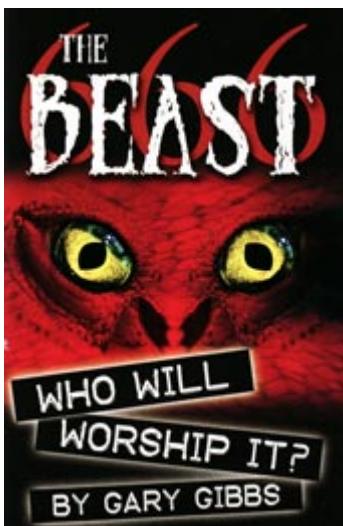


The Beast Who Will Worship It



By Gary Gibbs

Who Will Worship It?

In the past few years we've seen a remarkable fulfillment of several apocalyptic prophecies. It has been exciting, thrilling, and faith-building to witness. But it also is sobering, for fulfilled prophecies indicate that the remaining last-day prophecies are soon to follow.

Unfortunately, some Christians do not want to face the coming reality of the prophecy of Revelation chapter 13. "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 all the world wondered after the beast . . . as many as would not worship the image of

the beast should be killed. And he causeth 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." (Revelation 13:1-3,15-17). This is a frightening prophecy indeed. It predicts that a coalition of religious and political powers will align under the leadership of the Antichrist beast to cast the world into a boiling caldron of affliction. There will be a great time of trouble unlike the earth has ever seen before (Daniel 12:1). Some students of Bible prophecy have even suggested this tribulation will be worse than we can imagine.

With the future so bleak, we can easily appreciate why some have chosen to remain ignorant about last-day events. Many of those who have sought to learn about it are so fearful of living during the beast's reign of terror that they have become easy prey for false doctrine. The prevalent false teaching that promises a pre-tribulation rapture appears attractive against the backdrop of Armageddon and the mark of the beast. But ignorance and false doctrine will leave their victims destitute and lost as these fig-leaf garments dry and crumble under the withering blast of the final tribulation.

The desire to live in peace and security is understandable. Few of us, in our introspective moments, feel capable to stand for God and His truth when demons will overrun the earth. But despite these natural fears and aversions, we must not chase after promises of peace and safety that are not founded upon the sure Word of God. While we should focus on the love of God for sinners and the true security that comes from making Him Lord and Savior of our life, we should also give attention to the warnings of the Spirit concerning the last days.

The Scripture injunction we should heed most is that which warns us against worshiping the beast. Consider these sobering facts. All who worship the beast will forfeit the precious experience of eternal life with Jesus in a glorious new world (Revelation 13:8). They will be inflicted with the extremely painful and fearsome seven last plagues (Revelation 16:2). And finally, they will suffer utter destruction in the fires of hell (Revelation 14:9-11). Without question, we do not want to be found worshiping the beast in the days to come.

But what assures us we will not be in this group? Mind you, it is no small group. Revelation 13:3 says that "all the world wondered after the beast."

Although helpful, mere knowledge of the beast's identity will not guarantee escape. Judas knew Jesus as the Messiah, yet he betrayed Him. Similarly, many of those who understand last-day prophecies will ultimately find themselves on the side of the beast. Knowledge definitely isn't enough. So how can we be on the winning side when all the dust settles? Who will worship the beast? And what can we do now to keep from being part of that

group.

The Final Conflict

First, we must understand that the final conflict will be over worship. All inhabitants of earth will be divided into one of two camps before the end—those who worship the beast and those who worship the Creator. Creature worship versus Creator worship will be the issue to divide the world. Everyone will have to make a choice regarding whom they will worship. How will the whole earth be brought to make this choice between the creature and the Creator? The Bible predicts a time when the beast will gain immense political influence. From this position of authority, he will force people to worship him. Those who refuse will be economically boycotted and eventually sentenced to death. “And he had power to . . . cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all . . . to receive a mark . . . 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” (Revelation 13:15-17).

As the beast seeks to enforce worship through force, God mercifully warns people against the beast and urges them to worship Him as Creator. “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. . . . 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” (Revelation 14:6-10).

The scenario is clear. In the last days, the entire world will be squeezed between the two cosmic forces. There will be no neutral ground, no demilitarized zone. Everyone will have to make a decision whom they will serve and worship.

