

How to Battle the Beast (Politics and Religion!?!?)

Rev. 13:1-14:1

#26 in our series "The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation"

June 24, 2018

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Prayer

Lord God, we say together, in our hearts, we renounce the voice of the dragon and his beast, and the great harlot. We ask that you would help us, through your power, to hear the voice of Jesus sitting on the throne in the sanctuary of our soul. I am asking that you would help us to preach, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Message

For the last two weeks, we've been talking about the seven-headed dragon. And last week we met the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. I said that they were politics and religion.

Hopefully, you are aware that it was the beast from over the sea, the governor of the Roman province of Judea, Pontius Pilate, at the request of the beast from the land of Israelⁱ, the religious leaders of the Jews.

It was the beast from the land and the beast from the sea, under the direction of the dragon, that inspired the crowd to chant, "Crucify, crucify, crucify."

As the religious leaders of the Jews mocked, a Roman soldier took a spear and thrust it in the side of the Lamb of God. Blood and water gushed out, confirming that He was dead, and fulfilling the ancient prophecy of Zechariah that they would "look on the one whom they had pierced" (Zech. 12:10).

Now, the last verse of Revelation 12: "And the dragon stood on the sand of the sea . . .

Revelation 13:1-18

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer

them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. [or, more literally translated, “whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (NKJV)] If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of [a] man, and his number is 666.

It's “the number of a man,” or more literally translated “it's the number of man.” Hopefully, you remember that man is created on the sixth day and finished by the Seventh. Jesus was crucified on the sixth day of creation, the sixth day of the week, at the sixth hour of the day, just before the start of the Seventh Day. He cried, “It is finished,” and delivered up His Spirit—that Spirit that now romances the human heart. Well, 666 is the number of man . . . the number of fallen humanity.

As we talked about last week, it's also the number of Emperor Nero. In John's day, the common practice was to assign numbers to letters, and then add the numbers together to come up with a name. And then you might use the number as a code for the name, particularly if you were being persecuted by the person and government that carried that name.

And we know from the start of the Revelation that the early Church was experiencing persecution. In fact, Asia Minor, where the seven churches were located, was something of a hotspot for the cult of Emperor Worship.

The Jews were exempt from the requirement, for Judaism was a recognized religion. Most early Christians, even Gentiles, identified as Jews for they had been grafted into the family tree by the blood of Jesus. However, if the folks in the local synagogue disliked the followers of Jesus, they only had to say, “*These Christians are not Jews,*”

and then those believers would be handed over to the Roman *Concilia*, the Roman Body, tasked with enforcing emperor worship.

Some believers were killed and many were forced out of the trade guilds and turned into refugees—they couldn't buy or sell—for they refused the mark of the beast.ⁱⁱ

Nero was the fifth emperor of Rome.ⁱⁱⁱ

And he died by a self-inflicted head wound; he took a knife to his own throat.

Upon his death, the Roman Empire fell into a period of confusion, and many thought the beast was dead until Vespasian came to power, the empire revived, destroyed Jerusalem, and people throughout the known world wondered out loud, "*Who can fight against it?*" The Empire of Rome?

No matter who or what you think the beast is, one thing is clear, it seems almost impossible to kill. If you kill it in one form, it will come back in another.

The seven heads are seven kings or emperors. In chapter 17, we learn that they are also seven mountains or hills. Rome is the city built on seven hills.

The beast also has ten horns, and we'll discover that these are ten kings still to come.^{iv}

There have been all sorts of ideas as to who or what those ten horns symbolize; no one seems to know. Perhaps the ten is figurative, and it tells us to just keep counting using all of our fingers.

The beast is at least Rome, and at least many kings and kingdoms still to come. It's also many kings and kingdoms that *have* come and *gone*. They seem to keep coming back.

What John sees in the Revelation, Daniel saw 500 years before in Babylon. It's important to read your Bible so you recognize this stuff.

In Daniel 7, Daniel sees four beasts rising out of the sea. They are Babylon, Persia, Greece, and apparently Rome. The fourth beast has ten horns and it's defeated by the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man, whom all people will serve and whose dominion is an everlasting dominion (That's Daniel 7:14).

The four beasts are one beast and also appear as an image in a dream that both Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel have. You can read about it in Daniel chapter 2. And check this out: God even reveals that the head is Babylon, and in particular, Nebuchadnezzar.

You may remember, that God gives him the mind of a beast until he is humbled and writes one of the most beautiful hymns in all of Scripture—He's a beast, but he gets un-dragoned, or un-beasted, by God.

The head is Babylon, the torso is Persia, the loins appear to be Greece, and the legs and ten toes, appear to be Rome. Then a great stone, hewn not by any hand, strikes the toes of the image—breaking it into pieces and then grows into a Kingdom that eventually fills the whole earth... and will never fade away.^v

Well, the Lamb has conquered, for the stone has struck the image, the son of man has cried out, "*It is finished*," and he did it just when Daniel prophesied that he would.

