

THE SEALING MESSAGE¹

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Many years ago [1868], General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a Memorial Day Order, which began a special day to remember everyone who has died in U. S. wars since the War of Independence of 1775.

Boys and girls like to have fun, and its right that they should have fun. Sometimes they think life is nothing but fun. Mother asks Johnny to rake the leaves on the lawn but he says, "Oh, Mom, that's no fun!" She asks little Mary to help her mop the floor, or do the laundry or the dishes, but Mary says, "Oh, Mom, that's no fun!"

Sometimes teachers want to tear their hair out because the children don't like to study ("if it's no fun, don't do it"); so they devise all sorts of ways to make reading, writing, and arithmetic "fun."

But there are some things that are simply not fun, and nothing you can do will make them fun. One of them is *war*. Only an evil man could ever think that war is *fun*. It's no fun to be shot in the arm or leg or head or chest in a war, especially on enemy soil, under a foreign sky.

Since the War of Independence began, a half million Americans have died in major wars [now well over a million]. I think it's good for us to think about that on this Memorial Day holiday, instead of thinking only of ball games, picnics, or swimming.

Think of the Revolutionary War of 1775-1789. Brave men died that America might be a free and independent nation. Do you know what that means? I lived for nearly 20 years in countries that were free and independent. You become a real American when you yourself begin to appreciate the freedom and independence your country enjoys.

Think of another of the big wars America suffered—the Civil War. A terrible war caused by slavery. Some of the American people thought it was all right to have slaves, and others thought it wrong. Neither side was happy. Finally, the nation broke in two, and the two sides began to fight each other. Hard to imagine, isn't it?

Suppose that California declared war against Arizona, and Arizona soldiers came into Banning, burning our buildings and taking us prisoners, and California soldiers went into Arizona doing the same thing. That would be awful, but that's similar to what happened. The result was that the Nation was united again, so we have what we call the "United" States of America. What difference does it make? Peace and prosperity and freedom for all. We should appreciate what those brave soldiers on both sides did when they died in that terrible war.

Think of the two World Wars. There's usually wrong on both sides in every war, and it's hard for the children to think of anybody as an enemy. America has never wanted to fight, and was reluctant to get into either of those wars. But there came a time when we had to because there was evil threatening the world. And so much suffering came.

¹ Rev. 7:1-4. 27, 206.

But today we can have picnics, we can go on vacation trips without fear, we can go swimming and hiking, can play and work and go to school, all in a free country. Why? Because brave men and women, half a million of them, and many more besides in other countries, died. We think of them on Memorial Day. Let's don't forget them. You'll enjoy your life a lot more when you realize what it cost!

But I want you to think of someone else who died that you and I might live. "If I died for all, then were all dead. ..." That's the gospel right there—you believe it or you don't believe it. If you believe it, you realize that if Jesus had not died, you would be in your grave today, dead. But He died for you, and you want to live for Him. Your life doesn't belong to you.

For sure, it was never, and it is never, God's will that the world suffer another horrible world war. Christ "came not to judge the world, but to save it" (John 12:47). It was never His will that the Holocaust take place.

The horrors depicted in the Book of Revelation are not presented as something *He* wants to inflict on humanity, but as warnings of what Satan purposes to bring on the world. And God would prepare us and teach us how to escape the hell Satan wants. Revelation would encourage us that we are not his helpless captives; through all the "hail and fire" of the seven trumpets of chapters 8-11 there is the constant ministry of the "angel" with His "golden censor" filled with the "much incense" of Christ's righteousness, that "He should offer it with prayers

of all saints upon the golden altar which [is] before the throne" (Rev. 8:3, 4).

The tornado winds of human passion are represented as being restrained by "four angels" whose mission is to "hold" them that they should not devastate "the earth" until the "angel ascending from the east" can "seal the servants of our God in their foreheads" (Rev. 7:1-4). But while we pray ever so piously for God to "hold" those tornadoes of human evil, shouldn't we cooperate with Him by proclaiming the Good News of the sealing message?

Wherever there is trouble, there is where the reconciling message must be proclaimed. There is nothing Satan hates worse than the pure Gospel; let's not be cowards and let him have his way again!

Almost all Christian churches are now talking about the second coming of Christ, and the possibility of the imminent end of the world is widely talked about. Yes, it does make good sense to talk about preparing for such an event! The people living on the West Coast are urged to prepare for "the Big One", and many decide that makes good sense. Can't we apply good sense to preparing for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ?

There are many pastors and theologians who tell us that there is no special preparation—just live a good life and do the best you can and you'll be ready either to die or to meet Jesus and be translated when He comes. But even a child can see that there is something special involved: there is a final exam coming, a great test that Revelation

13 says is “the mark of the beast” that in one final issue will divide the sheep from the goats forever. The “mark of the beast” will involve “great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24).

