

The Mark of the Beast

by: Ronald L. Dart

I'm not sure why I should be opposed to biometric identification cards, but many people are very worried about it. I'm speaking as a Christian, of course. Why should I worry? If the only thing an ID card does is establish who I am, well, I carry my face with me everywhere I go. I am who I am. Never mind that I carry a driver's license everywhere I go with a picture of my face on it. Actually, it doesn't look much like me anymore. I'm kind of surprised people don't confiscate it when they look at it. One British website's primary objection to the biometric ID system is that it would cost too much. That's reasonable, but then I'd have to ask how much did 9/11 cost the United States? I don't know if anyone has ever calculated how much it has changed the airline industry. The billions of dollars that this alone has cost us is staggering. How much would it cost Britain if a nuclear device was detonated in London, wiping out Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, and the House of Parliament? The website is no2id.net and it seems solely dedicated to fighting the biometric ID system. It talks about what they call "The Database Society," which they are worried about: "The 'database state' is what we call the tendency to try to use computers to manage society by watching people." There are many interlocking government plans that do this. Together these plans mean officials poking into YOUR private life more than ever before.

All the databases could be linked to, or indexed by, the National Identity Register. That is the main aim of the ID card scheme. Your NIR number would be the key to your whole life. And, via information sharing, what you tell one public servant could be passed to anyone. The government calls this "Transformational Government." That sounds nice—until you understand that what is being transformed is not government but its power over you. I understand why they're concerned about this. The government already has more power than I'd like to think about, and it's a little chilling to look at what's already underway in England. The currently planned systems (not all in place yet, but definitely in the planning) include so-called biometric e-passports that would log data about your travel when used. A centralized computer database would know everywhere you have been using this e-passport. There would be centralized medical records without privacy. Actually, if I happened to pass out in some strange place and a doctor didn't know who I am or anything about me, centralized medical records could save my life, but we'll address that elsewhere. Then, there's biometrics in schools, biometrics in ID Interrogations Centers (that doesn't sound like anything I want to think about), and fingerprinting in pubs. Public campaigns now launching in towns and cities across the United Kingdom fingerprint you when you go in to buy a pint

of beer in the local pub. Electronically, of course. You don't get ink on your fingers. The Children Act Information-Sharing Index is about keeping track of where all the kids are, and we'll soon be doing something like that, I'm afraid. Then, consider roadside fingerprinting—that's using new police powers to check identity right on the roadside. Electronically, they could check a database and find out precisely who you are. There would be massively increased criminal records bureau checks for employees and volunteers, and a recording of all car journeys as a matter of course, using the photography system they've got on all their freeways. They could read your license plate, feed it into a computer, and know that you were going up the motorway at five o'clock on Friday afternoon. Why anybody would want to know that is a little hard to understand. Why would we care if they know?

Personally, I don't care very much if the government knows where I drive my car, nor do I care if a policeman is able to confirm my identity. In fact, I have a good friend to whom that would have been a boon. She and her husband were driving through Sulphur Springs, Texas, one night and were stopped by a patrolman. He took her driver's license and ran it through his system. It turns out there was an arrest warrant out for a woman with the same name. Different woman—the physical description was not the same—but nevertheless, they had to follow the officer back to the station house and spend much of the evening sorting out that she really was not the woman they were looking for. They even called the sheriff in her hometown to establish who she was. She would surely not object to roadside fingerprint ID, and neither would I if it kept me from wasting a lot of time because a policeman thought I was who I was not. There were two airline stewardesses jailed overnight in Florida a few years back, merely because they had the same name as somebody the police were looking for. So the positive ID thing by the police doesn't seem particularly scary to me. Then there are the criminal records bureau checks. If you were a landlord, wouldn't it be useful to know if a prospective tenant had been convicted of check fraud before you rent to him? That seems like it would be a useful piece of information. It would also help to know if that person was a registered sex offender. Sex offenders do move around, and don't bother telling anybody where they are. So, you might rent to one of them, and he could end up molesting a child in the neighborhood, and who knows where that would lead.

Thinking Biblically, people in those days lived in the same tribal areas all their lives. Everyone knew who they were, everyone knew what they did, and if they had been a criminal at any time in their life, the whole neighborhood knew it. Our society may offer way too much anonymity for our own good. In a way, biometrics takes away the anonymity which is most commonly used as a cover for crime. For a while I had a signature line on all emails that I sent out that said: "To the FBI or CIA agent reading this email, keep up the good work." It just didn't bother me. I can't think of anything more boring than reading someone else's email. I don't expect privacy for email anyhow. Anyone who uses the Internet can kiss privacy goodbye. I think the most telling argument the British website

makes against this system is that it probably wouldn't work as it's intended to. And, being that we're talking about the government, I can easily see how that would be.

