

December 16, 2017

RE: Mark of the Beast

Dear Mr. MacArthur:

I was deeply saddened upon learning a week ago that you have said, and stand by it in an online article posted on the Grace to You website, that God "must" allow people who take the mark of the beast to repent, "otherwise, how could so many be saved during the great tribulation?" This is a very dangerous thing to say. This is using your own fallible understanding of the order of events in the Book of Revelation, as well as your own limited wisdom, to come to the conclusion that you have the authority to downplay the stern warning from God in Rev. 14:9-13. It is not "enduring" when someone takes the mark and worships the beast in order to survive. (Rev. 13:7-10, 15-17) But the mark is not merely a financial control tool. It has much deeper meaning than that.

I am not able to dogmatically pinpoint when the rapture occurs based on Scripture, no matter how much I study or how many convincing (and contradictory) commentaries I read. I prefer to encourage people to be ready for Jesus' return, no matter when that is, rather than assure them they need not worry about the mark of the beast if they are believers now (even if I were to think they will not be on earth at the future time of the rapture). Because of my love for Jesus and His Body, and because of the great number of people you reach, I cannot just leave this be. This is not simply a matter of freedom of belief in "non-core" issues. To people who may be alive when these things come to pass, your comments on the mark of the beast could be compared to telling people who are now on their death bed that everyone goes to heaven.

Saying that people can escape suffering the punishment that God has specified for taking the mark is a foolhardy thing to do in light of Rev. 22:18-19 and Prov. 30:5-6. It is either removing the destiny absolutely ordained by God, or it is adding "unless they repent" when that is not what God said. He was perfectly able to say that, just as He said in so many other passages of the Bible, but He chose not to—and we can be sure that was with good reason, as always. Please bear with me while I establish from the Bible why everyone needs to be prepared to lose their lives to gain their souls if need be. (Matt. 16:25-28) I will also explain why I am convinced that it is not possible to "repent" of taking the mark.

Many people believe as you do that the Church is absent for the entire tribulation because it is also the 70th week of Daniel. It certainly is convenient to say we are "children of Abraham" through faith, but not "Daniel's people" isn't it? I don't dispute that the Church is a separate entity, but since we are grafted into the blessings of Israel, I try not to forget that when people act as though every good promise is for us and everything bad is for them. (Rom. 11) One thing we know for certain is that the promise to be spared from the "hour of trial" (which I am sure we can agree is the reign of the beast, based on Rev. 3:10 and Rev. 17:12) was specifically given to the Church of Philadelphia. It doesn't say how, but just that they will be kept out of it. It seems like they may be among "those who dwell in heaven" in Rev. 12:12 and Rev. 13:6, rather than among those servants Jesus deals with when He returns from the wedding in Luke 12:35-48.

So if we want to be kept out of the beast's reign of terror, then the commendation Jesus applied to the Church of Philadelphia needs to be applicable to us as well. Jesus specifies WHY He promises them they will miss the hour of trial—they have already withstood persecution, to such an extreme that Jesus will make those who troubled them bow before them in the future. (Rev. 3:8-9, Phil. 1:27-30, 2Thess. 1:4-12, Rom. 8:16-17) This reminds me of Peter under a death sentence, being freed from prison in Acts 12. (In fact, people make deals with Herod in order to obtain food at the end of the chapter, before God destroys him for accepting worship...) There are faithful believers like Peter in the world today, whose "release" would not even be noticed by the world—certainly it would not cause chaos like in the popular books and movies about the rapture.

Yet even those in the Church of Philadelphia must hold fast to their crowns until He comes in order to receive the promise. (Rev. 3:11-13, James 1:12, Heb. 6:9-12) He doesn't say He'll take it away. He says to be sure no one else does, presumably by setting snares and casting stumbling blocks to steadfast faith and devotion to Him—getting us to give up our crown ourselves by placing our priorities on temporary treasures, pleasures and concerns—deceiving us into thinking that preservation of our earthly bodies is more important than our eternal inheritance. (1Cor. 11:1-4, Luke 21:34, Matt. 13:18-23, Matt. 6:19-34, 2Pet. 3:14-18, Matt. 10:28)

Notably, the only other church in Rev. 2-3 who received no criticism, Smyrna, also endured severe persecution—but they were told not to fear it but to be faithful unto death. (Rev. 2:9-10) I don't believe we are all called to be imprisoned or die for Jesus, but no lukewarm Christians will rule with Him. (Rev. 3:21-22, Heb. 6:11-12, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Rev. 20:6) That is why we are exhorted so vigorously and so often to remain steadfast in our faith and devotion to Christ. All true believers know that we certainly don't save ourselves by anything we do. And yet the Bible is filled with these instructions for believers, about which you have written many books encouraging people to heed them. Salvation is free, but the kingdom (being worthy of Jesus) costs your life. (Luke 14:33, Luke 12:32-34, Matt. 10:37-38) Chapter 5 of Romans, mostly about the free gift of salvation, precedes it with:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5

