

The Spiritual Mark of the Beast

Mark of the Beast

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Very frequently on the Holy Days I am reminded that somebody else is running the show. I think it was about two weeks ago that one of the elders mentioned to me that he was thinking about speaking on "peace," and he did not go into any detail at all about it. He just said that is what he was thinking about giving. So I just filed it away in my mind. Actually that means that I forgot about it, and I went right ahead and prepared my own message.

As he was giving his sermon this morning, I found that he was speaking on a subject that is very close to what I prepared, and mine is just simply, as I would put it, "the other side of the coin" from what he spoke on this morning. I am not talking about peace, but about war. I am not really talking about war per se, but rather at least one of those things that makes for "no" peace.

Revelation 13:16-17 And he [the false prophet] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

It was back in the late 1950s or in the early 1960s that Herbert Armstrong published a booklet titled, *The Mark of the Beast*. I can remember reading it, thinking it made a great deal of sense, and then filing it into my mind as a truth. I had read other peoples' speculations previous to reading Herbert Armstrong's booklet, but I know that I remained unsure about what I was reading. Maybe the word would better be described as *mystified* about what I was actually reading there. But after reading his booklet, I felt that the others, while they were undoubtedly sincere, were probably off base.

The speculations that are alive today are not much different from what we heard back then, except that in the meantime the age of the computer chips has arrived, transistors are being used in every place imaginable, and now they have become a part of the mix of speculations as being *amark* as something actually implanted inside the body.

Many find these things fascinating to study into, but I do not think that anybody has come up yet with anything better than what Herbert Armstrong wrote in that little booklet. He said basically that the Bible is a spiritual book, and the mark will be something with strong spiritual overtones—something that will be a contrast to the sign that Christians carry about them—the Sabbath. And so the *mark*, he said, will be the veneration of Sunday as the official day of worship and freedom from the normal workaday pursuits, and those observing Sunday, regardless of whether they do it from a religious standpoint or not, they will bear "the mark of the beast."

But I have a question. Is it possible that there is more to the mark than normally meets the eye?

It was the Emperor Constantine who established Sunday as the day of worship for the Roman Empire, and it has served that purpose for the majority of the western world right up to today. In other words, if Sunday is indeed "the mark," it already exists, and all of us have been under its influence to some degree simply by virtue of being born into the western world.

Is it possible that spiritually there is more here than a day of worship? I am coming to believe very much that there is. Is it possible that we, as in the case of Sunday, already have some of this mark impressed upon us?

I am going to take a bit of a different perspective on this mark that has stirred so many sermons, articles, and arguments through the years. I want to let you know that I am not the originator of this concept that I am going to be speaking on. I read about it over a year ago in an article by a Mike Summers. He has a church of God connection. He publishes a magazine called *Your Choice*, which I believe appears about four times a year. But I have expanded upon the concept that he showed in that article.

Herbert Armstrong made a clear biblical distinction between a "sign" as signifying something that one voluntarily accepts, and a "mark" as being something impressed or forced upon—something taken either unwillingly or unwittingly.

If you look at a dictionary you will find that *mark* has a very, very wide usage. We are only going to be interested in one aspect, and that is, *as* something that *identifies*, indicates *ownership*, and sometimes *family descent*.

A brand on an animal, as with cattle, identifies that cow as belonging to a certain rancher. Rulers and companies and states have seals. The Church of the Great God is the *seal*, according to the State of North Carolina, and also the federal government, that we carry about us. We might call it a trademark. We might call it a name, but they call it a seal, and that is also a sign.

Then there is the family characteristic aspect that may indicate family descent. I will tell you that there is a characteristic that the Ritenbaugh family carries. My grandfather had it, my father had it. It has been moderated just a little bit in me, and our oldest daughter has it very noticeably, i.e. there is a bump in our nose, and it gives it a kind of hooked look about it.

My wife's family also has a characteristic within in that comes from the Courtney side of her family, and that is, the pinky finger sticks out at kind of a crazy angle. Evelyn's mother had it. Some of her children have it, and some of my and her grandchildren have it. It is just a characteristic that is there. It is "marked" upon the family. You probably have some things like that as well that you can see in your family.