Christ has conquered,

And yet, in John's day, they still battled the beast.

And it seems that we still battle the beast... in our space and our time.

So, what and where is the beast in our time?

In Revelation 13 there are two beasts, the political beast and then the one that looks like the Lamb and talks like the dragon. For hundreds of years among Protestants the most popular candidate for beast was the Pope in Rome. Read about the inquisition, the crusades, and the power exercised by the papacy and you'll see that it became incredibly beastly.^{vi}

But it's not just the Pope; it's the institutional church . . . Protestant, Roman Catholic or Orthodox. When politics and religion get together some incredibly evil things seem to happen.

In the 20th Century, Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Empire were great candidates for beast. Their communism wasn't just politics but religion. It was a faith statement about the ultimate nature of reality. Twenty to thirty million were slaughtered under Stalin and the Church was persecuted on a level that makes Nero look like an amateur.

Ironically Marx, Lenin, and Stalin were pursuing a definition of the Good that comes right out of Acts chapter 2—a group of people that shares everything in common with glad and generous hearts. They saw the Good, but they didn't really know the Good, and tried to take the Good like a beast.

Most of my Conservative friends are deeply concerned about that Communist beast, but sometimes in their fervor, they can act a bit beastly.

Joseph Stalin was a great candidate for beast, but Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich may have been the best candidate. And it wasn't just politics it was religion. The First Reich was the Holy Roman Empire, the Second Reich was the German Empire, and the Third Reich they believed to be the Nazi Empire—the new humanity. Hitler was known for family values.

A U.S. delegate to the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin in 1934 sent back this report of what he found under Hitler's regime:

It was a great relief to be in a country where salacious sex literature cannot be sold; where putrid motion pictures and gangster films cannot be shown. The new Germany has burned great masses of corrupting books and magazines along with its bonfires of Jewish and Communistic libraries.

Hitler was all about family, the German Family . . . and that's called a race. Family isn't bad. Family is Good.

So what happened? Hitler saw the Good, didn't understand the Good and tried to take it like a beast. Like Stalin, he was fascinated with power; he saw it as the ability to force one's will upon another will. And so absolute power would be to consume and subsume all other wills—including the will of God—into one's own will.

In 1973, historian Trevor Ravenscroft wrote a book entitled *The Spear of Destiny*. The spear is supposedly the lance, which the Roman soldier stuck in Christ's side as He hung dead on the cross. There are all sorts of legends surrounding this spear, involving rulers like Alaric (who sacked Rome) and Charlemagne—the first of the Holy Roman emperors. The legend was that whoever possessed the spear would be able to conquer the world.

On March 14, 1938, Hitler annexed Austria and obtained all the relics in the Hofburg Museum. He ordered that the spear be brought to Germany. In 1944 he placed it in an underground vault. On April 30, 1945, at 2:10 p.m. American forces took possession of that vault and the spear. Eighty minutes later, Hitler killed himself in a bunker in Berlin. (It was suicide, like Nero . . . and according to many a gunshot wound to the head is what killed him.)

Hitler spoke of the day he first saw the spear in that museum in Austria:

I stood there quietly gazing upon it for several minutes quite oblivious to the scene around me. It seemed to carry some hidden inner meaning which evaded me, a meaning which I felt I inwardly knew yet could not bring to consciousness...I felt as though I myself had held it before in some earlier century of history. That I myself had once claimed it as my talisman of power and held the destiny of the world in my hands...

Creepy huh?

Most of my Liberal friends are deeply concerned about that Fascist beast, but sometimes in their fervor, they can act a bit beastly.

Many say that the 20th century was the most violent in all of history. It was the century of the beast.

I suspect that this was largely due to Charles Darwin's study of beasts . . .

But I wouldn't blame our beastliness on Darwin; most people don't understand Darwin.

It's common to hear people say things like, "*Life is the survival of the fittest.*" But competition clearly doesn't explain life; it explains the limitations of life. It does have something to do with the origin of different species—but it can't explain species themselves.

Press any biologist worthy of the name and I think they'd have to admit that Life is not the survival of the fittest . . . but something more like the sacrifice of the fittest . . . and that's a great mystery.

We can understand why one beast would eat another beast. But we can't understand why one cell within a beast would sacrifice for another cell within that same beast; why one member of a body would bleed for another member of that same body . . . why one molecule would seemingly choose—freely choose—to serve another—even sacrifice itself for another.

Many have postulated some sort of a "Life Force" . . .

We know that "The Life Force" is the Will of God, and the Will of God is the Slaughtered Lamb standing on throne bleeding for each and for all.

We also believe that God is Creator and therefore, creation is Good.

And yet creation has been subjected to futility.

In other words, creation is literally eating itself; it has become beastly.

