

Imagine with me that our government of Canada announces a new law. They are going to get rid of debit cards, credit cards and cash. Instead, they will introduce a brand new “everything card” or E card. It will reduce fraud and protect consumers. The E card would be linked to your bank account and credit history. You will need the E-card to buy or sell. Companies need E-cards to receive payment and pay out employees. Citizens need them to receive their pay and buy what they need. Anyone can get an E-card. You only need to sign an agreement to 3 statements. “I agree to affirm the values of the government of Canada. I will abide by the government’s decisions. I promise to obey any new law the government puts in place. So if you affirm the government’s values live according to its decisions and promise to obey future laws, you’re good. Three simple statements – your signature at the bottom gets you an E-card. What would you do?

Without an E-card, you can’t go to a store and buy anything. You can’t get groceries or clothes or gas or the internet at home or pay for your heat in the winter. You can’t get a phone plan or go to a college or university or get paid at work or book a hotel for a vacation. If you don’t get this E-card, your life will be turned completely upside down. All you have to do is sign that statement. What would you do?

Well though this might seem like a far-fetched scenario, it has happened again and again in our world. Of course the form is different but the principle is the same. It happened in Babylon about 2500 years ago when it was the world’s superpower. The book of Daniel talks about King Nebuchadnezzar building a massive statue. He commanded that whenever the royal band played, everyone had to stop what they were doing and bow down to the statue. If you didn’t, you would be thrown into a fiery furnace and killed. You can read about that event in Daniel 3. Or late in the first century, the Romans ruled the Mediterranean world. They had developed something called emperor cult. Basically, it required everyone in the Empire to acknowledge that Caesar was god or Lord. All you had to do was confess this to be true when asked. “Do you confess that Caesar is Lord?” Answer “yes” and you can go on with your life. Answer “no” and you’d be arrested, and maybe killed.

But something like that would not happen today right? Well, I don’t think it would happen in the same way. Although in some countries of the world, if you resist or dissent with the central government, you do get arrested or disappear for your dissent. But in a democracy such as ours this appears to be impossible. Yet, maybe there is a more

subtle way that this could be done. You could promote new values through the media – news; opinion shows, movies, songs, shows on TV. You could legalize new values thereby giving them the honor of protection under law. Then as the majority of people begin to live under and accept these values, you can put down dissent through peer pressure; name calling; belittling; intimidation; mocking and maybe a few charges or court cases. Then anyone who holds a different view is scared into silence or harassed to exhaustion or shut down the moment they express something different.

Maybe that could happen. Maybe that is happening. Maybe that has happened. Maybe we have woken up to a society where Christianity is marginalized and mocked. Maybe we now live in a country where the majority of people see the Bible as irrelevant, mistaken and out of date. We might not be as far removed from living under Babylon or Rome as we thought.

We're not the first Christians to face this because this appears to be one of the enemy's strategies. Last week we were reminded that we have an enemy called the dragon in Revelation or the devil in other parts of the Bible. He looks for people to devour or bring under his rule. When he finds one of God's people, he wages war against us. Yet we also discovered last week that God continually defeats the devil. So we can resist him by the power of God and Gospel.

Today's passage in Revelation reveals more of the enemy's strategy. It contains a prediction of what will happen in the very last days prior to the return of Christ. It prepares Christians to face those days with courage and confidence. Yet I think we can also discern some ways the devil works even today against people and against us. Specifically we will see how the dragon exercises power and wages war. Though it won't be pretty, it will be important to discover how we can then stand in the midst of this war. My prayer for today is that you will discover ways in which the enemy fights against you and your loved ones. That you will be better equipped to pray against his strategy. But that you will be encouraged by God's help to persevere and overcome through the enemy's assaults. So let us open our hearts and minds to God and His Word as we come to it now in Revelation 13.

Revelation 13 (ESV)

13 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ²And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

⁵And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. ⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

¹⁰If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

¹¹Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹²It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.¹⁵And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. ¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸This 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.

At the end of Revelation 12, the dragon or the devil stands on the sand of the sea. He has been thrown down to earth from his place in heaven. His rebellion against God has failed. So now he goes off to make war against the woman's offspring or the people of God. To accomplish this, he calls up or raises up two beasts to carry out this war.