We are going to read a couple of verses in Revelation 13 to fill in with more material as we lay the foundation here.

Revelation 13:1-2 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as

the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

Revelation 13:11-12 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth: and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exercised all the power of the first beast before him, and caused the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Revelation 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whither soever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

We have a beast, we have a second beast that we are not going to pay much attention to, but it was obviously different. We have a mark that is mentioned in verses 16 and 17, and we have a Lamb, all of which are central to one aspect of the story running through this book.

Just in case you may have forgotten how potentially dangerous this mark is to those who receive it, let us read a little further:

Revelation 14:9-11 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation: and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name.

I do not think that there is anyone of us who looks forward with any kind of wonderful anticipation of going through what Revelation 14: 9-11 shows.

I think it is fairly obvious from the context of these two chapters that "beast" is being used in the sense of a wild adversarial animal. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is because of the use of leopard, bear, lion, and dragon. There is nobody within the sound of my voice that would acknowledge that these are domesticated animals, but rather they are animals that we would make every effort to avoid. We do not want to cross their path if we find any indication that they are around. We make a great big circle to get out of their way.

Then of course there is the contrast with a Lamb—a domesticated animal. Cattle, sheep, and goats are beasts, but they hardly qualify as being animals that strike terror in people.

The animal being described here would cause our hair to stand on end. It exudes malevolence. It is interested in eating us for food, or destroying us for crossing its path—a beast that is violent and aggressive, and simply wants to perpetuate itself.

I think that we understand that "beast" is being used in the sense of a symbol, and the context is not really talking about an animal. The beast represents a governmental system, the personality of a system, and that system's philosophy of life. The context is showing us that from the system's point of view, people have no value other than for its purpose, and its purpose is simply to maintain and to extend its existence and power through the use of terror and fear—things that any wild animal would throw us into. In the "beast's" eyes we are fodder, chattel.

In Revelation 13: 4 it says, "And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

This "beast" puts people into fear. It manipulates and controls to its good. Remember, we are talking about a system. This is a system that puts people into fear. It manipulates and controls to *its* good—not to the good of the governed, but its own. It has an attitude that hates people and likes destruction. It is adversarial.

Now contrast that with sheep, and especially with a lamb. They must be the most docile of all animals. Biblically, a lamb symbolizes gentleness, innocence, sometimes a child-like vulnerability. It is not aggressive. It is easily led and controlled by a shepherd.

Christ symbolically is the Lamb of God, and I want to show you that this is exactly what the Bible calls Him. Even though we know it, I want you to see it in John 1: 29.

John 1:29, 36 The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and says, Behold! the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world...And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God!

"Lamb" is used in reference to Jesus Christ twenty-seven times in the book of Revelation—3 x 3 x 3. This is interesting for those of you who follow numerology to any degree. There is a finality in that. The Lamb is Christ. The beast is an adversary of Christ, and exudes not gentleness, not goodness, not kindness, not innocence, but all of the opposites of those words.

Let us contrast for a just little bit, because we understand that Satan is being spoken of here, because it says that it is the "dragon who gives power unto the beast."

What is Satan described as in the Bible? This is contrasted with the Lamb.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made, And he said unto the woman, Yea, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

My Bible, right beside the word *subtle* has a "1," and in the marginal reference it says: *cunning*. Cunning is a word that is almost always used in a negative sense. Do you know what it says in the dictionary in regard to the word *cunning*? It says, "Someone who is cunning is skilled in

ingenuity or deceit, selfishly clever, crafty." Cunning is used to describe those who use their smarts, their intelligence, their wits to get the best of the other fellow by using whatever deceitful underhanded means are available just so they win.

In the Bible *serpents* are shown as a paradoxical combination of wisdom and evil; beautiful, yet repulsive. They have a fluid grace if viewed from a distance, but they are to be feared because they strike from hiding places and bite without warning. A serpent symbolizes craftiness that mesmerizes its victims. Now contrast that to the lamb. Quite a difference.

Let us go to the New Testament as we continue the descriptions the Bible gives of Satan.

I Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.

