



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-1905

The Unpardonable Sin and the Mark of the Beast

by Jim Buller

The Third Angel’s Message says, “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 an ever: and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name.” Revelation 14:9-11. God’s wrath, in the form of the seven last plagues, (see Revelation 15:1), is poured out on those who receive the mark of the beast, and they are not saved. So, receiving the mark of the beast is essentially the same as committing the unpardonable sin. But let’s look a deeper into this subject.

The typical verses used in connection with the subject of the unpardonable sin are Matthew 12:31-32. They say, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” To better understanding what is involved, and to see how it is connected with the mark of the beast we need to look at the rest of the story.

This story begins back in verse 22, where a demon-possessed man, who was also blind and couldn’t speak, was brought to Jesus. Jesus casts out the demon, and healed the man, so he could both see and talk. The people were amazed, and said, “could this be the ‘Son of David?’” —a direct reference to the Messiah. But the Pharisees didn’t like Jesus and wanted to discredit Him. So they said He had done this miracle by the power of the prince of demons.

Jesus showed them the danger of their thinking, by pointing out the obvious. In order to conquer demons one must have a power stronger than demons. Therefore, the demon could *only* have been cast out by God’s power. In addition, for a man without sight to be able to see, requires *creative* power —further evidence that *God* was at work here. The Pharisees, however, were so twisted they were willing to give Satan himself credit for the obvious work of God’s Spirit. Jesus took this opportunity to

get them to think about what they were really saying, and to point out how dangerous it was. As it says in Isaiah 5:20, “Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”

But, why is “speaking against the Holy Spirit” unpardonable? Let’s answer this by thinking about how God reaches out to us. Isn’t it by His Holy Spirit? However, if we have become so twisted that we think the Holy Spirit is satanic —how will we respond? Wouldn’t we flee from something we thought was satanic?

So, even though God still loves us, and is still offering us forgiveness and cleansing, if our thinking has become twisted to the point that we think He is satanic, will we accept anything from Him? The unpardonable sin is not unpardonable because God isn’t offering pardon anymore. It is unpardonable because pardon is no longer accepted! —as *anything* from God is rejected as something evil.

How then is it possible to get *this* twisted? Let’s look back at what Satan told Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He told her that if she ate the fruit, her eyes would “be opened” and she would “be like God knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:5. In other words, after she ate the fruit she wouldn’t need *God* to tell her what was right and wrong anymore. By having her eyes “opened,” she would be able to decide for herself what was good or bad. She could do what *she* wanted to do. This sounded good to Eve; and if we are honest, we have to admit we like this idea too! And ever since, the human race has been infected with a strong desire to do things our own way.

But, do we really know what is good or bad? How often have we said something like, “Well, it seemed like a good thing to do at the time,” when things don’t turn out so good? We simply *don’t know* how things are going to turn out, or what the result of our actions will be; and so we aren’t able to consistently make good decisions about what to do. Therefore, following our hearts, and doing things our own way will ultimately be destructive —not only to ourselves, but also to others around us. Like it says in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that *seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” (Emphasis supplied.)

On the other hand, God *can* see the end from the beginning, and therefore He *does* know what is best —not just for us, but for everyone concerned. The truth is, we *do* need God to tell us what is right and wrong; and we would do well to follow the counsel in Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, *do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him* and He will direct your paths.” (Emphasis supplied.) To guide us in the right course of action He has given us both His Word to instruct us, and His Holy Spirit to impress our hearts and minds. It is *only* by following Him that we *are* able to do what is truly right and good. “Without Me you can do nothing.” John 15:5.

Unfortunately though, because of our sinful human nature, we all start out with our thinking being somewhat twisted. In spite of knowing that God’s way is best, we still want to do things our own way. Our natural rebelliousness and pride cause us to be stubborn, and to resist the Holy Spirit’s attempts to influence us in the right direction. But hopefully, as a result of the experiences we have in life, we will humbly realize our need for God.

However, we know that if we surrender to God, and follow the Holy Spirit's leading, we will not get to do what we want to do. (See also Galatians 5:17.) When our selfishness and pride win out over humbly surrendering to God, we typically seek to justify our feelings and actions, rationalizing that it really is OK to do what we're wanting to do. Each time we do this, our thinking gets a little more twisted. If we continue to rationalize that things contrary to God's instructions are OK, and become more and more twisted, sooner or later we will become completely twisted and commit the unpardonable sin.

On the other hand, if we humbly admit that we don't know what is best, and ask for and rely on God's wisdom and help to do what is right, He can straighten out our twistedness. As James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So, a key question seems to be, are we willing to be humble and let God's grace change us? Or will we let our selfishness and pride have their own way?