The first beast rises from the sea. It has ten horns and seven heads. The dragon also had seven heads and ten horns back in Revelation 12:3. But there the dragon had crowns on the seven heads. Here the beast has crowns on its horns. Since horns were often symbolize power, this indicates the beast rules through force or might. John also tells us that on the seven heads were blasphemous names.

Who is this beast? I agree with commentators who argue for multiple fulfillments of prophecy. I think there could have been an immediate fulfillment of this reality for John's readers in the beast of the Roman Empire. Rome was powerful, forceful and fierce. It demanded obedience and tribute from every territory under its rule. It also demanded loyalty to the emperor. So for John's readers, the beast could have been Rome. But I also think this predicts that in the

very last days there will be an ultimate beast of some sort. It could be a person or a movement or a government or some dominant world power.

In verse 2, John further describes the beast. It looks like a leopard, with bear's feet and a lion's mouth. That sounds pretty weird doesn't it? Yet back in Daniel 7, the Old Testament prophet sees a vision of four beasts. The first was like a lion. The second like a bear. The third was like a leopard. And the fourth was a terrifying, dreadful and exceedingly strong beast. Later in Daniel 7, we're told each beast was a king and represented a kingdom. So it seems John has combined all four of these beasts into one in an attempt to describe what he saw. His description portrays the fiercest and most powerful beast the world has ever seen.

At the end of verse 2, John tells us the dragon gave his power, throne and great authority to the beast. We have talked about how the devil has some power and authority on this earth. Remember when he tempted Jesus and showed him the kingdoms of the world? He said He would give Jesus these kingdoms if Jesus would bow down to him. So the devil has some significant earthly power that he gives to the beast.

Then in verse 3, we have something strange. "One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed." In fact, the text says "one of the heads looked as though slain." Does that sound familiar? Remember back in Revelation 5 in the scene of God's throne room? An angel asks "who is worthy to open the scroll that God holds?" No one is found. John begins to weep until the Elder says to John "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." So John looks and expects to see a lion. But he saw a Lamb standing as though slain."

The beast has a head that looks as though slain. So it's almost like the devil creates this beast that kind of looks like Christ. This look impresses people for the whole world marvels at the end of verse 3. They not only marvel, they follow. They not only follow, they worship. Verse 4, "And they worshipped the dragon, and they worshipped the beast." If I'm the dragon who wants to rebel against God and take his place, I might say "mission accomplished" in Revelation 13:4. The world worships me." But why do they worship?

End of verse 4. "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it," say the people. Does that sound like people worshipping because they just adore the beast and all he has done? Yes they did marvel at the wound but they seem to

worship because they're afraid. "Who is like it? Who can fight it?" The conclusion is "no one." Therefore we better worship it so we can save our lives.

Then the beast begins to speak. Verse 5 – "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words." Haughty means proud or arrogant. Blasphemous means either slandering God or claiming to be God. Verse 6 lays out the target of the beast's blasphemies – God, His name and His dwelling place or those in heaven. So the beast speaks against God perhaps calling him less than God or dead or defeated. It maybe mocks God's supremacy. It slanders God's character. It speaks evil of all that He is and stands for. It maybe gets people to use God's name in vain – or reduce the name of Jesus to nothing more than a common curse word.

With its fearsome appearance, great power and blasphemous mouth, it thinks it now rules without any fear of God. So it wages war against God's people in verse 7. In fact, it conquers them. Didn't we say earlier that because of Christ we can overcome and conquer the devil? Yes. Back in Revelation 12:11 John writes "And they (the brothers and sisters) have conquered him (the dragon) by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives even unto death." So believers ultimately can conquer the devil by Christ's sacrifice or blood that protects their souls and by their testimony or remaining true to Christ even if it costs them their lives. So the beast cannot capture our souls or kill our faith. But he may kill our bodies. God's faithful witnesses get killed in Revelation. Many readers in the first century knew this to be a possibility if they were asked to swear the oath to Caesar.

Now this looks like it's a pretty bleak time. Yet in the midst of this bleak reality there is hope. Notice in verse 5 it says – And the beast was given a mouth to utter blasphemy. It was allowed to exercise authority. Verse 7 – It was allowed to make war on the saints. And authority was given it over every tribe. There are limits and controls put on this creature. It rules for only 42 months. It works only with permission or with something given. Though it doesn't directly say so, we see God's hand over it all. Even during this terrible time, God will reign supreme. Even during our terrible times, God is at work and accomplishing His purposes.