The Battle Over Worship

This last conflict over worship is actually the grand finale to a long drama that began in heaven before man was even created. The author of rebellion inaugurated this “creature versus Creator” war when he coveted the Creator’s throne. Lucifer, a created angel, decided his superior beauty and intelligence qualified him to better rule the universe than his Creator. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, . . . For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12-14). Working with stealthy deceit, he launched his campaign for the affections of the angels and was successful in attracting one-third of them (Revelation 12:4-9). Demanding the adoration due only the Creator, these created angels tried to bully their way onto God’s throne. This forced God to take drastic measures. Revelation 12:7 records, “There was war in heaven.” To protect the existence of the universe, God forcibly removed Satan and his angels from heaven.

But this was only the beginning of Satan’s campaign for worship that would last thousands of years and cost millions of lives. Cast to earth, Satan next solicited Adam and Eve’s worship and service. And it is by understanding our first parents’ test over worship that we learn how to keep from worshiping the beast in the last days.

Why did Eve eat the fruit of the forbidden tree? Simply because she lacked trust in God. She trusted the serpent’s word more than her Creator’s. Adam also distrusted God, but unlike Eve, he was not deceived _(1 Timothy 2:14). Adam’s decision to eat the forbidden fruit was a conscious, deliberate choice. He couldn’t dream of life without Eve. Worse yet, he didn’t trust God to come up with an acceptable solution to deal with Eve’s disobedience that would leave him happy throughout eternity.

Our first parents' distrust led them to disobey. And their disobedience became an act of worship of the serpent. You see, worship and obedience are synonymous. "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey" (Romans 6:16). When tempted by the devil to bow down and worship him, Jesus revealed that the act of worship is married to service and obedience. "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).

When Adam and Eve trusted the lies of the serpent above the command of God, they entered into creature worship. They truly worshiped the beast. The last conflict in the world merely brings man full circle to retake Adam and Eve's first test. Will we obey and worship the beast or obey and worship the Creator? Both the first and last tests of this world's history contain the same elements: the serpent and his lies, worship, obedience versus disobedience, and the penalty of expulsion from the kingdom of God. Mankind's path back to the tree of life ultimately retraces the steps of our first parents and passes through the corridor of the same test: will we trust God enough to obey Him? Only those who trustingly obey God will enter the pearly gates. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Adam and Eve's worship of the beast laid the foundation for all false worship. Examine any false religion and you will find it is based upon distrust and disobedience of God. Paul makes this point in Romans 1:21-25, NKJV: "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but . . . exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Whenever we know a Bible truth and refuse to obey it out of thankful hearts, we worship the creature instead of the Creator. We have put our own opinion and feelings above the revealed will of our Creator God.

Secular Humanism

The age in which we live has normalized this false religion of self-worship. We even have a name for it—humanism. Thousands of years ago, God predicted this humanistic movement. It is symbolized in prophecy both as the king of the south (Daniel 11:40) and as the beast from the bottomless pit (Revelation 11:7-10). When the French Revolution fulfilled this prophecy it deified man's reason and established the foundation for the pseudo religion of secular humanism. The belief that man's reason is sufficient to answer life's most profound questions and needs, and that there is no God or moral absolutes, forms humanism's axis. This belief system has largely controlled the affairs of man from the 1790s to the present day. According to Revelation 11:8, it has two key characteristics—Egypt's atheistic unbelief in the true God, and Sodom's immorality.

Secular humanism's atheism and immorality have gained a strong position in the United States. Humanism also controls most of America's government programs, institutions of higher learning, the training of grade-school children in public schools, the homosexual movement, etc. Consequently, America is now reaping the same whirlwind of degradation that France did in the wake of its Revolution. For lack of moral fiber, the United States is unraveling at the seams.

The current epidemic of homosexuality, adultery, crime, and other debasing actions should not surprise us. The Bible states this as the inevitable result of exalting man's reasoning above God's truth. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, . . . without natural affection, . . . Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:28-32).

Religious Humanism

Neither has the Christian church escaped the permeating influence of humanism. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in its document "Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith" (December 1991),

challenges its members to evaluate prejudices against homosexuals, insisting that “what we personally find offensive is not necessarily sinful.” Furthermore, it says, “We must distinguish between moral judgments regarding same-sex activity in biblical times and in our own time.”