In Romans 8, Paul writes that one day "*creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.*" In that day, "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... and the lion shall eat straw like an ox... and the nursing baby will play over the den of the Cobra... and they shall not hurt or destroy on my holy mountain*" says the Lord in Isaiah 11, "*for the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.*"

The Lord is Love.

And so the whole earth, even all the beasts, will be filled with Love (that knowledge, that Word, that Presence).

Well, the dragon cannot comprehend Love and so wants to eat the Baby.

He calls up the beasts to help him battle us with a river of lies.

The beasts are politics and religion.

We've been talking about the beasts for months, although that's not what I've called them.

You should be familiar with this picture:

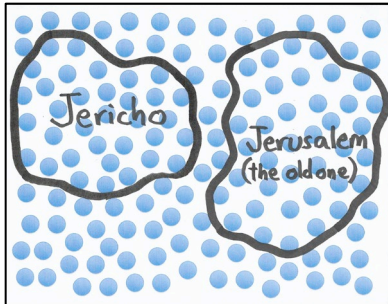


Figure 1 Image credit: Peter Hiett

The blue dots represent souls.

And the blue dots inside the black lines represent members of a society. It's what we previously called "a covenant of self-interest." I suspect it's what John is calling the beast. Another word for it might be politics or religion... or at least, human politics and religion.

It's a society bound together by "*The knowledge of Good and evil*," and the *power of the flesh*. It's not a living knowledge and it's not an interior knowledge. It's knowledge that's written down and put on a stone or in a book, but it can also be something like a custom or ritual. Scripture calls it "the law."

In a place like Jericho or Jerusalem, the law would take the form of a physical wall. Well, John's beast is a society bound together by legislation, enforcing its will through coercion—the power of the flesh.

In the best case scenarios, people inside the wall want to be inside the wall because the government works for them and so they work for the government—it's a covenant of self-interest or self-preservation . . . a way to save your life; it may look Good on the outside, but it's a world away from the communion of self-sacrifice that *is* Life and manifestation of Love.

In the worst case scenarios, people inside the wall are forced to remain inside the wall . . . And people outside the wall are threatened with death, if they don't agree to surrender their will to the will of the beast, which is walking death.

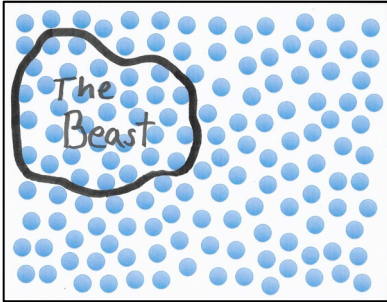


Figure 2 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

When people feel threatened by the beast, they naturally want to battle the beast, BUT how do you battle the beast?

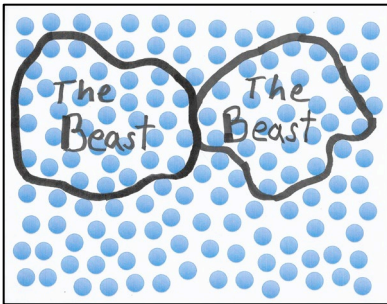


Figure 3 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

What we naturally do is form a new beast.

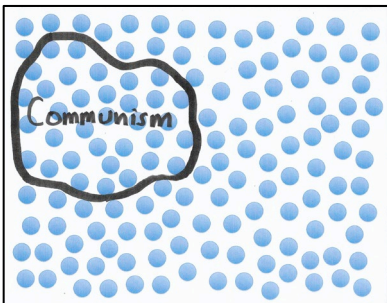


Figure 4 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

If the first beast is Communism . . .

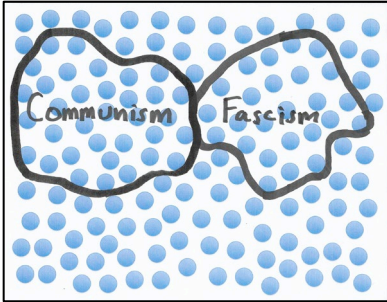


Figure 5 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

The second beast might be National Socialism or Fascism . . .

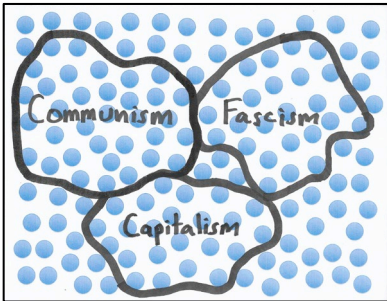


Figure 6 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

It might be Capitalism, advanced by an army of marketing, propaganda, and protected by the world's largest military.

We might think we kill the beast, but maybe we just become the beast . . . in a new form.

You know Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome were all successive beasts trying to replace the previous beast, and yet they were all still "the beast."

Listen closely: the Kingdom of the Lamb is *not* a new beast...

And yet, we're tempted to turn it into a beast every time we feel threatened.