Never in history have God’s people met such a test! Jesus said, “Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake and then shall many be offended and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another” (Matt. 24:9, 10). In other words, many who now profess to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will then turn traitor and accept the mark of the beast. And Paul sobers us even more when he warns us, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Peter was cocksure he would never “fall,” but a girl in or barely out of her teens overthrew him.

The Good News is that there is an alternative to the mark of the beast: the seal of God (Rev. 7:1-4). That involves a special work of purification of the heart: “When [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3). On this great cosmic Day of Atonement, that precisely is the work of the great High Priest. Don’t stop Him, don’t resist Him. Cooperate with Him!

There is a very sober warning in the Bible that it seems it is easy for us to forget. It’s in Rev. 14:9-12. “If any person worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his right hand or in his forehead, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God . . .” Then chapter 15 goes on to speak of those

who have met this great challenge and have accepted that third angel’s message, and have “gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name” who stand on the sea of glass singing the song of the Lamb forever and ever. In fact, the entire Book of Revelation is concerned about this issue—the mark of the beast.

Chapter 7 describes that same group who sing the song of the Lamb as those who have received the seal of God (“we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” vs. 3), who “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (vs. 14). In the Bible, a “seal” is interchangeable with a “mark.”

So the Book of Revelation tells us that in the last days just prior to Jesus’ return in the clouds of heaven, the entire population of the earth will be divided into two groups: those who receive that “seal of God” and those who accept that “mark of the beast.” Pretty serious, isn’t it?

This requires *very* careful study. Revelation 13:8 says that “all that dwell upon the earth” will worship the beast with the sole exception of those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. “The mark of the beast is to be presented in some shape to every institution and every individual.”² It’s another crisis which in principle is the same that the people faced when Jesus was here on earth. They were divided into two groups—those who believed He was the true Messiah as He claimed, and those who

² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 396.

rejected Him. He asked them, “What think ye of Christ?” (Matt. 22:42). They *had* to decide!

And so today, you and I *have* to decide between the mark of the beast and the seal of God. But the issue is far, far deeper than a superficial, skin-deep outward sign. “The third angel’s message in verity” is the true message of righteousness by faith; it will lead to receiving the seal of God. A false, legalistic view will lead to the mark of the beast.

Time magazine reports “A Half-Millennium Rift” being healed between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. In other words, either the Protestant Reformation is dead, *or* the Roman Catholic Church is now “converted” to the true gospel. What’s at issue is the very gospel itself, how Christ saves us. Catholic commentator Richard Neuhaus says the dispute between Catholics and Protestants on this issue is “the root cause of a division that has shaped all of world history.” True! It called forth Paul’s Letters to the Romans and the Galatians, nearly 2000 years ago; and it has caused serious conflict in the remnant church today, and still does.

“What difference does it mean to me in my life?” ask millions of sincere people who simply want to follow Jesus and believe in Him. “Are we to believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone? Or is it by faith *plus* by our own efforts?” The difference sounds trivial? Think again!

Ultimately, when the smoke has cleared away, it’s going to mean the difference between accepting the seal of God or accepting the mark of the beast (Rev. 7:1-4; 13:11-18; 15:2-4). Very serious!

Let’s look; Romans 5 is the one-chapter—“encyclopedia” of biblical teaching on justification by faith:

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (vs. 1).

That means we are reconciled to God because we have “received the atonement,” which is reconciliation with Him (vs. 11). It’s more than a legal declaration, or entry in the “books” of heaven; it is an actual change of human hearts. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (8:7), but now justification by faith has abolished that “enmity.”

You can’t be reconciled to God unless at the same time you are reconciled to God’s holy law; “do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law” (3:31). Therefore, if we are reconciled to God we shall gladly obey all ten of His commandments, including the fourth. Yes, we shall obey the seventh, too; justification by faith heals wounded, alienated hearts in marriage. The miracle of marital fidelity takes place in what were “carnal hearts.” If the Lutherans and Catholics have discovered biblical justification by faith, they will begin observing the seventh day Sabbath, as Jesus did.

Justification by faith brings the gift of heavenly *agape*-love “shed abroad in the heart” by the Holy Spirit (5:5). That means a deliverance from all kinds of fear because “perfect *agape* casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). Fear ceases to be a motive in following Christ, for “the *agape* of Christ constrains us” to live not for self but “for Him who died for us” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

This change of character is produced by a heart-appreciation for the sacrifice of Christ who died for “sinners,” even His “enemies” (Rom. 5:7, 8). The “wrath” that He endured on the cross had to be that of the second death (vs. 10). Such *agape* produces the most miraculous change in human hearts ever seen in world history, for as Luther wisely said, a full understanding of justification by faith must grow as the world becomes progressively more wicked just before the end. “More abounding sin” will require a clearer revelation of “grace [that] much more abounds” (5:20).