Christ is also symbolized as a lion, but not as a lion seeking to devour. That would not in any way compare favorably with a lamb. *Lion* for Christ is used in the sense of controlled majestic power; but for Satan it is the symbol for one who is ruthless, stealthy, powerfully aggressive, bent on defending its turf, and destruction, often working from ambush. That coordinates beautifully with "serpent."

Just recently I saw a film of a pride of lions stalking and attacking animals that were larger than they were. One time in one part of the film it was wildebeest, and another time it was a water buffalo—a great big animal. The water buffalo must have weighed pretty close to 2,000 pounds. In a way it was a beautiful deadly sight to watch the way those lions worked together as a team in order to bring that huge water buffalo down.

Do you know how they killed it? There was a multitude of attacks on every side—its hind quarters and on its side. But finally one lion got a grip on the throat of the water buffalo, and strangled it. It suffocated it. The man who was narrating the film said that is essentially the way lions kill—by strangulation. It is a slow and painful death. The water buffalo went down, and they were eating it before it was dead.

Satan is a lion, roaring, going about seeking whom he may devour. It was not a pretty thing to watch. Male lions will even eat the young in their own pride. It matters not. If they are hungry, and that little kitten is around there, one bite, and it is gone.

Job 41:1-9 Can you draw out leviathan with a hook? Or his tongue with a cord which you let down? Can you put a hook into his nose? Or bore his jaw through with a thorn? Will he make many supplications unto you? Will he speak soft words unto you? Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him for a servant forever? Will you play with him as with a bird? Or will you bind him for your maidens? Shall the companions make a banquet of him? Shall they part him among the merchants? Can you fill his skin with barbed irons? Or his head with fish spears? Lay your hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more. Behold, the hope of him is in vain [i.e. the one who grabs hold of leviathan]: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?

What is he describing here?

Job 41:18-19 By his sneezings a light does shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out.

Are we reading here of something that could come awfully close to a fire-breathing dragon? Are we looking at a description possibly of Tyrannosaurus Rex? Is God describing something that Job was familiar with? Yes He was describing something that Job was familiar with—whatever it is. If Job was not familiar with it, it would have made absolutely no sense to him.

Job 41:20-25, 33-34 Out of his nostrils go smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron. His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes out of his mouth. In his neck remains strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him. The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved. His heart is as firm as a stone: yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. When he raises up himself, the mighty are afraid: by reason of breakings they purify themselves....Upon earth there is not his like who is made without fear. [A beast that does not fear anybody! The real king of beasts.] He beholds all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

We are looking at a description, probably figurative of course, of Satan the Devil in the form of a dragon—a Tyrannosaurus Rex-like symbol of Satan. The dragon is the real source of power for the "beast"—a king of pride, a powerful beast beyond human control—ferocious, dangerous, repulsive, unmitigated power—the quintessential carnivore, seeking to devour.

No wonder the verse in Revelation 13: 4 says, "Who can make war against the beast?" It gives every appearance of invincibility. A nasty fellow, if I ever saw one described. It is this beast that places its mark upon human beings. What is "the *mark* of the beast" in a spiritual sense? What kind of spirit emanates from this wild ferocious, voracious system being described?

In Revelation 13: 7 it says, "And it was given unto him [the beast] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations." This is not war in the military sense, but it does indicate hostility toward. God is giving this system permission to be hostile against His people.

Again, what kind of a spirit would emanate from what we have just described here right out of God's Word? Leopard. Lion. Bear. We did not go into bear. The dragon all by itself is enough.

Jesus told us in Matthew 7: 16 to look for fruit as a way of testing what kind of a spirit would emanate from a beast like this. Remember that biblically *spirit* is used to indicate *that which motivates*. Spirit is invisible. It is immaterial, but what it produces is not, because it shows up on the outside of the person in behavior, and sometimes in the spirit that radiates out from them.

In a spiritual sense "the mark of the beast" is Satan's attitude. He is the great red dragon who gives power unto the beast, and a great deal of power over mankind resides in that spirit that radiates from him.

