proclaimed," he wrote.

"No one may add to them, and nothing may be taken away from them."

It is Athanasius's list the church eventually adopted, and it is the one we use to this day.

Athanasius, whose treatise On the Incarnation laid the foundation for the orthodox party at Nicaea, was hailed as "the noble champion of Christ." The diminutive bishop (Black Dwarf) was simply pleased that Arianism had been defeated. >>>>> But it hadn't

Within a few months, supporters of Arius talked Constantine into ending Arius's exile.

With a few private additions, Arius even signed the Nicene Creed.

The emperor ordered Athanasius to restore the heretic to fellowship.

When Athanasius refused, his enemies spread false charges against him. He was accused of murder, illegal taxation, sorcery, and treason—the last of which led Constantine to exile him to Trier, now a German city.

Constantine died two years later, and Athanasius returned to Alexandria as Archbishop.

1. In his years of absence, Arianism gained the upper hand.

2. Now many church leaders were espousing Arianism and banished him again.

3. Athanasius fled to Pope Julius I in Rome. He returned in 346 AD but would be banished three more times before he came home to stay in 366. By then he was about 70 years old.

Athanasius, who championed the fight for Christ's name would not permit fellowship around the Lord's Table to anyone who was of the Arian persuasion.

He was so strict in this regard the emperor, Theodosius, commanded him to admit these Arians to partake of the bread and the cup.

Athanasius refused the emperor, and Theodosius reproved him sternly for what he saw as insubordination to his emperor, and Theodosius said these words:

'Do you not realize that all the world is against you?'

Athanasius' answer: 'Then I am against the world'.

In 356, while Athanasius was conducting a service with his congregation, 5,000 armed soldiers stormed the church building. Calmly, he began reading Psalm 136 and asked his congregation to respond. When He Read: "O Give Thanks Unto The Lord; For He Is Good," His Congregation Responded: "For His Mercy Endureth Forever."

He went into the desert to spend time with the monks and wrote articles in defense of the great truth that Christ is fully God. He stated Arians were idolaters who worshiped strange gods, no different from the heathen.

In 362, He was recalled to his flock, but was almost immediately driven away by those who were stung by his attacks against them. He left his weeping congregation but comforted them with the words: Be of good cheer; It Is Only A Cloud, Which Will Soon Pass On.

He escaped hired assassins on an imperial ship on the Nile and found refuge once again in the desert. He returned & was driven away again. He spent 4 months in the tomb of his father.

When a new emperor arrived, he wanted unity at all costs.

Athanasius: No compromise! I Will Defend The Full Deity Of Christ Against All Odds.

Emperor: The Church, Bishop and Whole World are Against You.

Athanasius: Then I'm Against The Whole World!

Athanasius died in 373; he never saw the final victory of his lifelong cause.

The church will always be indebted to the good fight he fought in protecting The Christological view of Scripture.

The Christological view of Scripture.

New Testament teaches: Jesus the Messiah should be worshipped; He is co-equal with God.

Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:8-9 Forbids the worship of angels but commands the worship of Jesus.

Col. 2:9; 1:19 Paul tells us "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

Rom. 10:9-13 Paul declares Jesus as Lord and the One to whom a person must pray for salvation.

Rom. 9:5 "Jesus is God overall"

Titus 2:13 Jesus is our God and Savior

Faith in Jesus' deity is basic to Paul's theology.

John 1:1-5;9 Jesus is the divine, eternal Logos, the agent of creation; source of life and light

John 14:6 the "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"

I John 2:1-2 our advocate with the Father

Rev. 1:5 the Sovereign

Rev. 22:13 The Son of God from the beginning to the end

Consider: We must denounce all attacks on the deity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and "hold fast His Name."

A false Jesus cannot save you. If we do not get the identity of Jesus right, we will die in our sin.

John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I AM he, ye shall die in your sins. [John 11:25-26]

At a crucial point in his ministry, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Matthew 16:15. Peter: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Consider: We must denounce all attacks on the deity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and "hold fast His Name." If we deny the deity of Jesus, then we do not have the Father.

[I John 2:23; cf. John 5:23].

Understanding the deity of Jesus is fundamental in contending for the truth of the Christian faith. This belief separates us from nearly every other cult and faith in the world. Nearly every cult or non-Christian faith will readily accept that Jesus existed, believing Jesus was a prophet, an angel, a good man, a good teacher, a very enlightened man, God's son [a created being], etc... However, they will flatly deny Jesus' deity, and consider it heresy to call Jesus God.