So by the end of the description of the first beast in verse 8, it seems like the dragon succeeds. "And all who dwell on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." The beast is so irresistible, that only those protected by God can resist worshipping it.

So in this first beast, we see one way the dragon exercises power and wages war on people. **He rules with intimidation and blasphemy.** It's almost like he's a tyrant ruler who demands worship. He scares people into submission. Then he blasphemes God with apparent immunity so that people conclude there's no one greater. Satan does the same with people today. Why are we seeing an epidemic of fear and anxiety? I think the reason is the devil has succeeded in his campaign to blaspheme God. With no good God, how else can we live but in fear? There's two kinds of fear. The good kind is reverent respect of the Lord and His power while remembering his deep love and care. The bad kind is the paralyzing fear of the unknown or uncertainty. Insecurity and anxiety follows in running after the solutions of the world. Yet Jesus, in the darkest, most disturbing moment of the disciple's lives says "let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me." If some fear consumes your heart today, you must bring it to Jesus and to God who are much bigger than anything you face. With them you can overcome the devil's intimidation and blasphemy.

The vision continues with another beast rising this time from the earth. John tells us it had two horns like a lamb but it spoke like a dragon. So though it looked gentle or harmless, its voice gives it away. This second beast promotes worship of the first beast. It too receives authority. And in verse 13 it performs signs in front of people even calling fire down from heaven. Perhaps using dark powers it manipulates nature or spirits to perform these signs. Signs and wonders do not automatically point to God. Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 – For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray if possible even the elect." Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth to be saved." This second beast, who is called the false prophet later in Revelation, fulfills this perfectly.

Back in Revelation 13 he performs these signs, in verse 14 "to deceive those who dwell on the earth." So the signs aim to deceive. They lie to people that the beast is actually god and worthy of worship. Once deceived, the false prophet instructs the people to make images of the first beast. There were all kinds of images of the Roman emperors – statues; coins; banners; flags. Verse 15 talks about the false prophet somehow causing those images to speak or seem to speak. Then those who did not worship the image were exposed and killed.

But the false prophet does not stop with images of the beast. He wants to impose beast worship into the very fabric of life. So every person must be marked on the right hand or forehead. To ensure that people follow through with this, no one can buy or sell without this mark. What could this mark be?

In ancient times, there were different marks that people got on their bodies. Disobedient slaves and defeated soldiers were branded. People got tattoos of their preferred god. Some think this marking directly challenged the Jewish practice of wearing little boxes containing the law on their foreheads and left arms. Whatever it was, John tells us at the end of verse 17 that the mark is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

So if we look at this second beast, we see another way the dragon wages war against people – **Through Deception and Peer Pressure**. Deceive people about the truth. Get them to buy into a lie. Then get them to influence others so that the majority begin to believe the lie. Then require everyone to get a mark that affirms the lie. Make the mark essential by requiring it to buy and sell. By deception and peer pressure, the dragon is worshipped.

Does this happen today? Well let's think about the area of relationships between single people. If you were to talk with people at the office or at the fitness club or in your class or on your team, what would they say would be the natural progression for any teenage relationship? You go out on a date. If the date goes really well, you maybe sleep together. Or you go out on another date and if it goes well, you certainly sleep together. Then if things keep going well, you move in together. Then if things continue to go well, maybe you get married. This is now considered pretty normal isn't it? You see it portrayed as normal on TV and in movies. That's just the way the enlightened modern crowd does things. And it's good right. It's so good to do things that way compared to that old way of like dating and then waiting until marriage before you actually do anything.

Listen to Henry Cloud comment on this in his book "Boundaries in Dating." "God's rule against sexual immorality is meant to preserve our lives, rather than take away our fun. Adhering to the rule keeps us pure and holy as we follow His will. Sex outside of marriage affects us in destructive ways. We lose control of our own bodies and take advantage of each other. We become more interested in running after things that satisfy our own desires than in pursuing our relationship with God. That always hurts us. When we give 100 percent of our bodies to someone to whom we have not given 100 percent of our hearts, minds, and souls (as in marriage), then we are splitting our body and the rest of us. Sex outside of a commitment creates splits inside of people.