The task force formed to make this document said upon release of the 1993 edition, entitled “The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective” (October 1993), that “it recognizes that many Lutherans take literally the biblical condemnations of homosexuality . . . But the task force urges Lutherans to challenge such attitudes. It argues that ‘responsible biblical interpretation’ strongly supports the acceptance and even blessing of same sex unions and emphasizes what it says is the preeminent biblical command—to ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹

The United Methodist Church has also had panels convene to decide whether homosexuality is a sin. Though the proposals to loosen church strictures on homosexuality were rejected, the 1991 panel did agree that biblical references to sexual practices should not be viewed as binding “just because they are in the Bible.”²

The church that has probably departed furthest from God’s Word on this topic is the United Church of Christ. It allows homosexuals to be ordained to ministry.³

This issue is only one among many for which churches are placing their own reasoning above God’s commands. Although they have many sincere and dedicated members, these church organizations are as guilty of humanism as are the secularists. They are simply following “religious humanism” instead of “secular humanism.” Unfortunately, people who continue to support humanism under the guise of Christianity will be part of that group who will say to Jesus in the judgment, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” Sadly, Jesus will say to them, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” They will learn too late that religious humanism is insufficient to save the soul. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Another area in which the Church has unashamedly followed humanistic principles is in the choice of Sunday as a day of worship. The Bible clearly says that the seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday, is the day upon which God’s people are to gather for weekly worship and rest from their work. Interestingly, the Catholic Church says that Saturday is the true biblical Sabbath and that Sunday worship is based not upon God’s Word, but upon the traditions of men. In his book Plain Talk About the Protestantism of Today, Monsignor Segur admits Sunday-keeping “not only has no foundation in the Bible, but is in flagrant contradiction with its letter, which commands rest on the Sabbath, which is Saturday.”⁴ Other Catholic writers concur. “The word, ‘Sabbath,’ means rest, and is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Why, then, do Christians observe Sunday instead of the day mentioned in the Bible? . . . the infant Church changed the day to be kept holy from Saturday to Sunday . . . it rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible.”⁵ “We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.”⁶

Of course, non-Catholics have their own reasons for keeping Sunday. But the facts of history and Scripture are stubborn things. They unquestionably testify to the accuracy of what these Catholic authors assert. The Catholic Church did change the day of worship, and the Bible doesn’t authorize it. With all due respect to Sunday-keepers churches and pastors who spin fine-sounding arguments for why the fourth commandment doesn’t need to be obeyed are following faulty reasoning as flimsy as spiders’ webs. All reasons for disobedience which man can amass have one thing in common. They are founded upon humanism. They place the reasoning of men above God’s plain commands.

The Humanistic Little Horn

God wants us to flee from humanism. Repeatedly, He has warned us against its deadly influence and shown how it would infiltrate the church. Using the symbol of a little horn in Daniel chapter 7, God predicted the Antichrist would be humanistic. “I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, . . . and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things” (Daniel 7:8). Notice that it is not the eyes of the Spirit that are on this little horn, but “the eyes of man.” Here we see that Antichrist lacks true spiritual discernment and sees life only through human eyes.

His criterion for truth is “What do I think?” instead of “What does God command?” This is anti-Christian. Jesus taught that our will is to be held in subjection to God’s will. He prayed to His Father, “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

Christians seek to look at things from God’s vantage point (2 Corinthians 4:18). They do not base their decisions purely upon earthly considerations, but rather upon the eternal foundation of God’s truth and sovereign will. Christians ask only two questions—“What is God’s truth?” and “What are His promises?” Then they obey the one while claiming the other.

Because the Antichrist looks at things through humanistic eyes, he is led to some fearfully bold actions. He makes declarations that are counter to God’s truth. “And he shall speak great words against the most High . . . and think to change times and laws” _(Daniel 7:25). The ultimate expression of his humanism is to make people think God’s law has been changed.

He has especially attacked those laws which exalt God as Creator—laws such as the second and fourth commandments. The second commandment forbids the making of graven images and bowing down to them. The devil’s age-old war against the Creator has used the little horn to target this commandment. During the Middle Ages, the papal church compromised the second commandment and introduced graven images into Christendom. Today, Catholic catechisms omit the Bible’s second commandment, thus turning people away from their Creator.

Another law that has been “changed” by the little horn is the fourth commandment, which also exalts God as Creator. It establishes a weekly memorial to the Creator by commanding worship and rest from secular pursuits on the seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday. As we’ve already seen, the papacy readily admits it initiated this bold act. Amazingly, the papacy has been very successful in accomplishing the objective of making people think times and laws have been changed. Much of the Christian world has accepted the change of the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week, Sunday. The apostle Paul also understood the humanistic foundation of the Antichrist—“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the second coming] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4).

