

NO MAN MIGHT BUY OR SELL

The beast with lamblike horns of Revelation 13 "was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could speak, and could cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death. Moreover, it caused everyone, great and small, rich and poor, slave and free, to be branded with a mark in his right hand or forehead, and no one was allowed to buy or sell unless he bore this beast's mark, either name or number" (Rev. 13:15-17).

We observe three significant points in this text:

1. This will be enforced worship, based not on love, but on fear.
2. All men will be classified, cataloged, and labeled.
3. Freedom will be denied to one group of these individuals. The activity that is particularly restricted is buying and selling. This may include every variety of exchange, but the primary emphasis pertains to worship, which suggests restriction of the buying and selling of salvation.

Concerning this prophecy, Ellen White comments: "When we learn the power of His word, we shall not follow the suggestions of Satan in order to obtain food or to save our lives. ... In the last great conflict of the controversy with Satan those who are loyal to God will see every earthly support cut off. Because they refuse to break His law in obedience to earthly powers, they will be forbidden to buy or sell." *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 121, 122.

However, the major thrust will be against the proclamation of the Word. Those who oppose it "will put forth almost superhuman efforts to shut away the light." "By every means at their command they will endeavor to suppress the discussion of these vital questions." Civil power will be invoked and commandment keepers will be "threatened with fines and imprisonment" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 607).

Until probation closes the "restraining influence of the Holy Spirit" is felt in the land. Satan "moves upon his servants to propose measures that would greatly impede the work of God." But the "angel who unites in the proclamation of the third angel's message is to lighten the whole earth with his glory" and God counteracts Satan's moves by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the "latter rain" (*ibid.*, pp. 610, 611).

The prophecies outlined above are familiar ones, but the religious implications of the phrase "buying and selling" have often been overlooked in our interpretation.

"Buying and selling" implies: (1) sellers, (2) buyers, (3) merchandise, and (4) the bargaining transaction. Let's take a closer look at what is involved in each.

1. Merchants include: The master merchantman who, when he had found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it (Matt. 13:45, 46). "He opens His treasures and cries, 'Buy of me gold tried in the fire. . . . 'Open your doors,' says the great Merchantman, the possessor of spiritual riches, 'and transact your business with me.'"
" *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Rev. 3:18-20, pp. 965, 966.

The Master Merchantman employs men as His sales clerks. No sales man can succeed who is not thoroughly sold on his goods. Hence, we must buy for ourselves the gold, the white raiment, and the eyesalve that the heavenly Merchantman offers. Scripture also

mentions merchants of earth who became rich supplying the demands of the false church (Rev. 18:11-15).

2. Buyers: Purchasers of the heavenly treasures are represented by the man who found the treasure in the field and sold all to obtain it (Matt. 13:44). They are also represented in the parable of the virgins as awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). The foolish virgins were seeking oil from earthly merchants when the bridegroom came.

As purchasers, the true and the false church may be compared and contrasted. The true church is presented as a chaste, loyal, and pure woman. The other is seen as the great whore and her daughters. The term "whore" implies divided loyalty adulteration of teaching and practice. These contrasting symbols as applied to religious groups distinguish those who seek only to adhere to the teaching of Christ from those others who buy false religious philosophy mixed with the teachings of God's Word.

Each of these women who represent the church considers herself chosen of God, the "Bride" of Christ. Each feels secure. Both receive the same offer from the heavenly merchantman, since each claims to have and to respect the Scriptures. Both have access to the treasures of this world, if they choose. By contrast the false church, and the individuals of which she is composed, buy earthly treasure from the merchants of earth, whereas those composing the true church invest only in heavenly treasure.

3. Heavenly merchandise is presented in the Scriptures by such figures as truth, bread, oil, gold, white clothing, and eyesalve. Earthly merchandise is presented as gold, silver, jewels, ornaments, fabric for making clothing and "that which is not bread" (Isa. 55:2), presumably an imitation or substitute for the living bread.

Souls are sold by merchants of earth to the church of divided loyalty, whereas men are bought but not offered for sale by the heavenly merchantman. Jesus "saw in lost humanity the pearl of price" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 118). 4. The bargaining transaction. "Salvation is a free gift, and yet it is to be bought- and sold." Ibid., p. 116. To obtain it we must trade or sell all that we have.

This transaction is not a passive one but requires vigorous activity. The master merchant who offers his treasure to us says, "If any man . . . open the door, I will come in," and adds, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me" (Rev. 3: 20, 21).

This is where faith enters the picture. Not a dead faith that merely admits that God is great and that Christ died for our sins, but a living faith that governs the entire life and firmly believes that God's plan is best, trusts His counsel, and follows His advice.

In the parable the man who obtained the treasure sold all that he had to obtain it. The idea that we can earn a place in heaven by doing many, many nice things and yet indulge in some degree of rebellion is wrong. We cannot bargain with the Lord and haggle over the price for His treasure. In order to purchase the heavenly treasure we must put everything we have into the program those are the only terms on which it is offered.

When our hearts are fully in the program we will have made the purchase. We also will become effective salesmen.

Putting everything that we have, including ourselves, into the cause of Christ is like trading junk for precious treasure. The value difference is so great that the heavenly treasure is really a gift.

The power that attempts to put to death all who will not worship the image, thus hoping to establish a religious monopoly, will impose sanctions against those who do not accept its authority.

The divine prediction states, "No one was allowed to buy or sell unless he bore this beast's mark, either name or number" (Rev. 13:17). This suggests religious and spiritual restriction. Could it be that an atmosphere of religious toleration is implied at least at first, which would permit men to worship as they please and as their conscience dictates but forbids them to spread, or sell, their belief?

Might it also imply that men who have been cataloged as of one certain religious persuasion will be forbidden to investigate, accept, or buy other teachings or to alter their allegiance?

Be that as it may, "The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity, she will have to do in a terrible crisis, under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances. . . . The members of the church will individually be tested and proved. They will be placed in circumstances where they will be forced to bear witness for the truth." -- *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 463.

Certainly, in the light of that which is just before us, now is the time to lay up treasure in heaven. This treasure is that which the heavenly merchantman is freely offering to all who respond to His invitation.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1).

Along with this comes Christ's challenge, which will achieve even greater significance in the last moments of man's probation, "Where fore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" (verse 2).