If Jesus Christ is no more than a good man, then the bridge from God to Man does not exist. Jesus' death is no more than a martyrdom and his resurrection no more than a symbol.

If this is true, then man is still separated from God, his soul cannot be saved, and he is forever alienated from his heavenly home.

Why is this important? Because Arianism then and Arianism now will destroy the Church and destroy man's hope for a glorious final destiny.

It is a matter of life and death > our salvation or our condemnation.

- Deny His death, physical resurrection, and ascension.
- Deny He is the promised Messiah.
- Deny the sacrificial atonement He accomplished at Calvary.

In denying His Person,

- they deny His power to deliver from sin's guilt and power. [Matt 28:18; John 8:34-36]
- they deny His right to judge according to His absolute righteousness. [John 5:26-30]

If someone denies that Jesus Christ is Lord, it is a departure from "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" and is considered an apostasy.

Admonition: Call them out on it! Believing Jesus is God is one of the essentials of the Faith.

J.C. Ryle: Never let us be guilty of sacrificing any portion of TRUTH on the altar of peace.

Rev. 2:13b *did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

The people of Pergamum worshiped a myriad of Greek and Roman gods. When Christianity arrived with the belief in just one God, the city's pagan priests went on the attack.

In Revelation, Jesus called Antipas "my faithful martyr." According to church tradition Antipas, a contemporary with the Apostles, lived during the reign of emperor Domitian in 83 AD.

He was consecrated bishop of Pergamos by the Apostle John.

1. Church tradition says Antipas was a physician suspected of secretly propagating Christianity. The Aesculapeans (the medical guild) accused Antipas of disloyalty to Caesar.

2. When he was old, he was caught by the idolaters of Pergamos. The demons, whom they worshipped, appeared to them and told them they could neither live in that place nor accept their sacrifices because Antipas was forcing them out.

His faith got the attention of the priests and demons of Asklepios.

Renner: "He had cast out so many devils the demons had been complaining to pagans, saying, 'You've got to do something about this Antipas'."

3. The pagan priests went to the Roman governor and complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out of the city and hindering the worship of their gods.

4. As punishment, the governor ordered Antipas to offer a sacrifice of wine and incense to a statue of the Roman emperor and declare that the emperor was "lord and god." He refused. Renner: "If you reject the divinity of the emperor, that is the equivalent of rejecting the city of Rome, and believers were killed for this."

5. The governor tried to convince him that older things are much more honorable.

Note: The governor concluded the religions of the Greeks and Romans were more honorable since they were older and grew with the passing of time.

6. Antipas countered the argument using Cain's story as proof.

Even though Cain was older in age than Abel, Abel was accepted by God and not Cain.

7. When the governor and the Greeks heard this answer they burned with anger.

8. Antipas was sentenced to death on the Altar of Zeus. At the top of the altar was a hollow bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice. Antipas was placed inside a red-hot bronze bull, and was roasted alive.

Renner describes the method of execution suffered by Antipas. "They would take the victim, place him inside the bull, and they would tie him in such a way that his head would go into the head of the bull. Then they would light a huge fire under the bull, and as the fire heated the bronze, the person inside of the bull would slowly begin to roast to death. As the victim would begin to moan and to cry out in pain, his cries would echo through the pipes in the head of the bull, so it seemed to make the bull come alive."

Note: Even in the midst of the flames, the elderly bishop Antipas died praying for his church. The year was AD 92.

A few years later, the Apostle John wrote Revelation, mentioning the death of Antipas in Pergamum.

9. On April 11 the memory of the martyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamos is still celebrated by the Orthodox Churches around the world.

10. Antipas means "against all" and he stood against all odds for the faith that was once and for all handed down to him by the Apostles.

Side note: Only the foundation remains; the Altar of Zeus is more than 1000 miles away.

Most of that altar still survives today, and surrounding it are some of the world's most famous marble friezes. They depict the *Gigantomachy*, or the battle between the Greek gods and the giants. At the top of the altar was a hollow bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice.

In the 1880's, a German archaeologist working in the city of Pergamum removed that throne, that Satanic seat, from the hillside and took it to Europe. The "Throne of Satan" went on display in the city's Pergamon Museum in 1930, just in time to inspire one of the most brutal dictators the world has ever seen. Is there any connection with the rise of Hitler, and the Nazis? Hitler's headquarters were located in East Berlin.