

Buying And Selling

A Divine Transaction

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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With the COVID-19 vaccine in the news every day, we constantly hear of various conspiracy theories about it and how it's being used by the powers that be. I do not have any idea whatsoever—none whatsoever—whether any of these are true or false. I do not know. Like I said in my commentary the other day ["Vaccine Policy"], I do not have any really deep knowledge in immunology or any of those things that would allow me to make, if not an expert opinion, at least a qualified one.

But I have heard things like "it turns the injection site into a magnet." "It causes terrible clotting in the blood in some people" (and I know that some people have had that). "It bursts red blood cells." That was one of the most recent ones that I've seen. Somebody sent me a video that says the vaccine does terrible things to red blood cells. Almost immediately after it came out, I heard that it sterilizes men and women, or both, or whatever—I do not know the exact details on that one. Of course, with the mRNA stuff, I've heard that it changes our DNA, and now if we get the vaccine, we no longer own ourselves but the pharmaceutical company owns us because all that stuff is patented.

I've also heard that it's a ticking time bomb whose effects will only be known in 5, 10, 15 years, when people start dying like flies. All those are conspiracy theories. I do not know how many of them have been proven or not. Of course the one that has to take 5-10 years, we will not know until 5-10 years. But those are all things that are floating out there and people are pointing to them and saying, "You should take it." "You should not take it." Mostly, "You should not take it." That's just what's going on out there now.

One that gets the rounds on the internet a lot, especially during times like these, is that the COVID-19 vaccines are the mechanism for an implanted

microchip or some sort of nano computer that they will put in your arm and it will do something. I guess it marks you as one who succumbs to the force of the government, or what have you—the New World Order.

David recently told me—this was about two weeks ago that the most popular page on our website is a Bible Q & A, which we put up about two decades ago, on "Is the Mark of the Beast an Implanted Microchip? That actually began as a [form] letter from the Worldwide Church of God back in the '80s that we changed into a Bible Question and Answer for our site. That short article disabuses people of that notion—that the mark of the beast will not be an implanted microchip.

Sill, among religious people and conspiracy theorists, it is a going concern that the government—or a coming government (you know, the New World Order), or the Beast—will chip us like they do pets these days. They'll know exactly where we are, and this chip will be so advanced that it will keep us from doing certain things outside of their permission. Most often cited is that we will not be able to buy or sell unless we get one.

Let's go to Revelation 13, where the mark of the beast passage is. This is where the beast from the land is presented. This is the one that we call the false prophet:

Revelation 13:11-17 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth—by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except

one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

We have probably all read this many times. We have all probably heard a sermon or two, trying to explain this passage, in our time in the church. So the Beast from the earth—the false prophet— causes everyone under the Beast's jurisdiction to get a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. This placement—right hand, forehead—is often interpreted, interpreted to affect both the doing or the working (which we do with our right hand) and the intellectual pursuits (our thoughts, our reasonings) because the right hand symbolizes work, strength, and power, and the forehead is right in front of your brain, which symbolizes your mind and your thinking processes and how you reason.

Then comes verse 17, with its stipulation that a person who lacks the mark. . . . Notice, you can also lack the name of the beast or the number of his name. But the person who lacks the mark may not buy or sell. That is an intriguing proviso. The Mark of the Beast allows one to transact business. Perhaps it's as simple as buying or selling food. It seems like the Mark of the Beast opens up an opportunity, while lacking it closes all avenues of making a living or even purchasing the necessities of life. That's the way it's often been interpreted.

My purpose this morning is not to explain the Mark of the Beast, even though you may have thought that that's what I was doing. It is not also to suggest that it is developing before our eyes. We have explained many times before that it likely has to do with Sunday observance and the Beast's religion. That's the mark that's there. That is what identifies people as not being God's people. This is why the false prophet is its source and enforces it. The false prophet is a religious figure.

Today, however, I want to juxtapose this passage here in Revelation 13—specifically verse 17—with a proverb of Solomon and a prophecy in Isaiah to focus on what may be the transaction Satan wishes to shut down most of all.

