

The Counterfeit Holy Spirit

Revelation 13:11-18

8/23/2015

The wolf in sheep's clothing. This is a biblical phrase that Jesus uses to talk about false prophets. In the Sermon on the Mount, He says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Jesus goes on to say that we will be able to recognize them by their fruits. A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit. Recognizing false prophets when we hear them is essential if we are going to avoid being swept away by every wind of doctrine that comes our way.

The past couple of sermons in Revelation have pointed out that Satan is a counterfeiter. We have seen that Satan has his own counterfeit trinity. The dragon is the counterfeit father; the first beast of the sea is the counterfeit son, and the second beast from the land is the counterfeit holy spirit. Everything that this second beast does is a counterfeit of what the Holy Spirit does.

For instance, in verse 12, we read that the second beast points back to the first beast so that all those on earth will worship the first beast. The true version is that the Holy Spirit always draws our attention back to Jesus Christ, the true Son of the Father. Just as the true Holy Spirit was always closely connected to the prophets, so also is the false holy spirit closely connected to the false prophets. Verse 13 shows us the great signs that the beast can perform. It imitates Elijah. Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume the offering on Mt. Carmel in the presence of the 400 priests of Baal. By some method or power, this second beast is able to call down some kind of fire from heaven. The ancient pagans believed that a true prophet could be proven to be a true prophet if there was a bolt of lightning that came down from Zeus or another one of the ancient gods. So the fire from heaven is a counterfeit of Elijah, and also plays on the people's expectations regarding a prophet of Zeus. The beast also breathes life into dead things, just as the Holy Spirit gives life to those who are spiritually dead. Also, the second beast puts a mark or seal on all those who belong to the first beast and to the dragon, just as the Holy Spirit seals us and marks us as belonging to God. So this second beast is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit.

There are four methods by which this counterfeit holy spirit deceives

people into worshipping the first beast. The first method is by putting on a great show. Impress people, and they will want to worship. The more impressive the sounds and lights are, the more likely people are to bow down and worship the first beast. The mortal wound which appears to be healed, and the great signs of verse 13, including the fire from heaven in verse 12, these are all a great show that will distract people from recognizing the truth: that it is all a sham. It is an imitation of the prophets of God in the Old Testament. Elijah did some of these things. Moses did others. Obviously, the second beast is trying to imitate the true prophets, so as to look as harmless as possible.

The second method that the counterfeit holy spirit uses is the institution of a personality cult. The image of the first beast is used for this. It is made and then animated (this would involve sorcery of some kind, something no respectable ruler would ever do, unless sorcery became very normal, like how it is regarded in the West today). This image not only commands worship from people, but the animated image also kills those who do not worship it.

That is, of course, the third method that the beast uses to try to compel us to worship the first beast: force. The second beast institutes a reign of terror. It seems fairly certain that if the second beast is willing to kill people who do not worship the first beast, then it is willing to do any number of other things as well, by way of torture.

The fourth method that the beast uses is that of economic control. Everyone who worships the beast receives a mark. No one can trade in any region controlled by the beast, unless he has this mark.

What is the mark, we might ask? It is probably not a physical mark that is put on a body. Remember that it is a counterfeit of the true seal of the Holy Spirit. The background for this mark comes from what the Old Testament says about the law. It says that we should put it on our foreheads and on our hearts, and on our hands. In other words, God's law should be as close as possible to those areas of our lives that need it. God's law should be in our minds, our hearts, and our wills, so that we do these things. Some Jews took the command literally, and made what are called phylacteries. All too often, however, they used these outward decorations as a way of ignoring what the law really said. The mark of the beast, however, is used to exclude all Christians from the marketplace. As one very relevant example,

we can look at the various Christian business owners who have refused to cater to the LGBT community. They are sued for so much money that they have to give up their business. In other words, they don't have the mark of worshiping the state. This principle will extend in America until the only people left that Christians can buy from is other Christians. The mark means ultimately two things: what a person believes and what a person does. The mark of the beast means, therefore, that a person is completely committed to the first beast in his mind. This is what he believes: it is on his forehead. But the mark is also on his hand, because his actions also worship the first beast (and by extension the dragon). So, for the Christian, he is marked in his forehead by the Holy Spirit: what he believes. And he is marked in his hand: what he does.