It was Satan who created the original bad attitude, and he sustains it in humans when we permit these things entrance into our conduct, and manipulate others in order to gain advantage and to achieve our self-centered objectives. Spirit is something that inclines the mind, and in this case in a hostile anti-God, anti-law direction.

Ephesians 2:1-2a And you has he quickened [God has made us alive] who were dead [good as dead] in trespasses and sins [because the wages of sin is death; Wherein in time past you walked [lived your life] according to the course of this world....

From that series I gave on the Holy Spirit, remember that "the course of this world," is *zeitgeist*—the spirit of the times. That spirit is not always exactly the same. From age to age it is somewhat different. I would have to say just in my lifetime the spirit that there was in the United States back in the '30s, '40s, and '50s is different from the spirit that there is in the world now. Beginning in the '60s there has been a gradual intensifying of anger and hostility, by comparison to what was back then.

Ephesians 2:2-3 Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

All of us have walked according to this spirit. All of us have had this spirit. All of us have had "the mark of the beast" impressed upon us already. It has been impossible for us to avoid taking it on in its spiritual form. Some of us more; some of us less. Do you know the amount or the intensity of that spirit in us very largely depends upon the family atmosphere one grew up in, and the crowd that we chose to run with?

I heard Herbert Armstrong say two or three different times, "You parents are the best protection from Satan your children have." He meant by means of the spirit that is emanating from the parents in the house—the family atmosphere.

In John 8:42 we come upon the family characteristic of "the mark."

John 8:42-45 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, you would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Even because you cannot hear [cannot grasp] My word. You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a

murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, you believe Me not.

John 8:39-40 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father, Jesus said unto them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

Spiritually, Satan has been our father. We are already marked, and in our lifetime we have shown his characteristics. That is exactly what Jesus is talking about here. He knew that Satan was the spiritual father of these people because they carried his mark in the way they reacted to Him, and to each other.

Now Abraham had God as his spiritual Father, and Abraham did not attempt to kill Jesus Christ. He was not hostile to Him in any way, but he was very yielded. He did everything in his power to submit to Him. But here were the people of Jesus' time trying to put Jesus to death. They were openly hostile to Him.

Our problem is not worrying about taking it on. We already have it. Our concern is to control what we already have, and overcome and get rid of it because God is now our Father, and He has already enabled us to resist that mark in our own lives. It is our worshipful duty to work with God, to strive to break free of that foul spirit's enslaving hold on us.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind [the mind that is marked by the spirit of Satan the Devil] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The carnal mind is hostile to God, and of course to each other then. Because it is hostile to law, all are hostile to law, and all are breaking laws, and all are taking advantage of each other, and all are self-centered just like Satan, interested only in the protection and the increase of itself.

Here is the basic drive of that spirit—its heart and core: overweening pride. Remember, he is "the king of pride." It is overweening pride that reveals itself in hostility, animosity, hatred, malice, deceit, anger, cunning, competition, resentment, bitterness, self-pity, and intellectual vanity. All of them qualify, and every single one of them divides people from each other.

Look how that spirit was dividing the Jews from Jesus. That spirit eventually led them to divide to the ultimate. They murdered Him. They took His life, defending themselves from the truth that He was preaching to them. The animosity, the hostility to God has never been shown more clearly in the Jews' relationship with Jesus Christ there in the first century. What God tells us is we have the same spirit as those people. We have been marked.

This is only a partial list of this mark, a partial list of the spirit that is emanating from Satan. All we have to do to add to the list is to think of those attitudes that drove Satan to surreptitiously

persuade one-third of the angels—organize them, and then lead them into war against God—and you will discover the elements of that spirit emanating from the beast, and marking men.

A question: Have you ever felt any of these attitudes toward some of your brethren in the church? Perhaps so strong that you do not want to be around them, and so you do what you can to divide from them, because they actually become repulsive to you? You become convinced that they are evil, unconverted, that you cannot control them so that they will do or be what you want them to do or be. The mark—the spirit of this world, worldliness—might just be gaining the upper hand in your life.

Now hostility is increasingly evident in news broadcasts—children shooting fellow students at school. There are ever increasing incidents of road rage. Vicious wars are taking place on a daily basis. Some of us have lived through the Korean and Viet Nam war. There were a couple of things in the United States that we were involved in.