The man of sin, the Antichrist, assumes God’s place over the church. He declares himself to be God and that he has the power to institute doctrine, even if it is contrary to the Bible. This again is humanism—humans setting themselves up as a higher authority than God.

God’s True Believers

Fortunately, God still has people in all churches who trust their lives implicitly to Him in obedience. In fact, He has a message tailor-made to warn everyone of these compromises of truth and attacks against His Creatorship. This warning, known as the three angels’ messages, is found in Revelation 14:6-12.

The first angel's message commands people to worship God as the Maker of "heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Verse 7). God wants people to reverse the compromises of the Middle Ages. He wants us to obey all His commandments—especially those that honor Him as Creator. But obedience cannot come from our own strength. It must be rooted in faith in Jesus.

Let's face it—Saturday is one of the busiest days of the week. Consequently, it takes a special faith relationship with God to obey Him and keep it holy. Because true obedience can be accomplished only through faith in Jesus, the three angels' messages are called the "everlasting gospel" (Verse 6).

This threefold message calls all to be righteous by faith. Righteousness simply means "right doing"—doing what God has commanded. This righteousness must come from Christ through faith. And faith is an active ingredient. Faith works. "But wilt thou know O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:20-22).

Faith works by love. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). What God really wants to produce in response to the everlasting gospel of the three angels of Revelation 14 is righteous people who have learned to love and obey Him. The love of God must shape their lives and become the controlling influence in all of their decisions. They will obey God as Creator because they know He loves them and is worthy of their worship and obedience.

This experience of righteousness by faith is what God requires in this hour of earth's history—the judgment hour. The first angel's message announces, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Revelation 14:7. We live in this judgment hour that was prophesied to take place right before Jesus returns.

Notice that God wants us to worship Him as Creator during the judgment hour. Just what does this mean in a practical, everyday sense? Peter makes the answer obvious. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God . . . Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" _(1 Peter 4:17-19).

The experience God wants His people to have in the judgment hour is one of truly trusting Him as Creator and committing themselves to Him by doing His will. He wants them to be convinced of His faithfulness and to obey Him based on this conviction. Such persons God calls "saints" in Revelation 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." God's saints have learned by experience that He keeps His promises. They've learned that He loves them unconditionally. He accepts them where they are and gives them His power for victory and obedience. God's saints have settled into the truth that God is a faithful Creator.

Just how might we demonstrate such faith and trust? In everyday life, we are all faced with choices where we understand God's will but are tempted to do the opposite. Let me illustrate in very practical terms how a person might reveal a lack of faith and trust. Let's say a person is offered a job doing something that is not in harmony with Christian standards. Under temptation, he reasons: "I need a job, and this one is available. Should I take it? If I don't, my bills won't get paid. My house may be repossessed. It will put undue strain on my marriage if I'm unemployed. I can't make it without this job."

This type of thinking doesn't factor the Almighty God into the equation. It focuses on the problem instead of God. Like Elisha's servant, it sees only the enemy and not God's host of angels who are all around, ready to help and deliver (2 Kings 6:8-17).

Unfortunately, many of us are tempted to make the same mistake. Even though we worship God on the weekend, we live according to the dictates of our own reasoning during the week.

Here is a point that is often stumbled over in this humanistic age—it is never acceptable to compromise truth. Why? Because compromise means we don't believe God is adequate to take care of us. It means we think He is untrustworthy. What a statement we make about what we think of God when we compromise His truth!

God is calling for a different order of things. We must remember that He will provide a way for us to obey if we wait patiently for Him. With faith, even when we are severely tested we will be able to say: "I will wait upon my God to provide a way whereby I can obey Him. In the meantime, I will not compromise truth."

Can our Creator provide jobs for the unemployed that will not require them to compromise truth? Can He provide a Christian companion for the single? Can He heal damaged marriages and relationships? Yes! Our Creator is not limited. He is infinite in power and resources. But sadly, all too often we limit Him. We are impatient. We do not wait upon the Lord to provide His solution in His own time. In some situations, His solution may not become tangible until Jesus comes. But the person with real faith in God's infinite goodness can be satisfied even with this.

