

The Danger of Turning Back

2 Peter 2:20-22 (08/03/14)

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We come to the end of this terrifying chapter in God's Word on false teachers. False teachers are sneaky, popular, and greedy. They infiltrate the church and teach damnable heresies. They are headed for severe judgment like the rebels of angelic hosts, Noah's world, and Lot's cities. Last week Bryce graphically portrayed them as brute beasts, spots and stains, and waterless oases, promising freedom but are themselves slaves of their own lusts. Now we come to verses 20-22, the danger of turning back.

These guys look like the real deal. In fact, some people think Peter is describing genuine believers here who lose their salvation. We're going to find out this morning if these apostates are truly saved. What's an apostate? An apostate is one who professes Christ but then rejects the truth of God's Word and turns back to the world. There are different kinds of apostates.

There are **popular apostates** who have their world-wide ministries and outreaches and convince people to send in their money to fund their efforts to save the world. These apostates have a messianic complex, everything depends on them, they are doing great things for God, but you don't hear the true gospel of Christ in their messages. It's usually a health and wealth message, or at least a "feel-good-about-God-and-yourself" message. Millions follow these apostates.

There are **professional apostates** who stand in seminary classrooms and spout off their attacks against the Bible, convincing young seminarians why Moses didn't write the Pentateuch and how the Gospels are full of contradictions and, by the way, the Bible never really condemns homosexuality, and even if it does, it doesn't mean what it says. These apostates take a check for helping Satan destroy people's faith.

There are **clerical apostates** who man the pulpits of many churches and lead many denominations. They don't believe most of the cardinal truths of the faith, if any. Their whole purpose is to help people get along and motivate people to have community influence, but they wouldn't dare tell their congregations that they need to repent and believe in Christ or pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. Some of these clerical apostates are homosexuals or lesbians themselves, and are working overtime to bring their denominations to embrace LGBTQs as sincere followers of Jesus.

And then there are **average apostates**, Demas types, friends of ours, people who profess Christ but after a while go back to the world and its loves. We all know people like this. We had a man who seems to fit this category in a previous church. He professed to believe, faithfully attended our church, strongly affirmed my ministry, seemed to grow, and became a deacon. In order to extend his growth, he moved his family to another state to attend Bible college where he seemed to get all puffed up with knowledge. When he returned to our church nothing was good enough and no one was doing it the right way. He and his family finally left to find a church he liked, and as far as I know he slipped off the Christian grid back into the world. I hope God has restored him. Was he saved? That all depends on the end of the story. We cannot see into the hearts of people; we only observe behavior or fruit.

Let's look at these false teachers or apostates this morning. There are four clear statements about their spiritual condition.

THEY HAVE A LIFE-CHANGING SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE – v. 20a

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

You will meet people who have all kinds of religious, life-changing experiences. They've seen Jesus. They've heard God talk to them. They've felt the Spirit move up and down their backs. I mean, there are some really wacky people in the religious world. And many of them will take offense if you challenge them

about their experience with God. Like Talkative in Pilgrim's Progress whose religion was all in his mouth, but don't challenge him or he'll charge you with being judgmental.

These false teachers had a life-changing experience with Jesus. They escaped the defilements, the miasma, the polluting aspects of this world. They wanted their lives to be cleaned up. They knew they were in trouble and heard that Jesus cleans people's lives, and so they escaped the world's infectious germs. These people see how wonderful Christianity is. They are impressed with how godly people live godly lives. Sometimes they observe the purity of the young ladies who are following Christ. They want their lives cleaned up too. They may be immersed in pornography or are wasting their nights watching worthless shows on TV. They live to eat instead of eat to live, and they are sick of it. The world's moral poisons are getting them down. They need help.

They seek out a church. They learn of Christ. They come to a full knowledge of Christ as Savior. They memorize verses. They could go on Jeff Foxworthy's Bible Challenge Show and win big time. And everybody sees their life has changed. They show up at church every Sunday and talk about Jesus. They may get baptized and give testimony to their faith in Christ. They seem full of zeal. They have escaped the world's defilements because of their knowledge of Christ.

Is it really possible for people's lives to be changed through the knowledge of Christ and yet not be saved? Jesus warned us about this often. Remember Matthew 7 where people preached and worked miracles and did wonderful works in Jesus' name. "Lord, Lord," they say, "Didn't we do all this good religious stuff in Your name?" Note His reply, "Depart from Me. I never knew you!" That always makes me nervous; does it make you nervous?