There is actually quite a bit there, isn't there? Suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. Why? What is our hope? Christ in us, with whom we hope to glory—just like it says "through the Holy Spirit given to us," unless He's NOT in us. (Col. 1:27, Rom. 8:9-11) We have died with Him and our life is hidden in Him—He IS our life. (Col. 3:3-4) Those baptized into Him are united with Him into both His death and resurrection—those who suffer with Him, will rise and glory with Him. (Rom. 6:3-5, 8:16-25) The context of all of these passages is the holy life because of and by the power of Him who lives in us. (Titus 2:11-15)

If it were impossible to do, we wouldn't be told not to quench the Holy Spirit. (1Thess. 5:19) If our hearts are truly "circumcised," then we will worship God in truth and spirit, not with empty words, rote and ritual, or mere traditions of men. (Rom. 2:28-29, John 4:23,

Mark 7:6-9) It is necessary to overcome to inherit the kingdom, and that involves putting Jesus in His proper place: FIRST. Colossians 1:15-23 speaks not only of Christ's preeminence over ALL, but also the need to continue, stable and steadfast in the faith, not shifting from our HOPE. 1John 3:2-3 speaks of our hope of seeing Jesus as He is and being like Him, which can't be separated from the rest of the book about behaving like the children of God we claim to be (or we lie). (1John 1:6) Those who bear bad fruit do so of their own power, not His. (Matt. 7:13-29, John 15:1-14, Gal. 5:16-25) They don't need assurance that all is well. They need a wake-up call! (Matt. 26:41, 1Cor. 5:5, 13, 2Cor. 2:11)

The faithless servant who hid his talent watched those who faithfully used their gifts for the Master's glory ("profit" for His kingdom) receive rewards accordingly. But when it came to his turn, he lost his reward and was thrown out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 25:30) The man was truly one of His servants—he did receive a talent (gift of the Spirit) before the Master went to receive His kingdom. This man seems to have hidden his light under a bushel. He was cast out into darkness like salt that has lost its saltiness is thrown out and trampled. (Matt. 5:13-17 - That always reminds me of the outer court being trampled in Rev. 11:1-2.) When anyone downplays these passages for believers (in other words those who profess to have saving faith) because they are harsh teachings instead of the fluff people like to hear, it is NOT doing them a favor.

Jesus said He will never cast out any who are given to Him. (John 6:37) We know that no external forces can cause God to lose His grip on us. (Rom. 8:31-39, Acts 5:41, Rom. 8:16-17, Heb. 10:32-35) (Needless to say, false confessors are never In Him, attached to the Vine.) But He ALSO said that whoever doesn't bear fruit will be taken away, thrown out and burned. (John 15:2-6) The removal from the vine brings to mind how Jesus told us to cut off with any member of our body that caused us to sin. (Mark 9:43-50) In that same discussion, He said everyone will be salted with fire—not pleasant, but necessary. (1Pet. 1:6-7) Nothing that causes sin will be allowed to remain in His kingdom. (Matt. 13:41-43)

The Father has made a gift of some of His own to His well-beloved, only begotten Son. (John 17:6, Matt. 22:1-14) Many are called, but few chosen, and those who are chosen must remain faithful. (2Pet. 1:10-11, Rev. 17:14) Nothing unclean will enter the holy city, but through faith we receive a spotless garment. That robe can be soiled by our own carelessness and failure to value it as we should have. (Jam. 1:27, 2Pet. 2:22) If we deliberately soil it, refusing to repent and come to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing, we can forfeit our firstborn blessing like Esau did (and regretted miserably). (1John 1:9, Heb. 12, 2Tim. 2:3-7, Rev. 3:4-5, Rev. 22:14)

If our "god is our belly" (fleshly desires rule over us - 2Pet. 2:19, Gal. 5:16), then we are enemies of the cross. (Phil. 3:17-19) Paul said that we mustn't join Christ to a prostitute by committing sexual immorality with our bodies, which are His temple housing our spirits made one with Him. (1Cor. 6:12-20) Those who do so (without repenting) will not inherit the kingdom. Esau did receive a blessing from his father, but it included *servicing his brother*. (Gen. 25:23, Gen. 25:29-34, Gen. 27:36-38, Rom. 9:12, Heb. 12:15-17) In Ezekiel 44, God demotes all of the Levites except for the sons of Zadok from their intimate position of service to Him because of their abominable practices, including idolatry and failing to maintain the purity of the sanctuary. We serve the very same God, who feels the

very same way about His holiness and His name as He ever has and always will. (Ezek. 36:16-38, Isa. 48:10-11, Heb. 10:26-31)