Notice also that the second beast is quite the equal opportunity slave-driver. In verse 16, it becomes quite clear that neither fame (great or small), nor money (rich or poor), nor social class (slave or free) are sufficient to keep one away from Satan's kingdom. It is very important to remember that this must also be true of God's people. Of course, the two kingdoms are very different. Satan's kingdom exists to enslave us to Satan, who is the harshest tyrant of all. God's kingdom exists to bring glory and honor to God by freeing us from Satan's tyranny and making us servants of God, which the Bible always describes as true freedom.

Well, we have looked at what the mark of the beast is, but we could still get a clearer picture of who this second beast of the land is. Verse 18 gives us some clues, but they are mysterious clues. Verse 18 is probably the most debated passage in all of Revelation. Theories abound as to who this person is, whose number is 666. The first thing we need to do is exercise great caution. Where there is great disagreement even among Bible-believing Christians, and even among Reformed Bible-believing Christians, we must be very cautious. For instance, we should not jump straight from this text to our newspaper, and say, "there is 666, right there!" Never forget that this is God's Word, and it has a wide application for all of God's people in all the ages of the church. I will tell you what I think the verse means, but do remember that this is a cautious conclusion.

There is a translation issue which has a rather dramatic impact on the meaning of the verse. The NKJV says "for it is the number of a man." I believe that the Greek should be translated, "for it is a human number," or

“for it is the number of humanity.” In other words, the verse does not have to be referring to a single man. It could be referring to a group of people. It could be referring to examples of a type of person.

The second thing I want for us to notice is the context. We have been seeing that John is revealing for us a counterfeit trinity. The dragon himself is Satan. The first beast is government taken over by Satan for the purposes of tyranny. The second beast draws attention to the first beast. If the first beast is the Satanic state, then the second beast is Satanic religion that has false prophecy, and which has its life breathed into it by this counterfeit holy spirit.

This leads us away from the suggestion that it is any one particular person. The elements of what we have seen so far can be summarized this way: the beast directs people to worship the Satanic state; the beast is religious; the beast is human, and yet craves to be God. I believe, therefore, that all of these things are summarized in this number 666. As we know, the number 7 is symbolic of perfection. If we had three sevens, then we could be referring to the real Trinity: a triune perfection. 6 is the number that falls short of the perfect number seven. And this beast does so three times. In other words, it is very good at falling short. It does so very consistently! So the second beast is fallen humanity striving to be God, calling for us to worship and serve the created order rather than the Creator. This beast wants to focus all our attention and worship on things and people that are created. They do not want any genuine worship of the true God to happen at all.

So, what difference does this make in our lives? The big issue here is which side we're on. But let us put it in the terms of the passage. We have seen, for instance, that there are two marks. There is the mark of the beast, and there is the seal of the Holy Spirit. Which mark do you bear? This mark shows your allegiance. Does the world welcome you with open arms? You should tremble if it does! The end result of having the mark of the beast is tragic. It is nothing less than eternal condemnation in Hell. Chapter 20 makes it quite plain that our allegiance is either with the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet; or, our allegiance is with the Lamb, having our names written down in the Lamb's book of life. The good news here is that our allegiance can be changed from Satan to God. God has a big eraser. He can erase the mark of the beast that we naturally carry within ourselves. And God can put a new mark there. It is the mark of true faith. A visual reminder

of this invisible mark is what baptism is all about. Baptism does not mean salvation, mind you. It is a mark of God's promises that if you do have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved for eternity.

Here is another way of putting the same question from our text: are you going to worship the image of the first beast, or not? Remember that this image of the first beast is very convincing. It will be difficult to resist. It's not as though it will be easy to spot. The temptation here will be to worship the state. The state is god, according to many people today in America. They believe that the state should run everyone's lives, and that the state knows far more about how to live than any person. I once read a rather astounding statement from R.J. Rushdoony, to the effect that it is only Christians who can live truly free. Unbelievers, he says, do not want true freedom, because true freedom means exercising responsibility. The natural fallen man does not want to be responsible for his actions. Hence, he would much rather be a slave, and therefore he would not have the blame either. He doesn't have to think. He can simply go on mindlessly consuming the entertainment that the state doles out to him. This is what he thinks is true freedom, but it is in fact slavery. And the slavery is all the more hideous because it tries to be invisible.

We need to shake off the shackles by which the first and second beast are always trying to enslave us. To do that, we need wisdom, as verse 18 says. This calls for wisdom. We need to see properly, in order to avoid the enslavement. Then, we need to have the right mark, as we have already said. Furthermore, we need to pray that God would show us not only what the first and second beast are in our own context, but also how to fight its influence in our lives, whether in large or small things. This is how we follow the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who is no wolf in sheep's clothing.