And then Jesus told the farmer stories about planting seed in four different kinds of soil. Satan steals the seed beside the way, difficulties shrivel the plant on the rocky soil, and worries and wealth choke the plant in the thorny soil. All look like the real deal, but only the fourth soil brings forth fruit revealing genuine conversion. This, friends, is an awful reality. One can know all about Christ and even have a life-changing experience, and yet not be regenerated, not born again, and not possess Christ and eternal life.

THEY TURN BACK TO LIVING FOR THIS WORLD – v. 20b

they are again entangled in them and are overcome...

Something happens to these people. The novelty of Christianity wears off. They cool down in their zeal. They miss their old way of living. And like a fish swimming along right into a net, they get netted by all their old love of the world. They miss the fleshly pleasure to do whatever they want – the lust of the flesh. They miss all the stuff they used to want – the lust of the eyes. And they miss not being who they really want to be, the pride of life. And of course, others are calling them back to the world – friends, family, worldly associates. They are torn. They know the truth is in Christ, but their hearts are becoming so cool to Christianity and they become easy targets.

Be aware. Every believer is enticed by the world. Hebrews 12:2 says we need to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily trips us up. That sin which still indwells us calls us and promises us. The deceitfulness of sin works overtime to assure us it's okay, you deserve it, you can always confess it afterwards, other people do it, or don't get too fanatical here about your Christianity.

Christians are tempted, Christians are prone to wander, Christians swim into the net of sin, but Christians don't stay there. If you are a born again Christ, you are convicted, you are shamed, you feel guilty, you fight and struggle and wage warfare against your sin and confess and forsake it to live another day fighting the good fight of faith.

Here's the difference in verse 20b. Apostates are **overcome** by temptation and sin. They are entangled and sooner or later they just turn away from following Christ and give in and are overcome. Their lives become lives of going their own way. Pushed on by their pride, their self-righteousness, and their religion, they are overcome. This is a real problem. This demonstrates their real spiritual condition. They took the form of Christianity and appeared to be true believers, but now they are enslaved to sin. They

taught in verses 18-19 about freedom, but they themselves are slaves to their own sin. By whatever a man is overcome, to that he is a slave.

This is what 1 John 3 teaches. What does John mean in verse 9? “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” While every believer struggles with sins of all kinds, no believer is any longer a slave of sin. Believers do sin, but they don’t practice sin. These apostates in 2 Peter turn back to practicing sin, enjoying their sin. They are inwardly compelled to move toward sin because they do not have the Spirit in them fighting against their flesh and urging them to hold back and hate their sin. This is Galatians 5:16ff. If you practice the works of the flesh, you will not inherit the kingdom of Christ.

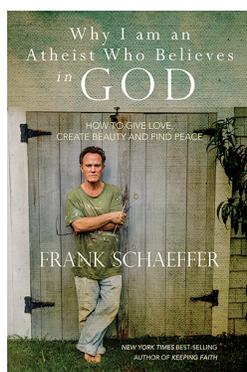
Look at Hebrews 10:26, “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge (*epignosis*) of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” Turning back from Christ means all you have to look forward to is a coming fiery judgment.

THEY ARE NOW IN A WORSE CONDITION – vv. 20c-21

the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

This is a most severe warning. Give yourself no rest until you are convinced that God has changed your heart. To come up to the truth, to profess to receive the truth of the gospel, and then to turn away and especially to teach people falsely is the worse situation a human being can find himself in. God entrusts preachers to teach the whole counsel of God, and that includes the harder things as well as the comforting truths. This is why James 3:1 says teachers face a stricter judgment. Every false teacher is more guilty than if he had never even heard of Christ. Jesus blew the whistle on Judas in Matthew 26:24. “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born!”

And remember that story of the house of eight demons. Matthew 12:43-45, “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”



I wonder if something like this has happened to Francis and Edith Schaeffer’s son Frankie. This is a sad story. He has turned back. He was raised in a home where Christ was honored. His parents loved Jesus and taught many people. But Frankie at some point turned back to a point where he now isn’t sure if God exists, and if God does exist, is God a he, she, or it? He takes a vigorous stand against the Bible, which he calls “disgustingly misogynistic (women-hating).” Here’s a picture of his latest book. He wants to persuade young evangelicals away from “allegiance to the Bible.” He says, “You can live by the Bible or live by Jesus, you can’t do both.”

