

# 666 ~ The Mark Of The Beast

Long Beach Alliance Church • June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 • Pastor Chris Lankford

***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.***

***~Revelation 13:18 (ESV)***

## **1) The Anti-Ministry Of The Earthly Beast**

- A) The call for trust in the blood of Jesus (Revelation 12:11) in hope and perseverance (13:10) centers both the chapter and the horrible descriptions of the “two beasts!”
- B) Revelation 13:11-18, describes the final member of the “anti-trinity,” the “beast from the earth” (13:11, cf. 13:1). John’s vision begins typically with, “[and] then I saw...”
- C) Like the first beast (13:1, Daniel 7-8), this beast also mimics Jesus (horns) as an earthly alternative to God (13:11).
- D) While the first beast is characterized by global strength and influence, the second beast is typified by intoxicating political power and verbal eloquence (13:11-12). The second beast is also named “the false prophet” (16:13, 19:20).
- E) The connection between the dragon, first beast, and false prophet are intimate, even interlocking at times (12:15-17, 13:5-6, 13-15), marked by fantastic demonic miracles.
- F) Those committed to the culture of the anti-trinity bear the invisible “mark of the beast” (13:16-18). In contrast to the “777” of Christ (cf. 5:6), the anti-trinity is marked by “666.”



**“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**  
**Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

## **Growth Group Homework**



### **Powering Up**

1. What observations from this weekend’s message, “666 – The Mark of the Beast,” did you find the most interesting or challenging? Have any questions? Share with your group.
2. **Mesmerizing!** Who is the most inspiring speaker you’ve ever listened to? Why? Share with your group.



### **Digging In**

3. Last week we learned verse 10 is the central theme of Revelation chapter 13. Despite the two powerful beasts (the Antichrist and the False Prophet), the people of God in the End Times are called to perseverance and faithfulness. But how do they live this way in the midst of such unprecedented persecution? The answer is in Revelation’s primary theme, focused in its central verse. Read 12:11 again. The only way to remain loyal to God and endure the tribulation facing them is for saints to live by “the blood of the Lamb.” After discussing this concept two weeks ago, we have clarity on how this phrase is connected with Jesus ransoming believers from death through His crucifixion and resurrection. That’s Gospel (literally: the good news) truth! But, this aspect is not *all* of the Gospel. What other “good news” about Jesus is there? How do those other facets help to answer how the Christian can persevere faithfully, despite overwhelming opposition?



“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)  
Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013

## A Handout To Help With “Atonement and the Gospel”

### “Atonement”

The word “atonement” (often referred to as ‘substitutionary atonement’) should be understood as a rich multi-layered term which is a capstone description of several contributing actions of God (including substitution, justification, reconciliation, propitiation, and expiation). **Substitution** means that Christ’s life is substituted for the life of the repentant sinner. Christ pays the penalty for sin (which He did not deserve or earn) and the repentant sinner enjoys the benefits of salvation and becoming a child of God (which mankind does not deserve or earn). **Justification** is God’s declaration that the faithful are “sinless,” which Christ’s substitution provides (cf. Romans 3:21-26). **Reconciliation** is the restoration of the relationship between God and His creation (including His people). **Propitiation** understands the life and death of Christ in terms of a sacrifice which brings about the turning of God’s wrath from mankind, allowing for reconciliation. **Expiation** is making amends for sin, it is more impersonal than Propitiation, but is also within the scope of the atonement. By themselves, Propitiation and Expiation declares a sinner as “not guilty,” which is why Justification is incredibly significant, since it actually declares the faithful as genuinely “righteous.” The Jewish “Day of Atonement,” (from the Old Testament), through its various movements, accomplished these many things. Further, Christ’s blood sacrifice at crucifixion accomplishes a “better” (Hebrews 10) atonement because of Christ’s complete holiness, a sufficient and perfect atonement for sin. The atonement, when practically applied (like the word itself) has great diversity.

But this is not the “whole” of the Gospel (another capstone description).

### “The Gospel”

The Gospel provides for the conversion of people (a right relationship with God – Loving God). Additionally, the Gospel provides for transformation (a right relationship with self and others – Loving Others). Finally, the Gospel provides for renovation (a right relationship with culture and the world – Serving the World).

