

## THE UNHOLY TRINITY Revelation 13

When we lived in Virginia, I had a friend who was a Secret Service agent. I learned a lot about the Secret Service, including the fact that it was originally formed to protect the financial currency of the country. Even today, they are called whenever there's a counterfeiting case. The way that they prepare to spot forgeries is not by studying all the different fake bills they've found. They study the real thing. They get to know a dollar bill so well that they can't be fooled no matter how good the fake is- there's always something out of place.

Revelation tells us about a cosmic forgery that's going on. Now, the Bible presents very clearly what we call the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here in Revelation 12 and 13, though, the Bible presents us with an unholy Trinity.

We saw last week in Revelation 12 the dragon, Satan, who is the most powerful of all the fallen angels. He is the direct adversary of God the Father.

Now in the first half of Revelation 13 we see a beast who comes out of the sea. This beast is a counterfeit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at how it mimics and perverts the person and work of Christ:

- The beast has 10 crowns, as Christ has many crowns.

- The beast has blasphemous names written on him, while Christ has honorable names written on Him, as we'll see in chapter 19 He has "King of kings and Lord of lords" written on His thigh.

- Then in verse 3 we see that the beast is wounded seemingly beyond recovery in a manner like Christ's crucifixion, but is healed, as in Christ's resurrection.

- The world is awed by this death and resurrection and worships the dragon and the beast; this mimics the universal worship Christ deserves.

- He uses his words to blaspheme God, while Christ constantly uses his words to praise God.

- He is a warrior, just like Christ, though their armies are in opposition.

- Jesus' authority is over "every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9), the very same words used in the description of the extent of the beast's authority.

Then in verses 11-15 we see a beast come out of the earth who serves as a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. This 2<sup>nd</sup> beast tries to get people to worship the 1<sup>st</sup> beast just as the Holy Spirit's ministry it is to inspire people to worship Jesus. This beast is much more soft and subtle than the first beast. We read, "He had two horns like a lamb." He's a cute little thing. But how does he talk? Like a dragon- in other words he speaks lies. He comes off as trustworthy, but at core he serves the dragon and he deceives as many as possible.

Now, you've seen enough movies and cop shows that you know a familiar scene- good cop/ bad cop. The bad cop comes in all angry and threatening. "If you don't come clean, I'll make sure you fry!" But then the good cop comes in, "Hey, you all right? Can I get you some coffee? Hey, look, I want to help you, but you gotta help me. You gotta give me something"

But here's the thing, both cops are after the same thing: information, or if possible a confession. Likewise, their approach is different, but both beasts are after the same

thing- they want to steal God's glory and turn our worship towards the dragon and the beast.

There are two great warnings implicit in this passage:

*A Warning against counterfeit gods.*

There's an important detail we need to clear up here in order to talk about this warning. Specifically the meaning of verse 18, "This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. "

There is a general fascination over the number 666, and an abundance of theories to calculate the number of the beast." Some people think John is encouraging speculation in the ancient numbers game called gematria, which is the practice of assigning numbers to names. Through this, we can arrive at hundreds of different historical figures. For example, if A=100, B=101, C=102, then HITLER comes out to be exactly 666! Nero is another popular mathematical equation. Others have arranged the numbers to come up with Martin Luther, John Wesley, Oliver Cromwell, popes, emperors.

Now I suppose it's possible that John is encrypting the identity of a single person. But what I think is more likely is that he's saying something more broad about the beast. Our English translations say, "it is the number of a man," but probably a better translation of the Greek is "it is the number of man," the number of humanity. In other words, Satan works through people. The beast manifests himself in human relationships and works.

The number 6 is a counterfeit of the divine number of 7, and so it's a fitting representation of this unholy trinity. The mark is nothing more than Satan's "seal of ownership" on a person, much like God's sealing of His people through baptism. It's most likely *not* a physical seal or a number on one's credit card; it is more likely a symbolic branding, indicating that a person belongs to and works for the devil's purposes.

Throughout history, every generation sees its share of wicked men who are working for evil and against the purposes of God, who make it difficult for believers to live. In every age there are those governments and dictators that have openly oppressed Christians. That's what the first beast represents.

But, you say, in America, we don't have that. No, we don't have direct oppression of believers, but we have something much more insidious. We have a government that promises to be God for us. To take care of us, to meet our every need. This is the subtle, deceptive work of the 2<sup>nd</sup> beast.