The Seal of God

This brings us to a crucial point that is absolutely vital for all who desire to avoid worshiping the beast to understand. The question of who will worship the beast is not simply a future issue. Daily we make decisions based upon whether or not we trust and obey God as our Creator. The cumulative effect of these decisions forms our characters. And the final conflict between the beast and God will reveal what character we have developed.

Did you catch this all-important point? It is so very practical and vital that I want you to fix it firmly in mind. Daily we make decisions based upon whether or not we trust and obey God as our Creator. The cumulative effect of these decisions forms our characters. And the final conflict between the beast and God will reveal what character we have developed. This is what the seal of God and the mark of the beast are all about.

The mark that we receive in the last days, whether it be God's seal or the beast's mark, will be the outward evidence of the type of inner character we have chosen to develop. Those who receive the seal of God have "set to their seal that God is true" and trustworthy _(John 3:33). They've learned to trust God as their Creator and Ruler in the little things of everyday life. Therefore, they are ready to face the larger tests of life. On the other hand, those who receive the mark of the beast _have lived lives of self-sufficiency and disobedience. Day by day they have brushed aside the still, small voice of God's convicting Spirit as inconsequential. Little did they realize they were forming their ultimate destiny by choosing to disobey what they considered at the time to be "little things." Because they have followed the beast's principles of self-sufficiency it will be an easy matter for them to receive the mark of the beast.

Make no mistake about it. We are now living in the time when our daily decisions are no small matter. We all have a date with destiny when we will reap the character our choices have sown. Right now we all need to set ourselves on a path to consciously and deliberately settle into the truth that God is love and can be obeyed. If we neglect to gain this experience, we will find ourselves worshiping the beast along with most of the world.

The ultimate end-time expression of our having been sealed with God's seal or marked with the character of the beast will be manifested in whether or not we keep God's seventh-day Sabbath. The devil has especially contended with God's Sabbath because it proclaims God's rights and authority as Creator. Therefore, the

Sabbath will become the visible line of demarcation between those who take God at His word and those who follow humanism to rationalize into oblivion God's claims upon their lives.

Sabbath-keepers Forsake God?

Unfortunately, even among God's current commandment-keeping people are those who will ultimately forsake the God of the true Sabbath that they now observe. How can this be? It will happen because they've not made God the Ruler of their entire life. Yes, they currently keep the Sabbath. But there is more to honoring God as Creator than simply going to church on the proper day. Those who live for self, whether they attend church on the Sabbath or not, will eventually find themselves opposed to the Sabbath when world conditions heat to a boiling point and bring them to the very last moments of time.

The large majority who will forsake God's commandment-keeping remnant in the last days won't come to this point overnight. They will have followed their self-will down this path for some time. Are some being deceived right now to think that since they know the objective truths of the gospel, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and of man's nature in death, etc., that this is going to be sufficient to save them? It certainly will not be if at the same time they are imbibing anger, bitterness, jealousy, or disobeying God in something that He has revealed to them. What is truly humbling is that we all are prone to make this fatal mistake. How important it is that we seek the Lord with all our hearts for His mercy and grace to give us a supreme love for Him and a faith which will obey implicitly!

Right now, we live in a time conducive to following God in all things. Relative peace and security still are ours. Revelation 7:1-4 says that this time of peace is for the sealing of God's people. As we've already seen, the seal has everything to do with whether we trust and obey God by faith. Now is our day of opportunity to settle into the truth that God is trustworthy. We can obey Him, and He will take care of us. Each day God is giving us opportunities to develop godly character. But, eventually, the winds will blow. The time of trouble, such as no man has ever seen, will arrive. Then we will reveal character—not develop it. Let us praise God for the daily test and trials that try our patience and faith in God. These are the greatest blessings He can send us when we consider what He is preparing us to face. Never resent God's providences. Seek Him with your whole heart and walk in faithful obedience, no matter how trying the circumstance. Remember that the journey from following God to following the beast takes more than just one step. Slowly and almost imperceptibly is this road traveled. Nearly everyone would balk at the suggestion that he or she might someday worship the beast. But in the end, many will find it an automatic response to worship the beast. It will be the inevitable fruit of their cumulative daily choices.

On which side will we be in the end? Will we worship the beast or the Creator? The answer depends upon the daily decisions we make regarding the place of God in our life. Today is the day to commit 100 percent to Jesus and to gain, through obedience, an experience in trusting Him as Creator. Will we worship the beast or the Creator? It's our choice. Today.