

Checkin' Out My Walk #6 - Pergamos - Part II

The year was 1930. Albert Speer, the new chief architect for the Nazi Party, was commissioned by Hitler to organize the parade grounds for the party rallies in Nuremberg. Altar of Zeus in the Berlin museum was his model. This "altar of Pergamum" had been brought to Berlin in the late 1800's. Speer created a colossal grandstand, the Zeppelin Tribune, at the rally grounds. After WWII only a small portion of it remained. In the middle of the grandstand Speer built Hitler's podium. This position on the Altar of Zeus in ancient Pergamos received the sacrifices to Zeus. Hitler wanted to create a "mass experience." Most of Nuremberg rallies were held at night. Speer surrounded the grand stand with 130 search lights. The columns of light extended for miles in the sky, creating a mystical effect Hitler wanted. "The concluding meeting in Nuremberg must be exactly as solemnly and ceremonially performed as a service of the Catholic Church." This effect was known as the "cathedral of light," a hallmark of Hitler's events. It was used in the closing ceremony of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Inside the rally ground at night, thousands of Nazi members marched in a "torch light parade." This would give a message of fear, strength, the unknown, of mystery. From his podium, he mesmerized the crowd. Under the "cathedral of light," thousands swore the "holy oath." "Blazing flames hold us together into eternity. No one shall take this faith from those who are dedicated to Germany." (Oath taken at 1936 rally)

1934 rally: A film, *Triumph of the Will*, was made which would be shown continually for 12 years in Germany. It portrayed everything Hitler wanted the people to know. Film portrayed Hitler as a "god-like" figure, the "savior" of the German people. His entrance in the film was from the sky, like a "messiah" descending to the faithful waiting below. He often borrowed Christian phrases in his speeches. His youth sang, "Hail Hitler to Thee." In his speech to them, he says, "You are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood."

His popularity skyrocketed after release of film. On September 15, 1935, more than 1 million Germans came to Nuremberg for the Nazi party rally. He announced the Nuremberg laws which took German citizenship away from Jews. He gradually marginalized the Jews. He introduced the phrase: "Final solution."

"Bitter complaints have come in from countless places citing the provocative behavior of Jews. This law is an attempt to find a legislative solution. If this attempt fails, it will be necessary to transfer the Jewish problem to the National Socialist Party for a final solution."

This law stripped the Jews of their rights as citizens. They couldn't teach in public universities, practice medicine in public hospitals, or display the national flag. Jews in Germany were subjects of the Reich, but not citizens.

Hitler's Final Solution: The Holocaust > means Wholly Burnt Animal Sacrifice

In AD 92, the faithful martyr Antipas died as a wholly burnt sacrifice on the Altar of Zeus in Pergamos.

Centuries later in the center of a redesigned Pergamum altar, the bronze bull was replaced by a podium. From there, Adolph Hitler announced his final solution to the world.

This time, the burnt sacrifice was 6 million Jews.

The Compromising Church: Rev. 2:12-17 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Constantine began functioning as a self-appointed political leader of God's Church. He ordered Romans to recognize Christianity as the national religion of Rome. Thousands of unsaved pagans became baptized and started calling themselves Christians. It has been said that in the year 324 twelve thousand men with women and children in proportion, were baptized in Rome. The emperor had promised to each convert a white garment and twenty pieces of gold. It did not cost anything to be a Christian. It was to an advantage to be one!

Constantine frequently used the word "Catholic" to describe the Church.

The word CATHOLIC means UNIVERSAL. Constantine wanted all men everywhere to embrace the Christian faith and to be united together. He thought Christianity could unite his empire and make it great. It is interesting that many of the Catholic practices, customs and teachings had their beginning around the time of Constantine.

Heathen customs and practices crept into the church. The pagan images and statues were still honored, but they were given "Christian" names such as Peter or Mary.

Artemis (Diana) worship was changed to Mary worship.

Isis, the Egyptian goddess was transformed into Mary.

They called her "the Great Virgin" and "Mother of the God".

Heathen temples were consecrated and changed into churches.

Heathen feasts were given Christian names.

Pagan practices introduced to the Church during this period include: The Rosary;

Celibacy of the clergy; Prayers For the Dead; Adoration of Saints & Angels;

Worship of Mary With Child; The Mass; Priests dressing in clothing similar to pagan priest;

Doctrine of Purgatory; Worship in Latin; Prayers Directed to Mary

It caused a terrible spiritual adultery in God's Church as the clerics of Roman Christianity substituted pagan fertility festivals for God's covenant rehearsals as the proper way to celebrate the birth, death, resurrection of Jesus.

It was just the same old paganism or heathenism under a new name!

The church had not conquered the world. THE WORLD HAD CONQUERED THE CHURCH!
Paganism had put on new clothes but it was the same old paganism.

II. Commendation

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

A. "held fast to His name."

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

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

1. 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?

This 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:

- a. 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.
- b. The Son is not self-existent and cannot be God.
- c. As a creature the Son or the Word must have had a beginning.
- d. The Son can have no communion with, and indeed no direct knowledge of, His Father.
- e. The Son must be liable to change and even sin (*treptos; alloiotes*).

A major misinterpretation in Arianism is the meaning of "firstborn" (Romans 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 eternality.

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

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."

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

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. "Division in the church," he told the bishops, "is worse than war." He feared the church dispute would cause disorder within his empire. To settle the matter, Constantine called the Council of Nicea, 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.

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

Enter: Athanasius attended the Council of Nicea at 27 years of age. 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."

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.

Constantine was pleased that 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 > Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and ended with the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.
- Since that time, Arianism has never been accepted as a viable doctrine of the Christian faith. However, Arianism has not died. It has continued throughout the centuries in varying forms. The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons of today hold a very Arian-like position on Christ's nature.

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 Nicea, 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

1. 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.
2. The emperor ordered Athanasius to restore the heretic to fellowship.
3. 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 reprovved 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 Is 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.

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."

Jesus commended Pergamos for "holding fast the name and the faith of the Lord Jesus; the name of the One who is God's Son and God the Son. It's no coincidence that during this church period this Arian controversy was raging. With all the faults there may have been in Pergamos - praise God, they held fast to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ponder: Would I be willing to stand and "hold fast the name of Jesus Christ"?

B. 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. Only the foundation remains; the Altar of Zeus is more than a 1000 miles away.

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.

Jude 3 I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

II Tim. 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Does my walk reveal: Holding Fast The Name of Jesus Christ > Against All Odds

Not Denying My Faith > Against All Odds