Jacob is an example to us of relying upon God during times of tribulation and of humility. (1Pet. 5:6-11) He didn't gloat over Esau because of the blessing he received from his father. In fact, he admitted his fear of him to God and prayed for deliverance from Esau's anger. (Gen. 32:9-12) If we boast against the "original branches" that were broken off so that we could be grafted in, we can also be broken off—not spared. (Rom. 11:17-24, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 1Thess. 4:1-8, 2Cor. 12:20-13:5)

When the greatest tribulation ever experienced and ever to be experienced by the dwellers of the whole earth begins, "those who" dwell in heaven have already conquered Satan by their testimony. (Luke 20:34-36, Luke 21:34-36, Rev. 12:9-12) They didn't love their lives even unto death, which indicates severe persecution, but yet it appears that the hour of trial has not yet begun. In other words, they have "tested out" of the hour of trial because their faith has already been proven genuine by their persevering through tribulation for His sake. "Compete by the rules" and suffer in order to receive the crown [like Philadelphia and Smyrna] and the first share of the crops. Paul cryptically tells Timothy to ask God for understanding of the saying. (2Tim. 2:3-7) To me, this sounds like being part of the harvest of firstfruits of the Spirit—those standing with Jesus on Mt. Zion whose description fits the promises made to the Church of Philadelphia perfectly. (Rom. 8:23, Rev. 14:1-5, Rev. 3:10-13—an offer for all believers who "have an ear to hear"—just like each promise made to overcomers in all seven churches.)

But my point isn't to zero in on when the rapture occurs. I am aware of the striking similarities when John the Beloved's is told to "come up here" in Rev. 4:1-2 to 1Thess. 4:16-17, as well as other viewpoints. It's enough to know that believers do not suffer GOD'S wrath, and those who are "called, chosen AND faithful" return WITH Him (and only they among believers do) at the seventh bowl of wrath. (Rev. 16:15, Rev. 17:14, Zech. 14:3, Psa. 110, esp. v. 3, Jude 1:14-15, Deut. 33:3 - the term "holy ones" is not *restricted* to angels.) His people are those for whom He prepared a place and returned for (John 14:2-3, these are those who love AND obey Him, as He elaborates on in John 14:15-24)—they are cursed by Satan during the hour of trial (Rev. 13:6, the Church is a temple built of living stones - 1Pet. 2)—they are unable to enter the temple during the bowls of wrath. (Rev. 15:7-8) Those who claim that NO ONE escapes the hour of trial/reign of the beast (despite Jesus' words to the contrary) and those who say EVERYONE who claims to believe escapes (despite "having no oil in their lamps" - how is that "faithful"?) are equally wrong. (Some say the wise virgins are guests, not the Bride. Even if so, how would it make sense that the guests need oil in their lamps, but the Bride does not? Ridiculous.)

The advice in Luke 12:35-49 applies to the servants waiting for their Master and Lord to return **from a wedding** (the Greek word for wedding is the same for both the ceremony and the subsequent feast - marriage - Heb. 13:4, Rev. 19:7). These servants of God who are being judged could not have taken the mark of the beast (which is an "automatic FAIL"). In the parable, Jesus teaches that it matters whether they "knew better" or not to do right; and it's one thing to "not get ready," and another for a servant in charge to "beat his fellow servants." (And of course, everyone will know better than to take the mark of the beast, since the angel proclaims it in Rev. 14:9-13.)

Scripture teaches plainly that not all tribulation (including the Great Tribulation) is God's wrath. Jesus said that the signs in the sun, moon and stars will occur AFTER the great tribulation in Matt. 24:29, whereas Joel says that those same things will occur BEFORE the Day of the Lord in Joel 2:30-31. So a dividing line has been established between "tribulation" (which is always for our GOOD, for refining and purifying, as Dan. 11:33-37 and Dan. 12:10 say specifically with regard to the tribulation) and "wrath" (which is God's anger poured out on unbelievers). The intense persecution referred to in seal 5 (Rev. 6:9-11) occurs before the signs in the sun, moon and stars at seal 6 (Rev. 6:12-16), which is understood by the inhabitants of the earth at that time as the beginning of God's wrath.