The end result? A people prepared for translation when Jesus returns (see 1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Do the Lutherans and Catholics see it?

The apostle Paul did not muddy the waters of Christianity; he powerfully clarified the gospel. He taught that justification by faith is an experience of total heart-reconciliation with God (Rom. 3:23-31; 5:11). And if your heart (which by nature is “enmity against God,” Rom. 8:7) is reconciled to God, it will at the same time be reconciled to His holy law. And if your heart is truly reconciled to God’s holy law, you will obey that law—gladly, willingly. In other words, there will be a life-change. And when this truth is understood clear as sunlight, a people will be prepared for Christ’s coming. That’s something neither the Lutherans or the Catholics seem yet to have grasped. But the Good News is, *you* can understand it if your soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Blessed is hunger!

The Reformers apparently never had an inkling of the real doctrine of the Sabbath. Quite apart from

the question of what day to observe, they failed to get far enough to discern the doctrine of Sabbath rest itself, as a concomitant of genuine righteousness by faith. Hence it is that popular Protestant or Catholic concepts of “justification by faith” come vitally short. The Sabbath grows out of the cleansing of the sanctuary; and the cleansing of the sanctuary is implicit in the Sabbath itself. In this sense, it can be said that the Cross and the Sabbath together constitute the “seal of God.”³ In other words, if a soul clearly understands ultimate righteousness by faith, he will of necessity find the Sabbath truth in it. His prejudice and fear will vanish. Perhaps this is the significance of Sister White’s pregnant statements about the 1888 message fulfilling Rev. 18:1, 2, 4. She says we will be surprised at the simple means the Lord will use to finish His work.

Note the intersection of the seal of God, the Sabbath, the cross, and the commandments of God in this EGW statement: “What is the seal of the living God, which is placed in the foreheads of His people? It is a mark which angels, but not human eyes, can read; for the destroying angel must see this mark of redemption. The intelligent mind has seen the sign of the cross of Calvary in the Lord’s adopted sons and daughters. The sin of the transgression of the law of God is taken away. They have on the wedding garment, and are obedient and faithful to all God’s commands.”⁴

³ Cf. SDA Com., Vol. 7, p. 968.

⁴ Letter 126, 1898. {7BC 968.13}

Jesus said in Matthew 24:12 of these last days in which we live now, “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” That word for “love” is the same word Paul uses in Ephesians 5 to describe the love of husbands for their wives. It includes marital love; and marital love implies fidelity. In other words, Jesus predicted that in the last days marital fidelity would be rare. And it is.

The wedding of Kate and William has reminded us of his father and mothers’ sad debacle. Nowhere has the world seen a more dramatic and sad example of marital infidelity than in the marriage of the future king of England, Prince Charles and Princess Diana. It has been described as the greatest funeral of world history, the Prince must walk behind the casket of his estranged and divorced wife—a ceremonial public and painful display of the breakdown of love, and a horrid example of marital infidelity for the future head of the great Protestant Church of England to make for billions of young people the world around to see. Queen Victoria would have been horrified, for she gave an example of marital fidelity in an age when the Church of England stood for moral fidelity; and probably Queen Elizabeth II was confused, perplexed, and bewildered by what happened in her family. She felt it was “horrible.”

Why has this breakdown of sexual morality and spiritual fidelity occurred in the royal family that is the head of the greatest Protestant church in the world? The Bible reveals the secret reason: “Babylon the great is fallen” (Rev. 18:3), Babylon being the Bible label for the confused Protestant

churches that have ceased to protest against the apostasy of Rome, that have denied the authority of the law of God because they have rejected the truth of the seal of that law, the seventh day Sabbath. And the result, according to verse 3, is spiritual adultery which opens the door to this breakdown of moral fidelity.

If a church is willing to break the fourth commandment of the Sabbath, it has no defense against the plague of breaking the seventh commandment. But the same passage in Revelation 18 describes a world-wide call to repentance that will be effective for all serious-minded and honest-hearted people. And that’s still Good News.

But the Bible is crystal-clear that there is indeed something that is genuine truth. And God’s eternal kingdom will be made up of people who reverence truth. And further, the Bible teaches genuine truth which commends itself to every reasonable-minded, honest person. The final issue that the Book of Revelation says will catalyze humanity will be that of truth versus falsehood—the seal of God, versus the mark of the beast. And today, every issue you and I will face is related to that final one: are we searching for, accepting, welcoming, truth?

The pope, in his encyclical in which he argues for Sunday sacredness, is employing cleverly stated reason and logic (or illogic) to support the idea that Sunday is now the true sabbath of God. He reasons that the seventh-day was the Sabbath of the “old covenant,” and Sunday is the sabbath of the “new covenant.” Thus the Bible doctrine of the two

covenants is now seen to be integral to the final issue of the mark of the beast versus the seal of God. What has been thought to be a minor theological squabble turns out to be an issue of tremendous importance.