So, I have to confess, I come out of this somewhat ambivalent about the idea. Absolute certainty about personal identification doesn't concern me, but the possible uses of information gathered from it just might bother me. The British are a lot further down this road than we are. Our Bill of Rights is a high hurdle to overcome, but there is a very real problem we need to think about. The Patriot Act is a mildly intrusive form of government surveillance. Many people don't support the Patriot Act, and they fight against it. It's hard for me to work up any serious concern over it, because it doesn't threaten me in any way—nothing I've seen does. I'm depending on Congress to do its job of oversight. Here's the problem. Most of us don't think we can depend on Congress very far. As bad as public approval rates are for the President, Congress is far worse and, candidly, I don't know who's tending to business there. That might be some cause for concern. But, if we don't have something like the Patriot Act to try to head off some of the problems we might have (which, apparently, it has in some cases already), the serious problem will come with the next big terrorist attack in this country. When I hear politicians pontificating about privacy (you see this from time to time on television), I keep waiting for some talking head to ask these guys the definitive questions: How many American lives are you willing to sacrifice for how much privacy? Are you willing to see 10,000 Americans die in order to keep your privacy? Are you willing to see 100,000 Americans die to preserve your privacy? How about a million? Because, once we cross this line, we have to make an arbitrary decision as to how much we are trying to save.

The problem is, if there is another big terrorist attack, the demand for government to do something will be so overwhelming, we will lose more freedoms than we ever imagined. It seems to me it's better to give up a little bit now than to give it all up later. There's a tragic irony in this, because we have already sacrificed some 40 million American lives on the altar of privacy. Do you recall that the fundamental issue in *Roe vs. Wade* was a presumed right to privacy? That was the constitutional issue. In fact, the big fear from the Left is that, if we start laying aside privacy rights, the right of a woman to have an abortion may be compromised. Keep that in mind. Every time you hear someone protesting that our privacy rights might be violated, we may risk sacrificing a city to a woman's right to abort her unborn child. But when a terrorist's nuclear device makes Manhattan uninhabitable for 1000 years, or kills a few hundred thousand citizens in Washington DC, the public will cheerfully give up far more privacy than we're asked to do right now. It's a sacrifice that might prevent another catastrophe, and maybe we would even behave ourselves a little better. Being who we are, though, we will probably dither until we can dither no more. It's that sort of mentality that allowed World War II to take place with a loss of thirty million lives. I can't tell you how it hit me when I read Winston Churchill's history of the second World War and

I came to the place where he described the events that took place prior to the beginning of the war. He stated that World War II was one of the most preventable wars in the history of mankind. If you don't know why that is so, you really owe it to yourself to find out, because it's true. It would have taken some very simple acts on the part of the British and French, and there would have been no World War II.

I'm afraid I'm not equipped to speak to the constitutional and governmental issues of biometric ID. I address this issue thinking about it as a Christian. Are there any Christian or Biblical issues connected with this that should concern us? If you've been a regular reader of the Bible, you're probably ahead of me on this and have already thought of one form of ID. It's the dreaded Mark of the Beast. The idea is introduced to us in Revelation 13:1. John, in vision, said, "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." I've seen some nightmarish artists' impressions of this vision in Christian literature, but it's a mistake to try to visualize it in any such renderings. The reason is that the beast of Revelation 13 is a verbal icon. In fact there are some six verbal icons in that one verse. What is a verbal icon? Nearly everyone these days knows what we're talking about when we talk about icons. While I was writing this, I counted all the icons in view on my computer screen, and there were nearly 40 of them. One of the most obvious is a tiny image of a printer. That's an icon. You click on that icon and you start the process of printing out a page. But, icons found in the Bible are not pictures. They are verbal icons. For an icon to work, though, it needs to be somewhat intuitive. Hardly anyone looks up all the symbols seen on their computer screen. You look at it for a minute and think, "What does that do? Oh, I know. That will create a table on my screen." You click on it and, sure enough, it creates a table. Or, maybe you didn't figure it out. You just try it, which is how many of us learn these things. We just click on the icon and see what happens. But icons are usually designed to be intuitive.

There's a tiny clipboard on your menu bar that basically means that anything you've highlighted on your screen will be copied onto "the clipboard." You can use another icon to paste that selection into a new document. This being the case, you would expect verbal icons in the Bible also to be somewhat intuitive, and they almost certainly were to the people who read them first. Seven heads with seven crowns represents, intuitively, seven kings or heads of government. It's really hard to imagine it meaning anything else. Applying a little reverse analysis you can, perhaps, go back and see the beast as something of a union of states. And you want to be very careful about numbers in any prophetic literature. They are just as likely to be symbolic as they are real. In fact, they are more likely to be symbolic than real. Seven, for example, crops up again and again in the Bible in prophetic works, and it basically symbolizes the whole. It's all of something. The literal number could easily be quite different. It's much smarter to leave that door open than to be caught looking for the wrong