But then again, overseas there were wars constantly going on in other places. There was war in Afghanistan. I do not know how many people were killed in Afghanistan. That war went on for years and years between Russia and Afghanistan. We got involved a little bit in Somalia. Have you read any news reports about what is going on in Algeria? Tens of thousands of Algerians are killing each other. Now we have got that thing going on in Yugoslavia. The Middle East is always teetering on the brink.

I recently heard a man very high in the American business community, whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, but he was quoted as saying, "Global business is war—economic war—where the same basic attitudes and tactics are used as in a military war, without the killing as on a battlefield. Business is conducted in a hostile environment. It's "dog eat dog," and only the strong will survive. And if your country goes down the tubes—tough! That's business. Somebody else will just fill up the gap."

Let us contrast this with what the apostle Paul says in Philippians.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it becomes the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

How can people strive together if "the mark of the beast" is on them, and the basic attitude in that mark is hostility? Hostility drives apart. Animosity drives apart. Competition drives apart. Cunning drives apart. Deceit drives apart. Are you beginning to see why Paul said that we have to *strive* together for the one faith of the gospel?

Philippians 1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

Go now to Philippians 2. This very famous section is actually a continuation of the thought that we just read in Philippians 1: 27-28.

Philippians 2:1-3 If there be therefore any consolation [encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife [hostility] or vainglory [the king of pride]: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

The hostile mind cannot do that unless an awful lot of control is exerted to make sure that the hostility does not surface.

Philippians 2:4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

The "mark of the beast" wants people to take advantage and to get from the other.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Now look at the contrast between the description that I just gave you of Satan and the spirit that has marked us, and what we see in the mind of Christ, what we see in the Lamb of God: Gentleness. Vulnerability. Innocence. That is the kind of person you would think would not get very far. Well no wonder there is such division all over the earth, and no wonder that this division carries right on into the church.

The Philippian congregation was generally a wonderful congregation. I have read several different times in different commentaries that of all the groups that Paul wrote to, Phillipians was probably the best of all of the congregations. But Paul was writing to these people with some measure of sadness because two ladies were having a fight, and it was inexorably dividing the group into rival camps. What Paul is doing here is spelling out our responsibility.

I want you to notice something here. Nowhere in the entire book of Phillipians does Paul tell them, "Don't come to services." He did not say, "Split away by yourself." But that is what is happening in the greater church. He did not say, "Just go sit in your living room." That is not an option with God. He tells us here that we have to look to and seek higher things. He says to let our conduct be worthy of the gospel that we say that we believe.

How far, brethren, did Jesus Christ go to make peace? TO THE DEATH! He did not allow the hostility of the world against Him to be turned or to justify hostility against those who were mistreating Him.

Do not be misled by the word "if" in verse 1: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ."

Paul was not stating a "maybe." He is stating an absolute fact. That word "if" is better understood as "since," and what is behind this is: "That since there are these things in you because of God's Spirit, sacrifice yourself. Make my joy complete and USE them." Now what does he say to use? Love, fellowship of the Spirit, bowels of mercy. "Fulfill you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

What Paul is saying is that because of God's calling, because God granted us repentance, because God gave us His Spirit, we have already been enabled by His Spirit to use these things to make peace, to be of one accord, to be of one mind. "The mark of the beast" can be overcome by God's Spirit in us, but we must sacrifice ourselves to use it. It is already there. So he is saying, "Use God's love in you, and be of one mind. Quit fighting with each other to gain the upper hand. Consider the other person better than you, and serve him by looking out for his interest."

When Paul says, "Let this mind be in you," what he literally said in the Greek is, "Keep thinking like this." How? As Jesus Christ has already shown us. He is saying, "Don't let your mind be drawn toward what you consider to be the cause of the offense." He is saying, "Don't dwell upon those things."

Brethren, I know that I am teaching a very high standard that we have to sacrifice ourselves to, but it is in God's Word. He expects us to look to Him for strength, and sacrifice ourselves to do it.

We are going to take a closer look now at hostility, at anger. We are going to go to Galatians 5, but we will not look at all the works of the flesh, but just this one, because Paul obviously saw anger and hostility as a basic element of human nature.