All wrath is tribulation, but not all tribulation is wrath. I would really like to hear someone explain to the early church that God doesn't allow His own to experience extremely trying circumstances through no fault of their own (except that they refuse to deny His name - 2Tim. 3:10-17, Acts 5:40-41, 1Pet. 4:12-19). One reason the Thessalonians needed to be reassured that the Day of the Lord wasn't already at hand is that they were undergoing such severe persecution that it seemed that way. (2Thess. 1:4-2:2) What Paul tells them, in effect, is that their suffering is a GOOD sign, because it shows that they are being made worthy of His calling. (Phil.1:27-30)

The Church of Laodicea receives a reminder that Jesus chastises all He loves in Rev. 3:19. Proverbs 13:24 says that whoever refuses to discipline their son hates him. Proverbs 23:13 says if you strike your child, he will not die. Hebrews 12:5-11 says that if we go without discipline, we are illegitimate—not sons. Hebrews 12:3-4, 12-13 once again connects suffering with being made fit for the kingdom (or not, if we refuse discipline or fail to recognize the holiness and greatness of God such that we offer Him unacceptably casual, familiar "worship" - perhaps even "trampling" the precious blood of the covenant and "outraging" the Spirit of grace by continuing in deliberate sin. Heb. 10:26-31)

If we incorrectly define "wrath" as including the entire tribulation (including Satan's wrath, not God's), then it follows that the Church is not subject to it. (John 3:36, Rom. 1:18-21, Rom. 2:4-11, Rom. 5:9, Eph. 5:6, Col. 3:5-6, 1Thess. 1:9-10) I believe this is a dangerous teaching, as it leaves people who have made a confession of faith, but have not taken up their crosses to follow Jesus, unprepared if they do end up being faced with the test—to take the mark, **or** be taken into captivity or be killed with the sword. (Rev. 13:10, Dan. 11:33, Jer. 15:2, Jer. 43:11) Anyone who says that God wouldn't let His children be tested or even chastised in that way has not read the Bible. What about the twelve apostles? (Yes, I know John was not killed, but Paul was, and that makes twelve.) Did God not love them as much as us? That's an absurd thought, right?

God is going to send a **great delusion** over those who delighted in sin and hated the truth so that they believe the false signs and wonders performed by the beast. I have to ask the obvious. How on earth is anyone going to "repent" of taking the mark (which we have NO reason to believe can be removed at all) in that case? How is someone who has been deceived BECAUSE their name is NOT in the Lamb's Book of Life going to REPENT of having taken the mark? For the sake of argument, what if they did repent of it and were able to remove it, then took the mark AGAIN, the next time they want to buy something in an effort to preserve their physical life—can they repent again? How many times can one person be born into God's family or Satan's family?

You said that this is not the “unpardonable sin” of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It isn’t? The Jews accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan. (Matt. 12:22-32) Satan will be doing miracles by his own power and people will be worshiping him as God, believing that what he does in his own evil power is of the Holy Spirit. (John 5:42-43) That sounds like it fits the description to me. The mark is not only to buy and sell. It is a symbol that the person accepting it acknowledges Satan as “god.” We CANNOT eat from the table of demons AND the Lord. Our God is a jealous God. The Israelites who worshiped the golden calf at the base of the mountain PERISHED. (1Cor. 10:1-22) Jesus said not to be deceived, and the one who endures to the end will be saved, despite enduring the greatest persecution and tribulation that has ever been or ever will be. (Matt. 24)

Paul strove to obey the entire law before Jesus made him His own (Acts 22:3, Acts 9:16, Phil. 3:12), but still called himself a former blasphemer. Why? Because like his fellow Jews, he attributed the works of Jesus to the devil. He believed that the true Son of God was a blasphemer for making that claim, and he sought to wipe out His followers. (John 10:31-33) But Jesus personally corrected Paul’s erroneous beliefs, which were out of ignorance. (1Tim. 1:13) How will someone during the hour of trial claim ignorance when an angel from heaven sets the record straight right from the start? (Rev. 14:9-13)

These are serious issues! You are using the wisdom of men to deduce that in your own personal understanding, many are saved during the tribulation and so in your opinion, God “has to” let them repent or things couldn’t unfold according to your own fallible reasoning. Why do the deeds of those who die in the Lord from then on follow them? I think it’s because of the extreme difficulty in surviving without taking the mark (requiring utmost reliance on God), and the fact that they are killed for standing firm for Christ. (Rev. 14:13, Rev. 6:9-11, Rev. 15, Dan. 11:32-36, 1Pet. 5:8-11) Ephesians 6:10-20 takes on a whole new level, as does ALL of Matt. 10. (Everything happens again. Ecc. 1:9)

All ten virgins had oil at the outset in Matt. 25:1-13, but only five were READY when the Bridegroom came. The oil represents the word of God, which is a light to our feet and lamp for our path (Psalm 119:105)–just what the virgins NEED when they hear the midnight cry to meet the bridegroom. Faith comes from hearing the word of God, and if we don’t, then we take chances with the most valuable possession we ever had or ever will have. What’s worse, the foolish were told that He STILL didn’t know them AFTER they returned, having presumably made a purchase of oil? Wow. IF this happens at the beginning of the hour of trial, then it would appear that in order to buy anything, they had to take the mark. No wonder He doesn’t KNOW them. They’re children of the devil now! I’m not saying this is absolutely the correct interpretation of the parable, but there is NO interpretation where it is not TRAGIC that the foolish virgins were turned away.