While this is modified a bit for our purposes here, the following short article “The Meaning of the Gospel,” by Pastor Tim Keller is very helpful:

#### CONVERSION~

We are not reconciled to God through our efforts and record, as in all other religions, but through His efforts and record. Christians who trust in Christ for their acceptance with God, rather than in their own moral character, commitment, or performance, are “simul iustus et peccator” – simultaneously sinful yet accepted. We are more flawed and sinful than we



## **“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)** **Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

ever dared believe, yet we are more loved and accepted than we ever dared hope at the same time.

Without this unique understanding of grace-salvation, religions have to paint God as either a demanding, holy God who is placated by back-breaking moral effort, or as what C.S. Lewis calls ‘a senile, old benevolence’ who tolerates everyone no matter how they live. The problem is that if I think I have a relationship with God because I am living morally according to his standards, it does not move me to the depths to think of my salvation. I earned it. There is no joy, amazement, or tears. I am not galvanized and transformed from the inside. On the other hand, if I think I have a relationship with God because the Divine just embraces us all, no matter what how we live – that also does not move me to the depths. I simply have the attitude of Voltaire, who, on his deathbed famously said, “Of course God forgives—that’s his job.” Any effort to take away the idea of Christ’s substitutionary atonement and replace it with a moralism (i.e., being moral, working for others, imitating Jesus) robs the Gospel of its power to change us from the inside out.

The Gospel is, therefore, radically different from religion. Religion operates on the principle: “I obey, therefore I am accepted”. The Gospel operates on the principle: “I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey.” So the Gospel differs from both religion and irreligion. Not only can you seek to be your own ‘lord and savior’ by breaking the law of God (i.e., through irreligion), you can also do so by keeping the law in order to earn your salvation (i.e., through religion). A lack of deep belief in the Gospel is the main cause of spiritual deadness, fear, and pride in Christians, because our hearts continue to act on the basis “I obey, therefore, I am accepted.”

If we fail to forgive others—that is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to believe we are saved by grace, too. If we lie in order to cover up a mistake—that is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to find our acceptance in God rather than in human approval. So we do not ‘get saved’ by believing the Gospel and then ‘grow’ by trying hard to live according to Biblical principles. Believing the Gospel is not only the way to meet God, but also the way to grow into him.

### **TRANSFORMATION~**

The Gospel is the good news of changed lives. Paul says to Christians, ‘your life is hid with “Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3), and in numerous places he says that we are now ‘in on the one hand, that the Father accepts us in Christ and treats us as if we had done all that Jesus has done (cf. Colossians 3:2a). But this also means Christ’s life comes into us by the Spirit and shapes us into a new kind of person. The Gospel is not just a truth about us that we affirm with our minds, it is also a reality we must experience in our hearts and souls.



## **“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**

### **Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

For example, In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul wants the people to give an offering to the poor. He says, “I don’t want to order you. I don’t want this offering to simply be the response to my demand.” He doesn’t put pressure directly on the will (saying ‘I’m an apostle and this is your duty to me!’) nor pressure directly on the emotions (telling them stories about how much the poor are suffering and how much more they have than the sufferers). Instead, Paul vividly and unforgettably says, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8:9). When he says ‘you know the grace’ – he uses a powerful image, bringing Jesus’ salvation into the realm of money and wealth and poverty. He moves them by a ‘spiritual recollection’ of the Gospel. Paul is saying, ‘Think on his costly grace. Think on that grace until you are changed into generous people by the Gospel in your hearts.’

So the solution to stinginess is a re-orientation to the generosity of Christ in the Gospel, where he poured out his wealth for you. Now you don’t have to worry about money – the cross proves God’s care for you and gives you security. Now you don’t have to envy any one else’s money. Jesus’ love and salvation confers on you a remarkable status—one that money cannot give you.

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians 5:25ff, where he urges husbands to be faithful to their wives. What is the point? What makes you a sexually faithful spouse, a generous-not avaricious-person, a good parent and/or child is not just redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ. Rather, it is deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding makes in your heart – the seat of your mind, will, and emotions.

Faith in the Gospel re-structures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting. The Gospel changes your heart.

### **RENOVATION~**

The Gospel is the good news of the new world coming. The plot-line of the Bible is: 1) God created the world, 2) The world and humanity fell into sin and decay, 3) But God sends his Son to redeem the world and create a new humanity, and 4) Eventually the whole world will be renewed. Death, decay, injustice, and suffering will be all removed.