Galatians 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies.

Of all the negative attitudes that are part of "the mark of the beast," I believe that hostility and anger are probably the most frequent expressions against God and others. But how often does the Bible show Jesus, our Model—the One we are to pattern our lives after—how often does it show Him angry?

Before we get to that I want us to look at Ecclesiastes 7:9. Here is an interesting observation that Solomon made.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry: for anger rests in the bosom of fools.

Brethren, Jesus was no fool. That is why we do not see very much about Him in the Bible about being angry.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Proverbs 25:15 By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone.

It is not very frequent that a person who is angry and hostile speaks softly.

Proverbs 19:11 The discretion of a man defers his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

Anger hardly ever helps a situation. It divides. It almost invariably makes things worse. It forces the other person to defend himself, and then a vicious cycle is generated.

I want you to see just one example of what it cost two men—Simeon and Levi—to get angry.

Genesis 49:7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

They had no inheritance in the land. Scattered. Do you understand the seriousness of that?

Consider what is probably, and maybe the most esteemed human being in the Bible—Moses. He lost his temper one time by striking the rock because he was frustrated at the Israelites, at their hardheadedness and at their rebellion. But when he struck the rock, rather than speaking to it as God told him to do, God said, "Okay Moses. You don't go into the land."

One time he lost his temper. We are talking about "the mark of the beast"—hostility. Anger almost never helps a situation. Now in one place Paul says, "Be angry, and sin not." Hard to do. That is the problem with anger, because sin almost invariably follows on the heels of hostility.

Let us go to Mark 3:5, because here we do see Jesus angry.

Mark 3:5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he said unto the man, Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

I chose this because I wanted you to see why He got angry. You can look in all four Gospels, you can look in all the epistles of Paul, you can look everywhere in the New Testament, and you will find that our role model, Jesus Christ, never one time got angry because of what people did to HIM. He got angry because of hard-headedness, because of the rejection of the truth of God.

He got angry at another time, shown there in John 2, when He found them selling things in the temple, and He went and turned the tables over and chased all the animals out of the area. And even there it was accounted by those who wrote the Bible as "zeal," not anger. He got angry because they turned the house of prayer into a place of merchandise. He did not get angry because of what people said to Him, about Him, or did to Him, or did against Him. Yet we find in the church people becoming offended and angry over things that are insignificant to

salvation.

When we left the Worldwide Church of God, we left for a significant, appropriate, and justifiable reason. They were completely changing the body of beliefs—the teachings on which our faith is based. The "faith once delivered to the saints" was being changed into something very different. Faith and truth was being systematically destroyed, and salvation is by grace through faith. In a situation like that, you have to split off and go to where you are going to receive the food that is going to build faith.

I am talking about the greater church and all the things that we hear with the information coming into this office. People split off because they think one doctrine is not what they think it should be, and so they leave to find the perfect group that believes or agrees with them. Or they leave over a personality difference with another in the group, or because they do not like how somebody is doing something.

They leave because another's temperament is different, or because what some might permit themselves to eat. They convince themselves that the Sabbath is too stressful, and they cannot have a spiritual Sabbath there because there is no peace for *them* there. When it comes right down to it, they have split off because they cannot have things in the group the way that they think it ought to be. The reality in many many cases is that they just want to control things.

After hearing Darryl's very fine message last Sabbath, maybe these people ought to talk to Jonah. There is a lesson there. Jonah did not like the way things were, so what did he do? He split off. He hopped on the first boat to Spain.

Now what did God do? That is the interesting part. God practically turned him inside out inside the belly of that great fish. He put Jonah through a brief but very intense tribulation—and Jonah had to do the job anyway. It is the same God today.

In many cases, brethren, some have yet to come to understand that one of the major reasons that God has split the church is because He wants to see what we will do about loving our brother in a small congregation. In the Worldwide Church of God when we had problems, we simply moved on to associate with other people, because there were a lot of other people around.