Both liberals and conservatives buy into this, and every political campaign make these god-like promises.

Conservatives say that government should be a great **protector**. It should have a powerful army that can bomb our enemies back into the stone age. And our local governments should prosecute criminals so they're not on the streets. That's where my safety lies. "*A mighty fortress is our government.*"

Liberals says that the government should be a great **provider**. It should create jobs, it should build roads and parks for me to use, it should fix Wall Street when it breaks, it should give the poor food and clothes and give me tax breaks. "*I lift mine eyes up to the hills. From where does my help come? It comes from Uncle Sam.*"

Friends, I don't really care about your view of government. But I do care about your heart. Where does your trust lie? In your money? In your citizenship? You family

ties? I'm sorry, but those are no match for the beast. The beast can deceive you and destroy you in any country in the world and in any social-economic class.

Verse 8 is so instructive, "and all who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life." Having your name written in the book of life is the only protection against the beast. All who are not elect will worship the beast. Now, again, is this some kind of cult that John is envisioning? Some kind of devil-worshipping group that will get huge in the future? No. It's a recognition that the human heart was made to worship. If we don't worship God, we'll worship something, be it success or our image or our family.

No matter what that something is that you worship, if it's not God, it's a form of the beast.

#### *A Warning against falling away*

Look again with me at verse 10, "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." In the midst of all this idolatrous worship- when everyone else is taken by the philosophies and new religions of the culture and the celebrities and power-brokers in high places, God calls His people to endure. To keep our eyes on Him. To trust that He is with us and for us. To not let the evil around us win. To not let anger and hatred consume us- but to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us.

Martin Luther King Jr. had it right when he taught that the only way to overcome evil is by doing good. There were many people in King's day who said that the way to work for justice was to fight back against the oppressors. But King said that's not the way of truth, that's not the way of love, and it won't accomplish peace and equality. His method of nonviolent resistance was not passive, it was love confronting hate, and it seems to me very biblical.

But, you say, "Evil is so powerful. This beast is so strong and he seems to be killed and yet he comes alive again and again and again. How can we endure against such great evil?"

Some of you understand this better than others. You've been overwhelmed by the powers of death and hell. You've spent time in the depths of depression, feeling as though your world is all grey and hopeless and you might not ever get better. (I know, I've been there) Some of you have struggled with manipulative or emotionally-abusive parents-and you felt like no one could save you from the grip they have on you. Some of you have struggled with wayward prodigal children and thought, 'Why can't my son or my daughter choose good? Why do they seem so drawn to and mastered by sin?'

The beast has been allowed to make war on us. And he's done a rather remarkable job of persecuting the saints.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian who lived in Holland during the rise of Nazi Germany. Her family would hide Jews in their house until one day the Nazis found the people they were hiding and they were all taken to concentration camps, where most of Corrie's family died. In her book *Tramp for the Lord*, she tells how she had been teaching in Germany in 1947 and was approached afterwards by one of the cruelest former Ravensbrück camp guards.

*You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.*

*"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?"*

*And I stood there — I whose sins had every day to be forgiven — and could not. [My sister] Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?*

*It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.*

*And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."*

*And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.*

*"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"*

*For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.*

Corrie Ten Boom could forgive that guard because she had been forgiven.

You see, it's so easy for the beast to do his work on the earth because evil lives within all of us. Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." We all have the ability to worship either the beast or God.

The only answer to the sin that lies within you is the sacrifice of the true Lamb. The dragon and the beast rule through power, deception and hatred. But God's way is the way of love. Jesus gave up all His power in order to give us new life and a new way to live. And in doing so, He defeated all counterfeit gods and every counterfeit way of living.

And if you are trusting in the true work of Jesus Christ, your name is written in the book of life. And you will conquer— through Jesus you will overcome the dragon and the beast. Because there's coming a day when the beast will receive a wound that it won't get up from. It will be thrown into a pit along with the dragon and everyone else that follows him. And there they will stay.

In this series on Revelation, I've been reading *The Returning King* by Vern Poythress, *The Book of Revelation* by Robert Mounce, and listening to sermons by Rev. Arturo Azurdia and Rev. Dave Silvernail. I'm especially indebted to Rev. Azurdia for the description of the second beast and the good cop/ bad cop illustration.