God spoke to the Levites in Mal. 3:13-18, He expressed His disgust at those who don’t care about serving and obeying Him. He said that He will remember those who DO care and SPARE them “like a son” from what is to come (and it goes on to discuss the END times in Mal. 4), that they’ll be part of His treasured possession. That sounds like the Church of Philadelphia, the faithful believers in Titus 2:11-15 and John 12:26, and those who must endure discipline in Heb. 10:23-39 and Heb. 12. We are a royal priesthood, therefore everything we do and say reflects on the glorious God we serve. (1Pet. 2:9-12, John 12:26)

I see this same scenario described in Malachi happening today. People look around themselves and think that nothing bad happens to people who care nothing about pleasing God. (Psa. 37, Psa. 73) Even many believers go along with the flow and say there's no need to exercise self-control—it's all covered by grace (but one of the fruits of the indwelling Spirit is self-control, so what does that say about people who don't exhibit it and even criticize those who care about holiness, calling them "self-righteous"?) (Gal. 5:16-25, Rom.6, Heb. 12:14, Rom. 8:9)

The world is mesmerized by the god of this world. The shaking that's coming will be a blessing in the eternal scope of things. Better to lose our lives for His sake (Rev. 15:2, Rev. 20:4) than to watch as Jesus gives our reward (eternally) to someone who deserves it—someone who bore abundant, good fruit—someone who endured faithfully as we were all told to do. (1Cor. 3:11-18, Matt. 21:43) Better to cry the tears of regret at how little love we have shown our Savior, despite all He has done for us, **now** while there is still time to change our pathetic, misled, faithless ways. If we love Him, we'll obey Him—and we'll be ready when He returns.

Great and glorious promises of God have been made specifically and only for those who love Him. (Jam. 1:12, 1Cor. 2:9, 1Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, Rev. 21:7-8, Heb. 6:11-12, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Psa. 50:16-23) None of those passages say "to those who [claim to] believe." Jesus made it clear what "love" is in John 14:15-24 and John 15:10. That is what is meant by "abiding." People need to understand the importance of taking care not to lose their stability by listening to the deceivers that Peter warned about in 2Pet. 2 and 2Pet. 3:14-18. Children of the devil love sin and they love to encourage others to sin. (Rom. 1:32, 1John 3, 1Pet. 4) They are the ones who accuse people who genuinely love God, and show it, of trying to earn salvation. (2Tim. 3:12-14) They hate intolerance of sin. (Rom. 1:32, Rom. 12:9)

I know that you believe and teach that we're not keeping the letter of the law in an attempt to save ourselves. We're using the freedom He gave us to honor and glorify Him. (John 8:36, Jam. 2:12, Rom. 6) We do so because we love Him who first loved us—we're pouring ourselves out for Him because that's what He did for us. (2Tim. 4:6, Matt. 26:26-28, 1John 4:8-10, 1Pet. 1:8-9, 2Cor. 6:11-13, Rom. 5:1-8, Titus 3:3-8, Gal. 5:13) We don't show someone our love and respect by constantly disregarding their wishes. The example of holding fast to our spouse in marriage represents our relationship with Christ. (Matt. 19:4-6, Eph. 5:22-32, 1Cor. 6:12-20) The warning is for our benefit, because it is necessary to hold fast if we want to receive all that we hope for. (Phil. 2:14-16, Col. 2:18-19, 1John 2:28-29)

Paul said that he was "striving" to be found IN Jesus (and all who are mature should join him in this line of thinking), to share in His suffering so that he could attain to the resurrection. Paul's saving faith didn't acquire this for Him, but rather brought it within the realm of possibility. (Heb. 11:6, Phil. 3:7-21, 1Cor. 9:24-27) The one who wants to attain it must fight the good fight, run the good race and exercise self-control. Since we know that we can't earn salvation, and everyone will be resurrected—even unbelievers—it seems that Paul was referring to the FIRST resurrection. (Rev. 20:4-6)

So while we do NOT save ourselves, our inheritance and portion in the kingdom of God is conditioned upon yielding to the Holy Spirit's work in transforming us into the image of Jesus. (Rom. 8:29-30) He does the work and we merely cooperate instead of striving against Him. Jesus taught us in the parables of the minas and talents that we must be obedient and faithful, using the gifts He gives us for His glory in order to receive a reward from Him. (Luke 19:11-27, Matt. 25:14-30, 1Cor. 12:4-11)