The body is doing something that the rest of the person has not fully bought into. A lack of obedience is inevitably self-destructive in some way. The Bible always teaches morality in the bigger context of hurting and rejecting God, hurting oneself, and hurting others. Obedience serves to protect our lives and ensure a good life. Rules of moral conduct are not killjoys. They are the principles that undergird success in every part of life...including sex. Boundaries make life better!"¹

The devil is not interested in making our lives better. He's interested in ruling over and enslaving us. We will see how to resist this in a moment.

But we need to talk about one of the most famous and debated verses in Revelation and perhaps the whole Bible. 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." So there have been hundreds of proposals made to what this means or how you can use it to identify the beast. Some think it must use an ancient science called *grammatia* where letters of the alphabet had numerical values. Therefore, you would take someone's name and add the numbers of their letters to determine their number. Many think they can get the wicked emperor Nero to fit into 666. Some think it was Hitler. Some think it was a pope or some other figure from history. But a lot of these calculations require great mathematical manipulation to get there. No consensus has been reached throughout the history of the church over this issue.

But I do tend to favor one interpretation. It relates to the number 7. We have seven over and over again throughout Revelation. It symbolizes completeness and maybe perfection. John uses 7 to describe God's judgments. John describes the Holy Spirit as 7 spirits. John associates 7 with God. And if we think of the Triune God, we would have three 7's – 777. So what is 666 compared to 777? It's close. It's almost perfect. It's a trinity that falls short of the true trinity. It's an unholy trinity.

This seems to be what the devil has done throughout this passage. **He imitates the Triune God to steal people's worship.** The first beast is given power and great authority like Jesus was given by the Father after the resurrection. It has what seems to be a mortal wound that was healed – like the Lamb looking as if it had been slain. It causes people to ask questions they asked of God – "Who is like the beast and who can fight against it?" It was given authority over every nation just like Jesus after His resurrection. Yet this beast is grotesque. It gains worship not by loving and sacrificing for

¹ This devotional is drawn from [Boundaries in Dating](#), by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.

the people. It forces them to worship. It utters blasphemies against God and seeks worship. It's no wonder it is often referred to as the anti-Christ.

The second beast resembles the Holy Spirit. It exercises authority of the first beast like the Spirit acts on the authority of Christ. It directs earth's inhabitants to worship the beast with the healed mortal wound like the Spirit directs worshippers to worship Christ the Lamb who was slain. It performs great signs like the Spirit performed signs to convince people of Christ's authentic mission. Yet this beast deceives. It does not guide people into truth. The sea beast frightens people into obedience. The land beast deceives people into obedience. Along with the dragon, they form the unholy trinity that will have a short reign in the last days.

How can we resist these tactics of the dragon?

By God's strength, stand firm through the persecution. Did you notice verses 9-10? "If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes. If anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword he must be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." Remaining true to Christ until we die or He returns is a tremendous resistance against the dragon.

In the last days, the beast may conquer by killing. But faithfulness to the end is more important. Though we might think that's asking a lot, God calls forth the same from us today. When we face death, we aren't excused to give up the faith. Those who are truly Christ's remain faithful to the end.

By God's wisdom and word, cut through the deception. Verse 18. "This calls for wisdom." Though everyone else may get this mark, don't get it. Though everyone else is doing it, don't do it. But how do we know what not to get or what not to do? Through God's Word and God's wisdom. Beware of believing everything the humanistic culture tells you is good.

Choose who you will worship – the dragon or the one true God. You might be here today and have thought this whole thing is kind of crazy. You may ask yourself "Does the dragon really wage war against me? My life is pretty good or at peace." That could mean one of three things. One - God has graciously given you a season of peace. So rest in it and renew during it for the next battle is coming. Two – We're not engaged in anything that concerns the devil. Three - We're actually following the devil and living under his kingdom.

Many of you here today walk faithfully day by day with the Lord. You don't live some dramatic, popular life that millions follow on social media. You put one foot in front of the other each day as you follow your Lord. You are standing firm in the faith and continuing to grow in His wisdom. Should these days come during your lifetime, you will be prepared and aware. Others might be wavering or wandering. You're wondering which way to go. The beast looks pretty powerful and flashy and fun. Christ looks boring and irrelevant. But it is only Christ who has your best in mind. It is only Christ who sacrificed Himself for you while the dragon wants you to sacrifice yourself for him. Make today a day where you redirect your life back to the Lord and His ways. Maybe some of you have never followed Him. Today God has opened the eyes of your heart. Turn away from the dragon's oppressive rule and turn to your Savior's reign of love.