The two covenants are not matters of time or dispensation; they are timeless. There were some people in Old Testament times who were living under the true new covenant; there are people living today who are still in bondage to the old covenant. Where you stand depends on your understanding and your belief of “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14), or your willingness to believe *un-truth*, that is, the falsehood of a counterfeit or what Paul said was “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6, 7). Serious business! One will lead to the seal of God, the other to the mark of the beast.

We have long seen in “The Signs of the Times” the evidences that indicate the end is near, the coming of the Lord draweth night, etc. Those “signs” were the dark day, the falling of the stars, the increase of knowledge, “perilous times in the last days,” etc. But are there “signs” that through spiritual maturity the Lord is preparing a people for the final crisis? Here is where the possibility exists that “the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.”⁵—ignorant of the reality. Scripture warns us not to “despise the day of small things,” and that the latter rain may “come like the dew,” not necessarily like a cloud-burst or gulley-washer. At least, its beginning.

⁵ TM 507.

We are right now walking on the enchanted ground that Pilgrim walked through in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the temptation to go to sleep is almost overwhelming. Things seem great, fun was never so widespread, and the church is doing great. But could it be that there are sincere and enlightened souls maybe seated next to you in church who are pinpointed in Ezekiel 9:4 as those who “sigh and cry for all the abominations [being] done in the midst of Jerusalem”? It is only they who finally receive a “mark”, “the seal of God.”

An angel is commanded to “smite” all those who do *not* “sigh and cry”! Sounds terrible, but there it is. All the rest end up ultimately taking the mark of the beast. That passage in Ezekiel has so often been cited to strengthen “holier than thou” self-righteousness, that it is seldom thought of today. But it does not encourage judging the person next to you in church as though you are more holy because you “sigh and cry” and he/she is not serious-minded. Those who sigh and cry negatively fall into the trap of self-righteousness; but those who sigh and cry positively realize that they are no better than anybody else by nature.

They have no goodness of their own; their hearts (and eyes) are melted by the love of Christ and the realization that they are indebted to Him 100%. “Sighing and crying” positively reaches out in humble contrition to bless others, concerned more for the honor of Christ than because of our own personal fear for security, or for hope of reward.

In every theological puzzle that confronts you, where the evidence seems balanced between

opposite views, don't throw up your hands in despair, and decide to sit on the fence. You can't! At the end of the road, you're going to have to decide frankly and openly between the "mark of the beast" and "the seal of God" (Rev. 13:16, 17; 7:1-4). Look to see where is *agape*, the true biblical love. Don't be fooled by the foolish, shallow sentimental "love" that is the counterfeit of *agape*. Keeping the commandments of God will be the final test in the great controversy between Christ and Satan; but let's remember that only "*agape* is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 10:10). Outward conformity to the letter of the ten commandments may mask a heart that is bitterly devoid of *agape*. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:10).

The question resolves itself as to whether God will be judged by the universe; or is "judgment" all one-sided with Him arbitrarily judging us? This is a serious issue because a mistaken idea here can influence a person's spiritual experience and motivate him/her to serve "God" because of fear. If such craven fear becomes the deepest motivation of our hearts, then our "Christianity" degenerates to become little better than paganism.

Someone may ask, What difference does it make, whether "obedience" is motivated by fear or by love so long as it "obeys the law"? The difference will show up in the final test of the "mark of the beast." All fear-motivation will then program us to accept the mark of the beast rather than the seal of God because the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:13-18; 16:2) will be based entirely on fear (the ultimate root

of paganism). We *must* find a better motivation. And that will require a clearer understanding of the character of God.

He does not want anyone to serve Him because of fear, because such fear would be for Him a hollow victory. Billions of people bowing low before Him because they are afraid of Him and His retributive judgment would bring Him no joy. He wants deep sincerity.

Therefore Christ as the Son of God must humble Himself, make Himself vulnerable, become open and transparent, surrender Himself to the judgment of His creatures,—in short, die upon a cross apparently forsaken by God, suffer the pangs of hell itself, drain the last drop of fear in order to disarm and condemn it forever. According to Revelation 14:6-15, God must submit Himself to the judgment of the universe, "for the hour of His judgment is come." Only thus can Satan, sin, and fear be finally and totally conquered, "because fear hath torment." The universe at last will see that "God is *agape*," and "*agape* casteth out fear" (1 John 4:8, 18). You and I can overcome it only by permitting the Holy Spirit to "shed abroad in our hearts" this "*agape* of God" (Rom. 5:5). Each must ask himself, Am I pagan or Christian?