We should be looking forward to His return with great anticipation because we are READY. We are walking in the LIGHT, fully CLOTHED, with nothing to be ashamed of. (2Cor. 5:1-5, 2Tim. 4:5-8, Rom. 8:16-25, 1Cor. 9:24-27, Col. 3:23-25, 1John 2:27-29, Matt. 25:1-13, 1Thess. 5:4-10) We have examined ourselves as Paul told us to do and we are confident that we will receive our inheritance. (2Cor. 13:5, Gal. 5:16-25, 2Pet. 1:3-12, Rev. 2-3, Eph. 1:11-14, Heb. 10:32-36, Heb. 3:5-17) If we do not bother to examine ourselves, or we do and find ourselves lacking but are not willing to change our ways, then that is cause for concern. We must accept discipline from God and encourage one another to live up to our high calling. (1Cor. 11:30-32, Heb. 12:3-11, Phil. 3:13-21, Col. 2-3, Eph. 4, 1Thess. 2:11-12, 2Thess. 1, Rev. 3:19, 2Cor. 13:11, Titus 2, Heb. 10:23-25, 1John 2:28-29)

Every preacher and Bible teacher surely knows that the 8th chapter of Romans also teaches that we MUST have His Spirit if we truly ARE His, and that those who have Him dwelling in them DO submit to God and walk in the Spirit. We must also suffer with Him IF we are to glory with Him. We believers need to pay attention to all of it, not just the "nice" parts that make us feel reassured that God still loves us "up to the sky" (to coin a child's phrase) no matter how much we show disdain for Him by our thoughts, words and actions. (2Tim. 3:12-13, 1John 3, 1Cor. 13:11-12) The man in the parable that Jesus told about the wedding banquet who did not put on the wedding garment which had been PROVIDED accepted the invitation. He "showed up," but He had not "put on Christ" - similar to those who thought that having some sort of vague connection to Jesus saved them, but they were not allowed in. (Matt. 22:1-14, Luke 13:22-30, Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:26-27)

We can't be the property of both God and Satan, and we need to be sealed by God if we are going to avoid being deceived along with those who have rejected salvation. (Matt. 12:43-45) If we are not even to serve money as our master or yoke ourselves to an unbeliever, then how could we possibly think it would be okay to do those things with Satan? (Luke 16:13, 2Cor. 6:14-18) We are to be faithful to Jesus just like spouses are to be to one another in marriage. (2Cor. 11:2) Taking a mark identifying ourselves as worshipers (really, his property--just like those sealed with the Holy Spirit belong to God) of the beast is idolatry just like unfaithfulness in marriage is adultery. (Rev. 14:4-5, Eph. 5:31-33) Again, we partake of the table of the LORD, not the table of demons. (1Cor. 10:14-22) What else is that if we worship a false god and take his mark in order to be allowed to buy bread? (Rev. 13:16-17) JESUS is the Bread of Life and living water (spiritually, we still die physically but we have eternal life). (John 6:47-51, 63, John 4:13-14) We rely on HIM to sustain us. (Psa. 37:25, Isa. 31:1) The Bible says that whoever takes the mark will be tormented in the lake of fire forever. That is exactly what terrifies every God-fearing person, right? It doesn't get any more dire than that!

Here's a question: Why would God go to the trouble not only of recording that information for us in the Bible, but during the hour of trial/reign of the beast--an angel will proclaim it,

if it is not CRUCIAL that EVERYONE understand? The Bible "doesn't say" that you "can't" repent of taking the mark and so that means you can? That reminds me of baptizing infants because it "doesn't say" not to. I think you'll agree with me that it's common sense. Babies have not yet committed any sins to be washed from and have no concept of what sin even is, let alone intention to turn from it and follow Christ. The Bible doesn't say "be 'baptized with the sprinkling of water' so that you will believe" or "faith comes from being baptized with water." But I digress.

When we were born, we inherited a sinful nature due to the fall of Adam, but had not yet sinned. (Psa. 51:5, Rom.5:12-13, Rom. 7:9, Isa. 7:15-16, Rom. 7:9) At that time we belonged to God, who owns the earth, including everyone and everything in it. (Psa. 24:1) Then we became self-aware, learned right from wrong, and we ALL sinned. (Rom.3:2-26) At that point, we *unknowingly placed ourselves in the domain of darkness, the "kingdom" of Satan*. (Eph. 2:1-3, 2Cor. 4:3-4) But thanks to God, we heard the Good News and received the opportunity to have our sins washed away by Jesus' blood (but not everyone accepts the gift of faith). (1John 4:10, 1John 1:5-10)