Now look closely at verse 21 and you’ll see what’s going on here. The gospel is called the way of righteousness and the holy commandment. These people hear of Christ, salvation is a free gift, a free ride to heaven, God helps clean up your life, but they never submitted to the Lordship of Christ. These are those building fools of Matthew 7 who build their houses on the sand of their own sinful hearts. They don’t repent and submit to the authority of Christ.

Christianity isn’t just a fun ride to heaven or a fire escape from hell. When God saves a man, He sets him on a pathway of righteousness and puts in his heart a hunger for holiness. This is the problem with easy believism. Salvation isn’t just saying, “Yes, I believe,” and then continue living your own way. When God saves you, He troubles you about your sin. He sometimes makes you downright miserable. He calls you not just to know about Jesus, but to repent of going your own way, to make a 180 degree turnaround in

your life, and then to bow in believing submission to Christ. That's true conversion. Your heart will be humbled. You won't be proud of your religion. You'll be aware of how much you need Christ. You'll repent every day. Sin will be a shame to you. You'll come to hate it more and more and Christ will rule your life.

But apostates "turn back" from God's call to holiness. Holiness was not part of their appetite. They secretly continued to love their fleshly desires. They secretly enjoyed indulging their lusts. They wanted Jesus and their own sins. But like Tozer said, "Christ does not save those He doesn't rule."

THEIR HEARTS WERE NEVER CHANGED – v. 22

It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

Now here we get to the real issue of the heart and nature of these people. They were never actually made partakers of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4). Their hearts were never changed into new creations in Christ Jesus! And so their nature is still the same. They are acting according to their nature, like a dog or hog acts according to their nature. God turns dogs and hogs into sheep believers. We used to be dogs and hogs, but now we are sheep who follow our Shepherd Jesus.

So here you have two unclean animals, a dog and a hog. Leviticus tells us dogs have padded feet and don't chew the cud, and hogs have split hooves but don't chew their cud.

A dog finds something to eat but knows it's bad, so he wretches and pukes it up. But then what does he do? He goes over to it, sniffs around and enjoys some of the smell, and maybe even licks it. Why does he do this? He's a dog!

And here's a hog, a sow. You can march this big old sow into your shower and get her all scrubbed down to pretty pink, comb her bristles, wipe deodorant under each leg pit, spray her with some dandy cologne, put a nice bow on her head, and she's the prettiest pig in town. You let her go out the back door to display her beauty. After a short time you look out the back window to the barn and there she is, wallowing and rolling around in the mire and filth. You go out and yell, "What's wrong with you? I just cleaned you up!" And she'll lie there, obviously enjoying herself, and grunt, "Hey, I'm a pig! I love wallowing in the mire."

This is the problem with apostates, whether popular, professional, clerical, or your average professor who goes back to the world. Their nature was never changed! One animal you will not see rolling around in the mud and vomit is a sheep! God turns dogs and hogs into sheep! He creates a new nature into His sheep. He gives us a new appetite to follow our Shepherd!

So What?

Be aware. There are false teachers scattered throughout the world. 1 John says many false teachers have gone out into the world. So, go past what they say to what they do. And if their message isn't the whole counsel of God, beware. God never calls preachers and teachers to carve out and disregard parts of His message that may be more offensive to people or to change the message to make it more culturally relevant and acceptable.

Beware. There's certainly a warning here to examine ourselves. You profess Christ as your Lord and Savior. Has God given you a new heart to love Him and pursue holiness? Are you at war with sin or comfortable with sin? Our teens just finished a great little book *The Chase*, which is all about the importance of pursuing holiness in your life. Next summer Keith Carter is teaching a class on holiness. J.C. Ryle's classic book *Holiness* deserves to be read repeatedly.

Be assured. I remember becoming very nervous when I heard messages like this. I questioned, "Is this me?" So I want to end with John 6:37. God wants His sheep to know how secure they are in Him. Listen and know, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Make sure you have come to Christ. Press your heart to the cross, be sure you have repented of sin, that you are fighting sin, that God has changed your heart to love holiness. Settle for nothing less.