number. You might think, “It can’t possibly be the beast because this thing is a conglomeration of thirteen different states.” That would be a mistake. Seven simply means it’s a whole. Sometimes an icon is not all that intuitive because we don’t live in the time and the place or don’t have the same background as the original readers. Sometimes we have to look elsewhere to figure out how it’s used and do a little research. So, maybe we have in this beast a political or governmental system of some sort. By the way, be very distrustful of hard and fast interpretations of any prophecy in the Bible. I’ll give you a rule: The more detailed it is, the more likely it is to be wrong. You want to leave that door open. One of my objectives is to introduce you to what the Bible actually says, for you to file it away in your memory, think about it, keep it mind, know where to look for it later on, and understand the events as they took place. A lot of religious literature gives you theoretical presuppositions or whole structures with all the authority of Jesus, who taught the Scribes and the Pharisees. If you read it very carefully, you will know that some of it has got to be wrong. I just recommend leaving the door open. Know what the Bible says and wait until it is revealed.

In Revelation 13:3-4, John said, “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?” That sounds like he was talking about a real military power. We’ve also got another verbal icon—the dragon. In Christian literature, the dragon is nearly always the devil himself. There’s a lot to think about in this chapter. For example, just how big is this beast? Revelation 13:7: “He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.” You have to ask at this point what is meant by “saints.” The word simply means the holy ones, and it could be Israel, it could be the church, or who knows what. “And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” There is something about this system that no one written in the Book of Life can possibly submit to. That means no Christian can submit. What might that be? In chapter 13, verse 11: “Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.” Here is another verbal icon—the lamb. In Christian literature the lamb is usually Jesus, the Lamb of God. Since the dragon is usually the devil, what this looks like, intuitively, is a wolf in sheep’s clothing—the devil trying to look like Christ. And, since elsewhere in the Gospels and in the literature, we find false christs described and prophesied, that’s familiar enough. This second beast “exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf and he made the earth and its inhabitants do obeisance to the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.” And this was not just weapon fire, it was a miraculous fire. “Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He

ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.” There’s another icon. The sword in iconography generally means war. One of these heads got involved with a war, was fatally wounded, and yet survived.

Here is something that no Christian can bow down to—this image in honor of the beast. It’s a repeat, in a way, of what happened to three young men called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their whole story is told in the Book of Daniel. The leaders persuaded Nebuchadnezzar to create this image, an idol, and then command everybody in the country to bow down before this image whenever the orchestra played. If they didn’t, they were to be thrown into a furnace of fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wouldn’t do it. They were called before the king and told what the consequences would be. They said, “Our God will protect us, O King. But even if he doesn’t, be it known we’re not going to bow down to this image.” The exact same parallel is coming, where Christians will be faced with the problem of doing obeisance to the devil, by another name. And they are going to have to refuse. There’s a reason for this and it connects with the Mark of the Beast.

Continuing in Revelation 13, verse 15: “He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” That could be you and me. “He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.” That’s clear enough. The mark of the beast is the name of the beast, or the number that represents his name. Some commentators, because of the way the alphabet works out on numbers in Greek, see this as a reference to Nero Caesar, who was then on the throne in Rome. Others see Nero as an icon of one who is to come in the very last days. In any case, you don’t have to worry if you get 6-6-6 on your license plates. This is simply the numeric code for the name of a tyrant. It worked for Nero, and it may work for somebody again, even though we don’t use numbers for letters. The most important thing to realize is that you are accepting upon yourself the name of the beast. You are becoming one of his instead of carrying the name of Christ.

This leads to a lot of hyperventilating about biometric ID and computer chips that might be planted in the head, or the right hand, so you get scanned at the supermarket. I have images in my mind of somebody putting his hand, or worse, his forehead, down on the scanner, getting scanned and automatically having the cost of his groceries taken out of his bank account. But, it isn’t anything like that. Whatever it is, it is something that no observant Christian could ever consciously do. So you don’t have to worry about unintentionally getting the Mark of the Beast. It isn’t going to creep up on you without you knowing that it’s there. The right hand and the forehead are also verbal icons. They may represent what we do

with our hand and what we think with our mind. This is serious business. No one slipped a pagan image into the room of Shadrach, who then accidentally bowed down before it when putting on his sandals. It was right out there in public. It was something that everybody had to do and they had to do it where they could be seen. The Mark of the Beast is not something that could be branded on you against your will. God would not judge you for that. But the judgment is severe for anyone who has accepted freely and openly the Mark of the Beast. It's something you should know would be wrong. It sounds like things are going to get very rough for anyone who refuses the Mark of the Beast, but the Christian has no choice. Those of us who end up facing this thing will have to suffer for His namesake and our reward is great.

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