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Nearly a century ago, Herbert Armstrong understood this verse to be a godly principle that instructs the church to give the truth away for free. "Gratis," as he used to say on his "World Tomorrow" broadcast. The church has done this. It has relied on the tithes and offerings of its members and co-workers—on the blessings of God that He has given to them—to fund its efforts. So we never ask for money. We never say that our booklets are worth \$5, or that you have to pay for them in any way.

On the other side of this transaction, we—that is, those who love the truth of God—are supposed to pay whatever price is necessary to gain it. "*Buy the truth* and sell it not." No expense is too dear to get God's way, God's truth, into our minds and into our lives.

Jesus puts it another way in Matthew 6:20. He says, "Lay up treasures in heaven." Do what you can to bring those treasures into your life and lay them up in heaven. They are heavenly treasures. Solomon writes a great deal in the early parts of this particular book—Proverbs—and elsewhere. He talks about seeking God's wisdom because it's more precious than gold or jewels of some kind. If you think about what the disciples did in the gospels, they forsook *all* and followed Him. That's the price they paid. Later on He asked them, "Are you going to go away?" "You're going to leave Me?" And they said, "No, because You have the words of eternal life." His words of eternal life were the most precious thing to them, and they were willing to give up everything for it. Let's go to that prophecy in Isaiah, where Isaiah says something similar:

Isaiah 55:1-3 Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.

God, through the prophet, echoes what Solomon said. The words of God are priceless. "Buy the truth and sell it not." The value of God's way is

inestimable. We cannot put price a tag on it. And as Isaiah says here, God's truths cannot really be bought, nor do we have the money to pay for them. It's beyond us, they're so valuable. But God says He gives them freely to those who will listen. Even though He has some of the most precious items, as it were, in the universe, He's willing to give them away to those who want them because of the good it will do for them.

The result of Him giving these things freely to us and us seeking them with our whole heart is a relationship with Him. As He says here, it's an everlasting agreement with Him, a covenant, and all the abundance of what is truly important forever. That's the transaction I'm talking about, this transaction between those whom God calls and who decide to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and give their lives to Him, and on the other side are God the Father and Jesus Christ. And all we have to do, God says, is listen and respond with in obedience and love for Him. But that's the transaction. "I will give you all these things freely. Just believe. Just listen and start to do them." That's all he asks. "Have a relationship with Me. Obey My voice."

We find it difficult to do these things, but by comparison, it's really a small price to pay for all that God promises, all that God dangles out there as the reward: eternal life; rulership in His kingdom. We look on it with such awe and we think it's so hard. But it has such great rewards. It is such a wonderful thing to hope for—that is, the culmination of all of it.

But you know what? Satan the devil hates this transaction with a passion. He's hated it from the beginning. He's hated it from the time of Adam and Eve. *He* wanted their love and affection. He did not want them to give it to God. He did not want them to have a relationship with Him. He did not want them to have the rewards that God promises to all humanity, and it has come down all the way to us, and he has the same hatred for the transaction to be made between us and God. He's tried to stop it in so many ways down through the centuries and he has consistently failed with those whom God has chosen.

Now, I'm just going to throw this out there as something to think about: The Mark of the Beast may be his last ditch effort to stamp out the preaching of the Gospel. He wants to stamp out the church's ability to do its part in that transaction. No one will be able to preach unless they conform to the state

religion and preach the Beast's gospel. No one will be able to do the business of religion unless they have the approval of the Beast and his False Prophet.

I think, How they will *hate* the Two Witnesses because they will be free of the Mark of the Beast and doing, worldwide, with a huge megaphone supplied by God and all the miracles, to do exactly the thing the Mark of the Beast is designed to prevent. You wonder why the Beast and the False Prophet will want to kill those Two Witnesses and shut them up? Because they are God's mouthpiece for getting that transaction started and making it progress along the way. They will not be stopped in "selling," and the people that God is calling will not be stopped in "buying."

Who knows how long it will be before such a decree falls on the world. But right now, we can still preach God's word pretty freely, and pretty inexpensively, too, through the internet and by other means as well. We can speak the words of life to this world, and God can use them in however He wills. You might say, we have not taken the Mark of the Beast; we can still "buy and sell." We can still do God's work.

As I always do with with these offering sermonettes, I try to give you something to be thankful for, something that makes gratitude well up in you for what God has done. So this is something to be thankful for—that is, the church's freedom—even amidst all the shrinking freedoms in this world.