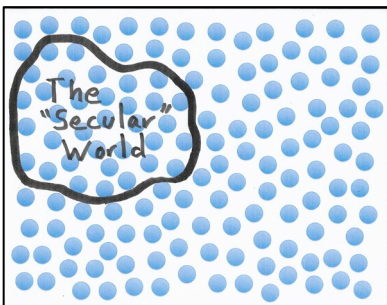


Figure 7 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

In America, when we feel threatened what do we do?

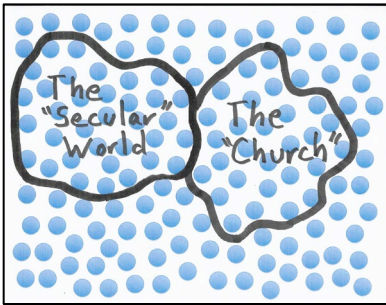


Figure 8 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

We write our congressman and then complain that the Church is no different than the world.

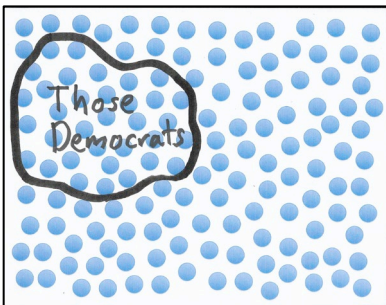


Figure 9 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Maybe we feel threatened by some Democratic legislation, and we think we need to go to battle, and maybe we really should go to battle . . .
But how do you battle the beast? Do we create a new beast?

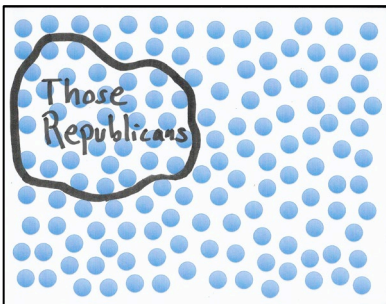


Figure 10 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Maybe we feel threatened by some Republican legislation, and we think we need to go to battle, and maybe we really should go to battle . . .
But how do you battle the beast? Do we turn the Church into a beast?

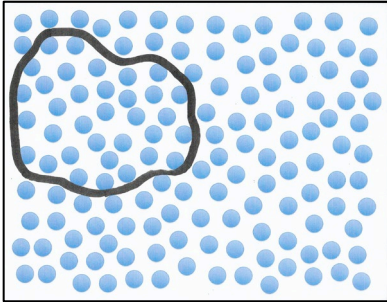


Figure 11 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

How do we battle the beast?

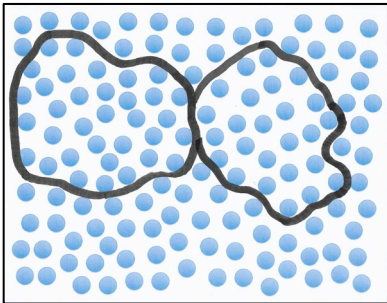


Figure 12 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

We Americans seize power and create another beast...

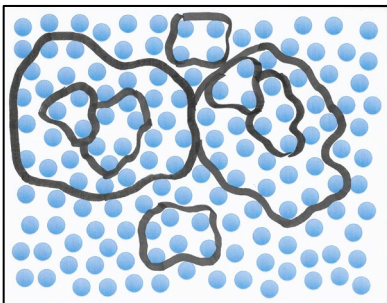


Figure 13 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

And then, beasts within beasts, battling more beasts...

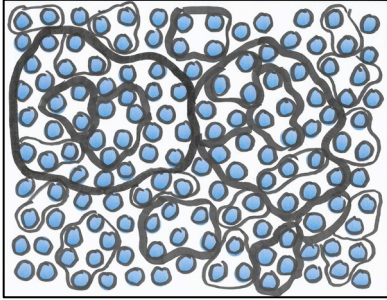


Figure 14 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Until everyone is a tired and lonely old beast.

The Kingdom of the Lamb is *NOT* a new beast!
 But if you think it is, you will sacrifice the Lamb . . . for the sake of the beast.
 You will join the priests chanting, "Crucify, crucify . . . we have no king but Caesar."

Karl Barth wrote:

The divine state is quite incompatible not merely with the wicked totalitarian state but with every conceivable human regime. . . . We do not know God at all if we do not know Him as the One who is absolutely opposed to our whole world which has fallen away from Him and is therefore self-estranged; as the Judge of our world; as the One whose will is that it should be totally changed and renewed.

Well, the beast *is* politics and religion...

But now you might say . . .

"Well dang, I'm grateful for a little politics and religion. It's better than anarchy." "Peter who was it that stopped Hitler in 1949 and brought the Soviet Union to an end in 1989? . . . Didn't we kill the beast?"

Well . . .

I think our government restrained one or two beasts, but we may have helped create some other beasts . . . and in the process become a little more beastly ourselves.

I'm certainly not saying we shouldn't have entered WWII.

Personally, I'm very grateful that we did.