I have been following this thing now for seven to eight years. Hostility seems to be a hallmark of this church age almost in the same way that road-rage is to the world. It is all right for us to be righteously indignant as long as we do not sin. There is a place for righteous indignation, but God does not permit very much anger, because it is very difficult not to sin when angry. That kind of anger is a "mark of the beast."

Hostility is very frequently simply a denial of reality. People do not have tempers as though it was something that was born in them. Angry tempers begin to be created in childhood. Angers are allowed by the parents to burst forth, and each time it bursts forth, it becomes easier. And the next time, and the next time, and on and on until it is ingrained in the personality.

Anger is nothing more than a passionate response to some sort of stimuli, and almost always with a self-centered response. It usually begins when we believe that what should or should not have happened either did or did not, and conflict arises, and we can believe, either strongly or

weakly, it should or should not have happened. Therefore, anger can be either strong or weak, or anywhere in between.

The reality is this: What happened, happened. How is anger going to help the problem? That is the question. Is anger going to help? Now Satan believes that it does, because he wants to control, he wants to win, he wants to compete, he wants to devour, he wants to get the upper hand. He wants to triumph. Do we really need the anger to drive us to manipulate or to punish? Why not just start working on a solution without the anger, knowing full well that the anger is very likely going to create sin and cause additional damage to the relationship? In a way it is all very logical, but our feelings just get in the way.

Do you remember Proverbs 14: 12? Herbert Armstrong must have said this 15 million times. "There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." A paraphrase: "There is a way that man thinks things should be." That is where the conflict arises. Two people see things differently. The question is then, who is to say that it should be the way YOU see it? This is where the conflict begins to arise.

Suppose you go out on a snowy day. The people in the north ought to understand this. What happens on a snowy day when two automobiles try to occupy the same space at the same time? You get banged-up fenders, smashed-in rear ends. Brethren, that is reality. Things happen because laws are broken, and whatever we sow we reap, and sometimes we get caught in other peoples' ignorance and stupidity.

That is a fact of everybody's life, even to God in the flesh. He got caught in the ignorance and stupidity of His fellow Israelites there in Judea, and it cost Him His life, and He did not get angry. What an example! What an example of control. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

How far did He go to make peace? To the death, even when the other person was totally, absolutely, completely WRONG. He didn't go to war against them.

The problem with anger arises when we turn our feelings and our drives to set things right, as we see them, into absolute necessities. It has just got to be our way. You see, brethren, others have rights too. They have the same rights from God that you have, and that I have. Others have free moral agency. Anger arises because of the way we judge things. And then we apply the standard that we hold as being the one that is right.

Philippians 4:10-12 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me has flourished again; wherein you were also careful, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Brethren, frustration and bitterness were not Paul's companions, and the reason is because he did not make what he considered to be his needs absolutes in order to determine his sense of

well-being. By faith he believed that God was watching over his life and would provide.

Turn now to I Peter 2. I want to show you that Paul followed the example of Jesus Christ, and this is the example that we too are to follow. We are to *learn* to be angry, and sin not. We are to *learn* to not make frustration and bitterness and hostility as regular parts of our life.

I Peter 2:21-23 For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.

Do you know where the term "awful" came from? I understand that it arose out of the Middle Ages as a term that was invented in order to signify the ever-burning hell that many people in the world believe about. See, the ever-burning hell was "awful." The term "awful" is derived by peoples' feelings about having to be cast into that place. Brethren, there IS no ever-burning hell. Is there anything, any situation, any circumstance that is truly *awful*? What is the most awful thing that has ever happened on earth? The most awful thing that ever happened on earth was the murder of God in the flesh. Absolutely, totally, innocent, lamb-like, vulnerable. He was a lamb led to the slaughter, and He allowed them to kill Him without defending Himself. Our Creator—put to death—was the worse thing that ever happened on earth.

What, brethren, on that scale, does anything that has ever happened to you measure up against that? That is why God points to this example. He did not revile. He kept His mouth shut. He committed Himself, by faith, to Him that judges righteously.

We need to face the reality that these bad attitudes are part of the spiritual "mark of the beast." Our salvation, our deliverance from them, lies in the relationship with God. That is our salvation. More of that will come in other sermons, but that is what will save us from hostility.