Our "former sins" were committed in ignorance. (Acts 17:30) For example, the men crucifying Jesus "knew not what they did." They knew they were causing Him severe pain and taking His life, but they thought it was justified—they didn't understand that He was the innocent Son of God. (Luke 23:32-43) Paul was not aware that by persecuting Christians, he was persecuting Jesus. He thought he was doing the right thing by rounding them up, confiscating their property, and having many of them put to death. (Acts 7:58-8:3, Acts 22:3-8, Acts 9:4-5, Acts 26:9-11, 1Tim. 1:13-14)

We probably knew it when we did wrong, but we didn't understand that the penalty for it would be death—that God is HOLY and sees it ALL. (Acts 3:17-21, Heb. 4:13, Rom. 6:23) Sometimes we convince ourselves that there is nothing wrong with what we do, since everyone around us thinks it's okay. But God has given us each a conscience (the "law written on our hearts"), and so unless we sear it so that we can no longer hear it prompting us to do what is right, we DO know better. (Rom. 2:14-16, Rom. 1:18-20, 1Tim. 4:1-2)

When we accepted the message of repentance and forgiveness, along with the corresponding gift, we were *transferred from the kingdom of the "ruler" or "god" of this world (Satan) into the glorious kingdom of the Son of God—we became "citizens of heaven."* (Col. 1:13-14, Eph. 2:4-10) We became a new creation in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk as Jesus walked, in a manner worthy of Him and His calling (2Cor. 5:17, 1John 1:5-2:6, Eph. 4) (and of course, there is forgiveness and cleansing from our sins when we repent and confess them). (1John 1:9)

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit when we come to faith in Jesus. Being born again into God's family is a ONE time event. (John 1:12-13) Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Heb. 12:22-24, Luke 10:20) If we would rather be children of the devil, "despising our inheritance" and forsaking it, there is no turning back. (Heb. 6:4-9, Heb. 10:23-39, Heb. 12) I think you'll agree that it's not something a believer can do accidentally, so if they feel grieved by their behavior and want to receive a fresh start from God then they CAN repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing, and be restored to fellowship

with God and their brothers and sisters in Christ. (2Cor. 2:6-11) However, there IS such a thing as "blotting out" a name from the Book of Life. Those in Sardis were told that IF they overcome by correcting the deficiencies Jesus pointed out, THEN their names would not be blotted out. THEN they would "walk with Him in white" like those who had not "soiled their garments." (Rev. 3:1-6, Jam. 1:27, Heb. 12:14, Rev. 21:27)

Satan has always wanted to be God (not "a god," but THE God. Isa. 14:12-21, Ezek. 28:11-19, which are dual prophecies about a historical king AND Satan). Satan "fell" spiritually before he tempted Eve, but he still had access to heaven at least up until the time Jesus ascended to His Father. (We know this because of the pre-enactment with Joshua "standing in" for Jesus in the vision where his robes are filthy and Satan accuses him in Zech. 3, 2Cor. 5:21, John 20:17.) Many believe that Satan was banned from heaven shortly after creation, but reference is made to terrorizing the nations. There were no nations yet when only Adam and Eve had been created. Additionally, Satan was able to accuse Job, just as we see he does with all of the saints in the passage above. We know that God tolerates "vessels of wrath" for as long as He sees fit, for His own purposes. (Rom. 9:14-22) If we cleanse ourselves from the dishonorable, we will be vessels fit for honorable use by the Master of the House. (2Tim. 2:19-26, 2Cor. 6:14-18)

So these events occur after Satan is cast out of heaven once and for all. He knows that "his time is short" before Jesus will return to put a stop to his reign of terror for the sake of the elect. Satan hates God and everyone who loves Him, and he is the "father of lies." (John 8:44, 1John 2:9-11, 1John 3:15, 1John 4:20) Since we know that Satan's purpose in all of this is to imitate God and divert worship from God to himself, we can then apply that knowledge to the mark of the beast. What is its purpose? It's obvious. Since God seals people (invisibly) with the Holy Spirit to mark them as His, Satan also wants to seal people with his mark as well. (2Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13-14, Eph. 4:30)

In Rev. 3:12, overcomers are told that the name of the Father, Son and New Jerusalem will be written on them. In Rev. 14:1, the name of the Father and Son are written on the foreheads of servants of God who are on Mt. Zion with Jesus. In Ezekiel 8-9 (esp. 9:4), God has His people marked on their foreheads prior to striking dead those who are unconcerned or even participating in the idolatry that is going on. Rev. 13:6 specifies the mark of the beast to be taken either on the forehead or the right hand, which seems to signify strength and authority in its usage in the Bible—when Aaron and his sons were ordained as priests in Lev. 8:22-24, the ritual specified by God involved their right side. So suffice to say the mark of the beast is a **counterfeit seal**.