I'm just saying that the US Government didn't kill the beast.

You might say...

"Well Peter, God instituted the governing authorities."

Romans 13:1 Paul wrote, "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities (exousia). For there is no authority (exousia) except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*"

This last week, Jeff Sessions famously quoted that verse in defense of President

Trump's no tolerance immigration policy.

He quoted the verse, but he forgot to mention a few things...

- Like the fact that Saint Paul often wrote from prison where he was kept by *the authorities*...
- And that Jesus was crucified by *the authorities*...
- And that most of the Bible, including the Pentateuch, most of the Prophets and the New Testament was written by people on the run from *the authorities* BECAUSE they didn't do what *the authorities* told them to do...
- Even the United States of America exists cause we didn't do what *the authorities* told us to do... we said, "*Shove off King George, and take your tea with you.*"

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul wrote,

...We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities (exousia—same word), against the cosmic (world) powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

It seems that Paul obeyed the *authorities*, unless he felt compelled by a higher *authority* to do something different. No matter what, he never battled people, but he always battled *the authorities*...

Do you suppose he battled *the authorities* by subjecting himself to *the authorities*? (He didn't write, "Obey..." but "*Be subject to*" the authorities.

Jesus battled *the authorities*; He certainly didn't agree with *the authorities*.

. . . But did He subject Himself to *the authorities*?

Did Jesus *LET the authorities* nail Him to a tree . . .

Or did He call down a legion of angels to kick their ass?

A lot of folks seem to think He messed up the first time, so He needs to come back and conquer—He still needs to kick some ass, for "It is *not* finished."

In Colossians 2:15, Paul wrote that on the cross, "*God disarmed the rulers and authorities [exousia] and made a public example of them triumphing over them in Christ Jesus.*"

That means that on the cross, God, in Christ, kicked their ass.

And yet, in Romans, Paul wrote that "God instituted the authorities..."

Do you suppose He wanted us to watch Him kick their ass?

God "*instituted the authorities*" wrote Paul, in Romans.

God "*triumphed over them in Jesus*" writes Paul, in Colossians.

And now "*we battle them*" writes Paul, in Ephesians.

How do you put that all together?

Well, this thought helps me:

In 1950 the great Dutch theologian, Hendrik Berkhof wrote a ground-breaking book titled

Christ and the Powers—that is “Christ and the Authorities”—*exousia*. In it he argues that Paul saw the principalities and powers, the rulers and authorities as “structures of earthly, human existence,” “social facts,” ideologies, nations, governments and even religions. These “rulers and authorities” were created *by* God, but like humanity, they had fallen and could become inhabited by evil.

- So, we battle against *the authorities* inhabited by evil . . . like Stalin and Hitler.
- And yet I think, maybe, we battle against them all... even the ones, perhaps, not quite so saturated with evil—like Denver County, the Home Owners Association, or maybe even a 501c3 non-profit religious organization that we refer to as “our church.”
- I mean maybe we’re supposed to battle *the authorities*, the way a child battles to grow up and become an adult.

That would mean that God instituted the authorities for a time, but not to rule us for all eternity. The authorities are institution governed by *law* in the power of the flesh.

In Galatians 3:19-20 Paul wrote, “*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed [that’s Jesus] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.*”

A mediator works to turn several wills into one will, but God is one will. And if we all had the will of God, sitting on the throne in the sanctuaries of our souls, we would all be one, and each of our wills would be free. We wouldn’t be bound by law, but united in Love—for God is free.

In Ephesians, after Paul writes that we “*battle against the rulers and authorities*,” he asks the Ephesians to pray for him that he’d be given courage to “*proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, for which he is an ambassador in chains.*”

In Ephesians 3:6, he tells us the mystery.

This mystery is that the gentiles (that means “the others,” the people on the other side of the wall, even the unbelievers) *This mystery is that the gentiles, are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.*

He goes on to say that our job is to proclaim this to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Our job is to proclaim that we are truly not divided.
But that Christ has made us one Body in Him.

My body is governed by a radically different sort of government than that of Babylon, Persia, or the state of Colorado...

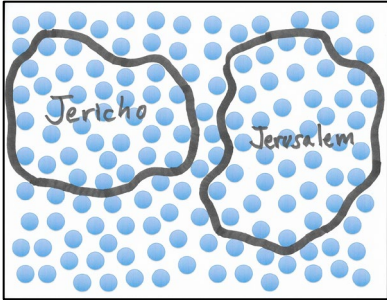


Figure 15 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

The cells in my body don't look like that.
They look more like this:

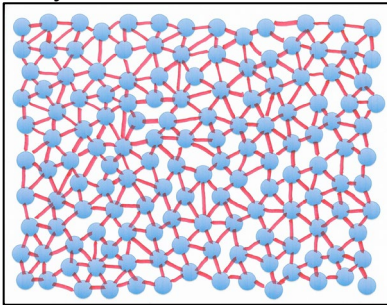


Figure 16 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

My body isn't dead. And it's not many individual lives, but one life.