The Gospel then is not just about individual happiness and fulfillment. It is not just a wonderful plan for ‘my life’ but a wonderful plan for the world. It is about the coming of God’s kingdom to renew everything. Gospel-centered churches do not only urge individuals to be converted, but also to seek peace and justice in our cities and in our world



## **“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)** **Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth via giving all away. Those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those who admit that they are weak and lost. This pattern creates an ‘alternate kingdom’ or ‘city’ (Matthew 5:14-16), in which there is a complete reversal of the values of the world with regard to power, recognition, status, and wealth.

When we understand that we are saved by sheer grace through Christ, we stop seeking salvation in these things. The reversal of the cross [the power of the Gospel], therefore, liberates us from bondage to the power of material things and worldly status in our lives. The Gospel, therefore, creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition – all these things are marks of living in the world, and are the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26).

### **CONCLUSION~**

All of these are important ‘perspectives’ on the Gospel. The first stresses the doctrinal content of the Gospel. The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ died and rose for our salvation in history. The second stresses the personal individual impact of the Gospel. The Gospel is a transforming grace that changes our hearts and inmost motives. The third stresses the social impact of the Gospel. The Gospel brings a new ‘order’ in which believers no longer are controlled by material goods or worldly status and have solidarity with others across customary social barriers. These 3 three ‘perspectives’ are all Biblical and should be kept together. There is a tendency for Christians and churches to focus on just one of these perspectives and ignore the others. However they are inseparable and inter-dependent on one another.

For example, if you stress the social perspective to the exclusion of others, you might call loudly for social justice, but your life will not convert people and give them the changed lives they need to persevere, humbly serving the needs of the poor. If you stress the doctrinal perspective to the exclusion of the experiential and social, you might have a life that is doctrinally accurate but it will not produce changed lives, so why should anyone believe your doctrine? If you over-stress the personal perspective, you might ‘psychologize’ the Gospel so that it is presented as strictly a way for an individual to overcome his or her guilt and unhappiness. But, it will not get the person out of him or herself – which is what you need most to be happy. We were built by God for service. All three perspectives are necessary. This full approach to the Gospel creates a church that does not fit neatly into the traditional ‘conservative/sectarian’ nor ‘liberal/mainline’ categories.

The Gospel is the dynamic for all heart-change, life-change, and social-change. Change won’t happen through ‘trying harder’ but only through encountering with the radical grace of God.





**“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**  
**Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

*In the lives of many Christians, “the Gospel” is simply telling people about forgiveness and calling for conversion. Of course, it is this, but only in one sense of the word. The Gospel invites us to a great deal more. The Gospel is not just a moment in our lives, the embracing of salvation alone. The Gospel is not just a part of being a Christian, it is the whole. Like salvation, we are always exploring and working-out the Gospel message, its power, its implications in our lives.*

*This is what it means to be overcomes “because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death” (Revelation 12:11). The blood of Jesus Christ provides salvation, and so much more. It is both the beginning, the middle, and the future (cf. Revelation 14:6, the permanency of the Gospel).*

*We are saved because of the blood of Christ, we live our lives according to the blood of Christ, we have resurrection hope because of the blood of Christ, and our eternity is destined for a radical experience of God through the blood of Christ. For the “born again,” the Gospel is our lives, and our lives are given to the purposes of the Gospel.*



## **A Handout To Help With #4 ~ “The Everyday Gospel”**

4. **The Everyday Gospel.** “The Gospel” is all of the good news regarding Jesus Christ, and so it’s not a part of Christianity; it encompasses all of it! Understanding how the good news of Jesus can permeate even the mundane aspects of our lives can be tricky. Consider each scenario below. How would you “live out the Gospel” in each circumstance?
- a. A reckless driver cuts you off while you are driving on the freeway!
  - b. Guests are arriving at your house soon, and you’ve just discovered you’re out of salt & pepper. You could call your guests to pick up the salt & pepper on their way to your house, but you don’t want to appear unprepared. So, despite being short on time, you run to Ralph’s to grab salt & pepper, and race back to your home. A few minutes later, the lady in front of your Ralph’s check-out line is not only slow and over-talkative, but you notice she has way more than “only 10 items” despite the clear sign right in front of you!
  - c. A coworker arrives late to a company meeting, not having completed the assignment you had asked him to prepare 2 weeks ago.