In his imitation of God, Satan gives his followers "gifts" during his reign of terror. (Dan. 11:32, 39) He also appears to "resurrect" someone who died of a fatal head wound from a sword, which brings to mind a combination of John the Baptist and Lazarus. (Rev. 13:3, 13:12-14) As you know, the "heads" of the beast symbolize both mountains and kings, even though preterists like to spiritualize them solely into past "kingdoms." It seems to me that the mountains represent kingdoms and so that would be repeating the same symbol—kings have kingdoms but are not kingdoms. (Rev. 17:9-11)

Regardless, if we are on the earth when these things written in Rev. 13 come to pass, God will not "understand" that even though He did NOT cast a delusion over anyone whose

name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, we took the mark anyway because we wanted to save our physical lives. That is idolatry because it is putting trust in and ascribing worship to a false god. Those around us who are deceived by the beast do not have their names written in the Book of Life. **Anyone who takes the mark and worships the beast will be officially born of Satan, not God.** That is why it's called the hour of trial. It is a TEST. (Dan. 7:21-22, 25, Isa. 48:10, Jam. 1:2-4, Jam. 1:12-16, 1Pet. 1:6-7) That is why it calls for such endurance. What will we choose—to lose our lives in order to gain our souls, or to survive? This is no doubt why Jesus said those very harsh words in Luke 21:19, Matt. 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-38, Luke 9:24-26 and John 12:25, but especially Matt. 10:32-42.

Why do you suppose the person who gives a cup of water to someone because they are a prophet receives the same reward as the prophet himself? In my opinion, it's because in the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' words, it may cost a person's LIFE—not only to refuse the mark, but also to support those who refuse to take the mark. Dangerous times. We have a type of it in the Old Testament when Saul was pursuing David. Saul found out that some priests had sheltered and assisted David, so he had them, their families and even their livestock killed! (1Sam. 22) The manner in which people treat those who are suffering for God's name also brings to mind the judgment of the nations in Matt. 25.

There were severe consequences for idolatry in the Old Testament. These people belonged to the one, true God, and KNEW to worship ONLY Him—just like we do. (Heb. 13:8, Mark 12:28-34)

*Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose **heart is turning away** today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. **Beware** lest there be among you **a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit**, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, **blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'** This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The LORD will **not be willing to forgive him**, but rather the anger of the LORD and His **jealousy** will smoke against that man, and **the curses written in this book will settle upon him**, and the LORD will **blot out his name from under heaven**. And the LORD will **single him out** from all the tribes of Israel **for calamity**, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law. Deuteronomy 29:18-21*

*You **cannot** drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of **demons**. You **cannot** partake of the table of the Lord and the table of **demons**. Shall we provoke the Lord to **jealousy**? Are we stronger than He? 1 Corinthians 10:21-22*

There is a price to pay for ANY form of idolatry. The same "root of bitterness" in Deut. 29:18 is mentioned again in the solemn warnings of Heb. 12. We have ONE God who does not change. He STILL hates the same things today as He has always hated. Taking the mark (which I believe will be permanent—those who have it—or at least do not have God's seal—at one point wish to die and are unable to do so over a 5-month period of time - Rev. 9:1-11) and worshiping the beast (remember, whoever refuses may be killed - Rev. 13:15) is quite an obvious practice of idolatry. (1Cor. 10:14, 1Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:5) Even unrepentant covetousness is considered idolatry. (Eph. 5:5) This world and its pleasures are passing away, but the one who does the will of God will remain forever. (Matt. 6:19-34, 1John 2:15-17, Phil. 3:17-20, Rev. 3:19)

The one **who conquers** will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will **never blot his name out of the book of life**. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Revelation 3:5

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. Revelation 22:18-19

How amazing it is that God tells us all these things in advance! (Matt. 24:25) **I would be extremely relieved if you would very publicly retract your poorly-thought-out teaching, which reverses the warnings God was so gracious to provide.** No harm has been done yet as these things have not yet come to pass. There is still time to abandon this harmful hypothesis and adhere strictly to the word of God so that there will be no blood on your hands. (Ezek. 3:17-21, loosely applied) The Bible does not teach that we can take the mark of the beast, repent of it and be saved. God gave us SEVERE warnings against this, and we are not to "soften" it for anyone, negating what He said. That is going beyond the text, and it is the sort of thing people do when they want to change what God said to allow various sins that people they love commit (or that they like to do themselves). The result is people being deceived into thinking that their sin is acceptable to God. (Jer. 23:16-22, Gal. 6:7-9, 2Pet. 2:18-22)

I have nothing whatsoever against you, but it has been very saddening to see how your supporters make light of this error. We are not to be respecters of persons, but are to lovingly correct one another. (James 2:1, James 3:17, 1Tim. 5:21, 2Tim.4:2) The Bible teaches:

"If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Revelation 14:9-12

With a heavy heart,
Tricia Berg