Each member feels its neighbor's pain, and all members together feel their harmony as absolute joy. My body is not governed by a list of laws, and I never have to argue or force the members of my body into submission. Every member is free, even though entirely subject to me, the head.

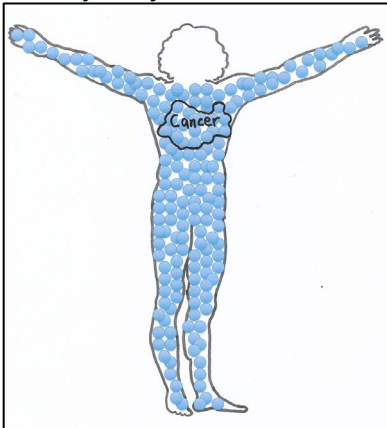


Figure 17 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

The cells in my body don't look like that.

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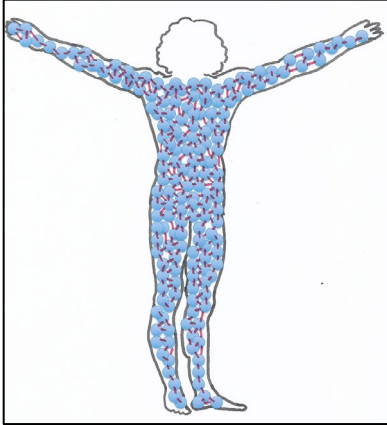


Figure 18 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

You could say that each member has faith (trust) in the judgment of my head.
 And each member is fed by the blood pumped from my heart.
 Each member constantly surrenders blood and receives blood.
 Each member constantly surrenders its life and finds its life.
 Each member is happy.

Well in Galatians 3:23-25 Paul continues talking about life under the law:

...before faith (trust) came, we were kept under guard by the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor (paidagogos—"child conductor") until Christ came, that we might be justified (made right) by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. But you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

I think Paul is saying that the rulers and authorities are like babysitters.
 There are relatively good babysitters and relatively bad babysitters.

You hire a babysitter so your kids don't kill each other while you're out to dinner, but you never trust the babysitter to raise your children. Likewise, a government can keep people from killing each other, but a government cannot create in you, or your neighbor, a new heart, a heart trusts the Father; a person in the image of God..

Well, Christians arguing over government is like two parents arguing over rules for the babysitter. That's fine, rules for the babysitter really matter, but if those parents divorce over the rules for the babysitter, they're worse than the babysitter; they've become the beast.

In America, we get to choose our own babysitter. And often we don't choose well...
 But a Christian doesn't put faith in the babysitter; he or she puts faith in the Father, who's coming back and claims us as His own.

Usually, we don't choose well . . . and most of the world can't choose at all.
And with my analogy, I don't want to diminish the fact that babysitters can be downright evil.

I didn't watch it, but I saw the trailer for this new movie: *The Babysitter*; it's about a young boy attracted to his babysitter, who happens to be the babysitter from hell, who plans to sacrifice him to the dragon. Maybe it's a stupid analogy, but my point is don't trust the babysitter; trust the heart of your father in heaven,

Inspired by the dragon, the pastors and priests of Israel colluded with the government of Rome; they convinced the children of Israel to chant, "*Crucify, crucify, crucify*, and then, they did. They nailed the heart of their Father to a tree in a garden.

"*We battle not against flesh and blood*," writes Paul, "*but rulers and authorities*..."
So, how do we battle the rulers and authorities?
How do we battle the beast... not just in places like Iraq, but even our church?

In 2nd Corinthians 10, Paul writes that our weapons aren't of the flesh, but they do have power to destroy strongholds and every proud argument.

In Ephesians 6 he gives us armor . . . and all the armor *is* Christ.
In Revelation 13 we read about the beasts that slaughtered the Lamb.
In Revelation 14:1 we see the Lamb: "*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*..."

As we preached earlier in this series, we are the 144,000, and we battle like the Lamb, with the very blood of the Lamb flowing in our veins.

He is the Light of the World. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
And so here are just a few suggestions:

How do we battle the beasts?

With Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Light

We shine the light on the beasts...
We know what they are, and we know what they are not . . .
And we know we battle them, and not each other . . .

So we should get together and argue about the rules for the babysitter, but never break up the marriage.

In sermons, I try to avoid rules for the babysitter, for I think I'm called to preach our Father's heart. But I would love to host discussions during the next election, or even now, around any political issue that you'd like—not so you could win an argument, but so that we could all shine the light on the beast, listen for Christ in each other.

And never surrender your thinking and feeling to an institution like Fox News, CNN or even the institutional Church (I am sharing with you, and this is also an institution. Hopefully, you can hear what I say, and you know enough about me to listen to me as a person. But beware of institutions!)