Let's be honest with ourselves, and admit that we need God's guidance, acknowledging Him in all our ways, and surrendering ourselves to Him moment by moment. As we "abide" in Him, and allow His Holy Spirit work to in our lives, His will remove our selfishness and pride and fill us with His love and a willingness to serve. As we form the habit of *continually* staying surrendered to God, He will be able to write "Holiness to the Lord," [or "Completely God's"], on our foreheads, and we receive the "seal of God." (See Exodus 28:36-38, Ephesians 1:13, and Revelation 7:1-3.)

On the other hand, if we are not surrender to God, He will not be able to "keep [us] from falling." (See Jude 24.) As it says in *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 4*, page 355, "Without Christ we cannot subdue a single sin or overcome the smallest temptation." And as Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5. So, if on our own we are not able to keep from committing the "smallest" sin, for sure we will not be able to keep from receiving the mark of the beast!

Thus, as the mark of the beast is forced on *everyone*, (see Revelation 13:16), either we will be totally surrendered to God and His grace will keep us from receiving it, or we will receive the mark and commit the unpardonable sin. Probation closes as this polarization becomes complete, and everyone's destiny will be decided for eternity. How important is it then, that we develop the habit of "abiding" in Him now, by acknowledging Him in all our ways and humbly *staying* surrendered!

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Heaven stands indignant at the neglect shown to the souls of men. Would we know how Christ regards it? How would a father and mother feel, did they know that their child, lost in the cold and the snow, had been passed by, and left to perish, by those who might have saved it? Would they not be terribly grieved, wildly indignant? Would they not denounce those murderers with wrath hot as their tears, intense as their love? The sufferings of every man are the sufferings of God's child, and those who reach out no helping hand to their perishing fellow beings provoke His righteous anger. This is the wrath of the Lamb. To those who claim fellowship with Christ, yet have been indifferent to the needs of their fellow men, He will declare in the great Judgment day, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity." Luke 13:27.

Some Thoughts on “Grab & Go” Packs, “Backyard Survival,” and Hiking Packs

Every once in a while someone wants to show me the items in their “Grab & Go” pack. As they start pulling equipment out, all too frequently the items are still in the plastic wrappers! When I see this, it makes me cringe inside. Gear that is still in the wrappers has obviously not been used, and that causes me to wonder if they actually know how to use the things in their pack.

Don’t misunderstand, I’m glad they *have* put a pack together—which is more than what most people have done. But I can’t help but wonder if their pack full of “emergency” gear doesn’t actually provide a dangerous false sense of security. How would they fare in an actual emergency? Would they be able to get their equipment to work so they could stay warm and dry? Do they have the gear they actually need? And what would happen to all the “plastic” trash?—especially if they were out in nature somewhere?

There is a thing called, “Backyard Survival.” It goes something like this: “If you can’t make it work in your backyard on a sunny afternoon, you won’t be able to get it to work up on the side of a mountain, in the dark, when it’s raining!” By practicing with your equipment at home, you will *know* how it works, and you will also have a better idea whether you have what you really need or not. So *please*, take your equipment out of the plastic wrappers and try out your gear at home. Using just the things in your pack: Build a fire—use a barbeque grill or a fire pan if necessary. Cook some simple foods on the fire. Get some poles, (“tree stakes” work good,) and build a shelter with your tarp(s) in the backyard. Sleep in it overnight. By the way, this makes for some great family time—your kids will love the adventure of it all!

A logical next step would be to take your “grab & go” pack on hikes. Of course, you may not want to take *everything* in your pack for just an afternoon hike, but ask yourself, “What am I willing to carry when we’re *not* planning to spend the night, so I *would* have it with me if we *did* have to spend the night?” and pack accordingly.

But don’t let your hikes be destination-oriented-forced-marches. Make the purpose of the hike to interact with both nature and the equipment you need to live in nature. Allow yourselves to “wander” and explore. Stop and play with nature and your gear along the way. This will give you the chance to become familiar with what nature provides, and the equipment (tools) you need to make use of natural things. By doing this you will find yourself refining your equipment list, and what you have in your pack will become more efficient.

Those “extra” items, that you didn’t necessarily want to take with you on just a day-hike, can simply be kept next to where you keep your pack. That way they can be quickly and easily added in a “grab & go” situation. It may also be a good idea to keep certain clothing items with your emergency pack, such as your hiking shoes or boots, as you may not be wearing proper clothing when it is necessary to “grab & go.”