*The good news of Jesus Christ is that He speaks into each of these situations! God is not too small, powerless, unconcerned, or lacking in compassion to work through even mundane aspects of our lives that don’t feel significant or spiritual. He sees it all, and works through it all! As your GG members discuss these scenarios, guide them into deeper waters. Don’t let your GG settle for answers like “I guess I should just love everybody,” but seek the deeper spiritual realities of what the Gospel means for our lives! The following options are adapted from an article by Elyse Fitzpatrick entitled, “The Transforming Power of the Gospel.”*

*In relationship to the previous “scenarios” which were presented, how do we live according to the Gospel (Revelation 12:11 – blood of Christ, witness to His blood, without regard for our own lives... Revelation 13:10 – perseverance & faith)? What are the available options?*

- Option #1: If I’m a **happy moralist**, I’ll assure myself that my anger is “righteous” because the person is not obeying the rules like I do. I’ll remain angry but feel better about it.
- Option #2: If I’m a **sad moralist**, I’ll recognize that my anger isn’t righteous because I’m not loving my neighbor and I’m angry because of my idolatry. I’ll feel both guilty and angry, but now I’ll despair because it seems as though I’ll never change – no matter how hard I keep trying.





**“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**  
**Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Option #3: If I’ve been thinking about the salvation without considering the rest of the Gospel, I’ll despair even more because I’ll know that Jesus suffered for this sin and I’ll be **sad, guilty and despairing** thinking about how much pain He endured on my account. In this case the Gospel doesn’t elevate my soul, it results in crushing me.

Option #4: If I’m seeking to live in the light of **The Whole Gospel**, my heart will seek spiritual solutions to life’s problems by being transformed in the following aspects of the Gospel:

Gospel Aspect #1: Because of the **incarnation**, Jesus Christ knows exactly what it is to live in a sin-cursed world with people who break the rules... like me. I am a rule-breaker, but He’s loved me and he’s experienced every trial I face. He’s with me. He sympathizes with my weakness (Hebrews 4:15). This understanding of His love in the face of my sin drains my anger at my rule-breaking neighbor. I can love because I’ve been loved and I am just like my neighbor.

Gospel Aspect #2: Because of His **sinless life**, I now have a perfect record of loving my neighbor. He perfectly loved rule-breakers. This record of perfect love for my rule-breaking neighbor is mine now; knowing this relieves my guilt. Even though I continue to fail to love, His record is mine.

Gospel Aspect #3: Because of His **substitutionary atonement**, I am completely forgiven for my sin... even the sins that I seem to fall into at the slightest provocation. God has no wrath left for me because He poured it all out on His Son. He’s not disappointed or irritated. He welcomes me as a beloved child.

Gospel Aspect #4: Because of His **resurrection**, I know that the power of sin in my life has been broken. Yes, I’ve failed again, but I can have the courage to continue to fight sin because I’m no longer a slave to it. This replaces despair with faith to wage war against my selfishness and pride.

Gospel Aspect #5: Because of His **ascension and reign**, I know that this situation isn’t a mere chance happening. He’s orchestrated it so that I will remember Him and be blessed by the Gospel again. He’s ruling over my life and interceding for me right now. I’m not a slave to chaos or chance. He’s my Sovereign King and I can rest in His loving plan today and rejoice in Him.



**“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**  
**Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Gospel Aspect #6: And, because of His **promised return and secure future**, I know that all the doubt, injustice, and struggle will one day come to an end. my plans aren't all there are in life. There's the great good news of the Gospel. I can go from these situations and share with my family and guests how Jesus met me in my mundane life and we can rejoice together regarding His work on our behalf.

The whole message of the Gospel has the power to transform impatient, guilty, selfish, and despairing idolater (being committed to things which are not Gospel centered) into free and joyful worshippers of the Living God. The whole message of the Gospel includes His incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, ascension, reign, return, and future eternity. Seeing Jesus and His glorious work is the only power strong enough to transforms us from “one degree of glory to another” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18), or as John Owen (British church leader from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century) wrote, “Here in this life, beholding the glory of the Lord [true believers] are changed into his likeness. Hereafter they will be like Him for they will see Him as He is” (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2).

There is much to consider in light of the great news of Jesus Christ, the Gospel! This kind of distinctive Gospel life will supply us with refreshment and true dependent living on God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit!



**“666 – The Mark of the Beast” (Revelation 13)**  
**Week of June 2<sup>nd</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**



## **Connecting To Life**

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