And we can argue, and we don't have to panic, for the Lamb has already conquered... and nothing can be done by the beasts that hasn't been allowed by God, our Father. When Jesus stood before Pilate and the High Priests, Pilate said, *"Don't you know I have the power to crucify you."* Jesus said *"You have no power over me, except that which is granted you from above."*

How do we battle the beasts?

With Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Light
2. Jesus is the Way

Jesus is the way.

And Jesus said, *"I only do what I see the Father doing."*

John writes that the beast *"was, is not, and is to come."* This may fry your brain, but in some utterly profound way, the beast has no power now... perhaps it doesn't even exist now.

The beast derives its power from fears in your past and your fears for the future . . . it makes you fear death and form strategies to save your own life, so you'd never lose your life. It uses death as a trump card; the resurrection has utterly transformed the meaning of death.

Can you imagine how the beast tempted Jesus on that Friday?

"Jesus if you do this; if you refuse to fight, you will die . . . And not only you will die, most all your disciples will suffer and die. Jerusalem will be destroyed." All that your people have struggled to build, the labor of one-thousand years will be destroyed.

But Jesus didn't navigate with strategies and maps...

He walked in the now with His Father.

That's the presence of the Kingdom.

And so He said to Pilate, *"If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight, that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world."*

How do we battle the beasts?

With Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Light
2. Jesus is the Way
3. Jesus is the Truth

Jesus is the Truth. He sits on a throne in the temple of your heart, and you know Him not as just law in a book, but a voice in your soul that's called honesty.

Jesus said to Pilate, *"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."*

The beast from the land looks like a lamb but talks like a dragon. You may have noticed in chapter 13 that he is allowed to deceive the people that dwell on the earth with signs.

On the day that Jesus conquers the beast, He does no signs. He wants you to hear the Truth and love the Truth apart from the signs. Jesus *is* the Truth, and Jesus means *"God is salvation."*

The Beast may look like a lamb and do all sorts of amazing signs, but he won't preach *"God is Salvation."* He'll preach, "I am salvation" or "Your choices and deeds are salvation." "We—the beast—are salvation. We are life. Don't lose your life."

How do we battle the beasts?

With Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Light
2. Jesus is the Way
3. Jesus is the Truth
4. Jesus is the Life

Jesus is the Life.

And Jesus doesn't save His life; He offers it for all. What the beast takes, Jesus gives—He *for-gives*.

Life is literally a river of constant forgiveness; it's a river of blood.
The Life is in the blood.

We are His Body and we bleed His blood.

It's the ultimate weapon against the Beast.

It destroys the accuser and it tames the Beast.

The Beast is allowed to conquer the saints, for that is how the saints conquer the beast .
. . . and are made in the image of God the Father.

"Conquering in both cases," writes commentator Eugene Boring, "that of the Christ and that of Christians, means no more or less than dying."^{vii}

You know we already have a wall at the Mexican border? I used to see it every few months when we'd go build houses in Tiajuana. It's a wall of cement, steal, regulations, customs, and laws.

What's been happening at our southern border has been an absolute tragedy for as long as I can remember . . . and lately, it's only gotten worse.

But as long as we have two separate governments there will be some sort of wall... and we can bicker about what it's made of, and how big it should be. But if you really feel called to tear down the wall, you don't need the backing of the beast: Mexican or American—you just need the blood of the Lamb.

Find a Mexican immigrant and love him, her or their kids the way you love yourself . . . because you know they are yourself; they are your own body. Even better, book a flight to El Salvador, find some teenage boys filled with fear and pledged to the beast, MS-13. If they attempt to take your life, forgive your life . . . bleed for them, "*loving not your own life even unto death.*"

If you wonder, "What good will that do?"

Well, that's just Good, and it's the way we conquer the beast. "*The blood of the lamb, the word of our testimony, loving not our lives even unto death.*"

How do we battle the beasts?

With Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Light
2. Jesus is the Way
3. Jesus is the Truth
4. Jesus is the Life

*"The Blood of the Lamb, the Word of our testimony,
loving not our lives even unto death."*

- It was precisely when the beast from the land conspired with the beast from the sea,

under the influence of the dragon—when they took the life of the Lamb on the tree . . . that He gave His life on the same tree and conquered *all things*.

- It was precisely when that Roman soldier thrust the spear in our Lord's side that the beast was conquered, and could no longer conquer.
- It was then that the Roman Centurion dropped to his knees and said, "Surely this was the son of God."
- It was then that he looked on the One whom He had pierced.
- It was then that Jerusalem began mourning for Him and begging for mercy.
- It was then that the fountain was opened on Mt. Zion.
- It was then that the river of Life began to flow, half to the western sea and half to the eastern sea, all as prophesied by Zechariah.
- It was then that the Great stone, hewn not by any human hand, struck the image of the beasts in Daniel's vision, and the kingdoms of this world began to crumble and the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ began to fill all empty things with the fullness of God.

Don't get sidetracked by a world of politics and religion.
You already know how to battle the beast and conquer the dragon.

Communion

For on the night that the Lamb was betrayed, the beginning of that day, the Lamb took bread, broke it and said, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat.
And in the same way, He took the cup saying, "This is *the* covenant [It's not a covenant of self-interest, but it's a covenant of love] in my blood. It's poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it *all* of you."

Benediction

So, John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos being pursued by the beast from Rome. And I imagine he was hated by the beast from the land—his own people. The city of Jerusalem was about to be destroyed and God gives him a vision. He looks to the throne and sees the Lamb. That was the Lamb he saw when he stood at the foot of the tree—the cross. He sees the Lamb and 144,000 redeemed from the earth. That means these people had been harvested from the earth. They had died in arenas and been persecuted and tortured, many had been his friends and he sees them on the throne singing and dancing. Do you see how that totally undoes the power of the beast? They're liars and they keep us in a lifetime of bondage through the fear of death.

So, by way of benediction, believe the Gospel. And if you say, "How do I know the Gospel when I hear it?" Believe the One who has freely chosen to hang on a cross, for that One has chosen truth over the beast—of Rome: politics, over the beast—of Israel: religion, and over the Great Harlot, which is an economy of consumption. He has chosen truth over politics, religion, and business. He has not only chosen truth, He is Truth.

You've come to the communion table, which means that Truth is sitting on a throne in the sanctuary of your heart. He speaks directly to you. You don't need the babysitter. Listen to the voice of the Father, in your heart, when you surrender yourself in prayer. In

Jesus' name, believe the Gospel!

ⁱ "The Land" is a common Biblical designation for the promised land, the land of Israel.

ⁱⁱ Emperor Nero was notorious for his insanity and his persecution of believers. He would roll them in pitch, strap them to poles, and then, use them as human torches in the Coliseum so that even at night, Roman citizens could watch others believers fed to the beasts on the arena floor.

ⁱⁱⁱ Depending on how you count, Vespasian or Titus could be numbered as the 7th. Jerusalem was utterly annihilated in 70 AD by Titus under the direction of his father Vespasian.

^{iv} That's why people got all worked up about a Ten-Nation European Confederacy . . . and then those dang Europeans went and added too many countries to the European Union.

^v In Daniel 9, the Angel Gabriel appears to tell Daniel that this would all happen in 490 years—it would be an end to sin, atone for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness... seal vision and prophet, and anoint a holy sanctuary.

Church Fathers like Athanasius and commentators like Matthew Henry clearly thought this referred to the death and resurrection of Christ.

But in the 20th century, in particular, many seemed to think that the kingdom hadn't come with Jesus the first time, so he'd need to do it a second time... but this second time he'd really kick some ass...

In Daniel that time of struggle before the end is referred to as "time, times and half a time, that is 1 year + 2 years + a half a year, which is 42 months, 1,260 days or 3 ½ years, a broken 7.

It's the time of struggle before the end.

I believe what the New Testament teaches that Jesus is the End, and the cross is the Revelation of the End, so when we come to the cross and believe the Son of Man as he cries "It is finished," we are finished in the image of God.

We pass from the 6th day to the 7th day, where everything is Good.

We pass through Judgment from death into life, when we believe.

All of us believe, but struggle to believe, and so we still battle the beast.

And clearly, John thought the seven churches battled the beast.

The Lamb had conquered.

And we are called to conquer by faith.

"This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith." Wrote John

^{vi} Most think that the church conquered Rome in 313 AD with the Edict of Milan and the conversion of the Empire. But some make a pretty good case that, at the same time, the Beast conquered the church, by turning her into a beast.

The demise of the Constantinian world view, the gradual decline of the notion that the church needs some sort of surrounding "Christian" culture to prop it up and mold its young, is not a death to lament. It is an opportunity to celebrate. The decline of the old, Constantinian synthesis between the church and the world means that we American Christians are at last free to be faithful in a way that makes being a Christian today an exciting adventure. -Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens, (Aningdom Press: Nashville, 1989) Chapter 1, pg. 17

See also, Malcolm Muggeridge, The End of Christendom, (Eermans: Grand Rapids, 1980)

^{vii} Joseph Tson was the friend of some of my friends in Romania and the pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Oradea. He was persecuted by the Nazis and then the Communists.

One day, the secret police brought him in for interrogation and threatened to kill him if he didn't stop preaching the Gospel. Joseph said, "Sir your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying... so go on and kill me." Not knowing what to do, they let him go... And yet, largely due to the blood of some of his friends, Romania is now free of its dictator.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote, *...as long as this world lasts and Christ's Church is in it, it is to be a militant Church. Although it has the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, woe to the Christian Church when it is triumphant in this world, for then it is not the Church that has triumphed but the world . . . Did he not come into the world in order to suffer; is not that what he called being triumphant?*