

THE APOSTATE'S TRUE NATURE

2 Peter 2:20-22

INTRODUCTION

- In recent years a number of high-profile, celebrity “Christians” have renounced the faith
- The modern term for this is “faith deconstruction” – where professing believers question, doubt, rethink and eventually leave the faith
- The Biblical term for this is “apostasy” (Greek *apostasia*), literally a departure, falling away
- We all know people who once seemed to be true Christians – their lives had changed, they talked of God and Christ, they read the Bible and prayed, they were united with the church – but in time they drifted away and now they have no interest in God whatsoever
- What are we to make of such people?
 - ✓ Were they once saved, but have lost their salvation?
 - ✓ Are they still saved, just backslidden?
 - ✓ Were they even saved in the first place?
- These verses have been misused by some to teach that a believer can lose his salvation
- Yet when we read the context of the chapter, we realise that Peter is writing of false teachers who clearly were never saved:
 - ✓ They are reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished (9)
 - ✓ They are as natural brute beasts, made to be destroyed (12)
 - ✓ They will utterly perish in their own corruption (12)
 - ✓ They are wells without water to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever (17)
- In vv.20-22 the false teachers are shown to have had a mere pretence of Christianity, which they eventually depart from,

demonstrating their natures were never regenerated – they always were dogs and swine

Consider the three stages of apostasy:

I. THEY RECEIVE AN APPEARANCE OF CHRISTIANITY

A. They escape the pollutions of the world

1. The “they” is best understood to be referring primarily to the false teachers described throughout the chapter, rather than the victims of their deception (vv.18-19), though it can be applied to both
2. The world (*kosmos*) is a polluted (*miasma*), defiled, putrid, noxious cesspit full of evil and wickedness (1 John 5:19)
3. Everything in this wicked world is contrary to God, truth and righteousness
4. Yet there are some who, for various reasons, seek to escape from these pollutions
 - a. They become aware of the long-term consequences of a life of sin
 - b. They think there may be personal gain in adopting Christianity
 - c. They are pressured by others to leave the paths of sin
 - d. A personal crisis elicits a change of lifestyle

B. They gain a knowledge of Christ

1. This “knowledge” (*epignosis*) is an ascertainment, an acknowledgement
2. They understand that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour
3. But a mere knowledge of these facts without an act of personal faith in Christ’s atonement does not save a person

- a. Saving knowledge of God cannot be attained by mere human efforts to understand the gospel, it must be imparted by God into the heart of the sinner (Matthew 11:27)
4. They have not repented of their sin and yielded themselves under the lordship of Christ
5. There are many who receive some Biblical instruction and desire to “follow Jesus”, reforming their lives, seeking to “live the Christian life”
6. Does this make them saved, a child of God, a recipient of everlasting life?
7. A person may have many and varied religious experiences, yet not be saved
 - a. Conviction and confession of sin (Exodus 9:27)
 - b. Sorrow (Matthew 19:22)
 - c. Trembling (Acts 24:25)
 - d. Joy in receiving the word (Matthew 13:20-21)
 - e. The acceptance of the church (Galatians 2:4; Jude 4)
 - f. Success in Christian ministry (Matthew 7:21-23; 10:1)
8. These people are also described as having “known the way of righteousness”
 - a. There are but two “ways” that a person can take – the broad way to destruction, or the narrow way to life (Matthew 7:13-14)
 - b. Like Formalist and Hypocrisy, many think they can get into the way to life without entering the Gate which is Christ (cf. John 14:6)

9. In contrast to these professors who by their own efforts escaped from the filth of the world, the true believer is delivered from this world only by the power and grace of God (Psalm 40:1-2)

II. THEY RENOUNCE THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST

A. They go back to the world

1. “Entangled” (*empleko*) is to be “enweaved” into something, and is used of a sheep who has been caught in thorns
2. Because they are of the world (1 John 4:5), they love the world (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15), and they walk according to the world (Ephesians 2:2), they will eventually be entangled and overcome by the world, and finally condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32)
3. The believer on the other hand is not of the world (John 15:19), is not conformed to this world (Romans 12:2), and does not love the world (1 John 2:15), he will ultimately overcome the world by faith (1 John 5:4-5)
4. The apostate’s return to the world may be a complete abandonment of everything to do with Christianity
5. But it can also be a departure to an apostate form of Christianity, such as cults, Catholicism, contemporary or liberal churches, etc, where Biblical truth is rejected for a Christless religion that is more appealing to the world

B. They turn from the holy commandment

1. This refers to the gospel which is altogether holy, in contrast to the polluted world
 - a. It is holy because of its Author – God
 - b. It is holy because of its Subject – Jesus Christ
 - c. It is holy because of its effect – it declares us righteous by justification, and makes us righteous by sanctification

2. This gospel is “delivered” to men by God through his faithful preachers
 3. It is a demonstration of God's infinite grace that he delivers the good news of eternal life through Christ to hell-deserving sinners
 4. It is a demonstration of man's supreme folly to turn from the only means of salvation, and thereby condemn himself to eternal judgment in hell
- C. Their latter end is worse with them than the beginning
1. They are inoculated against the gospel
 2. They become reprobates, having abandoned God, they are abandoned by God, and their repentance is impossible (Hebrews 6:4-6)
 3. They are liable to greater damnation because of the abundance of light they were given (Matthew 11:20-24)
 4. To the multitude of sins against themselves they add the most heinous sin possible – to tread under foot the Son of God, counting his blood unholy and do despite unto the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29)
 5. They become instruments in taking others into apostasy with them
 6. They become completely given over to devils (Matthew 12:43-45)
 7. They have an eternity to regret their rejection of life
 8. As the Lord said of Judas Iscariot, “it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24)
 9. Better to never have an existence than to exist in hell forever

III. THEY REVEAL THEIR ACTUAL CHARACTER

A. Apostates are likened to dogs and swine

1. This proverb is found in Proverbs 26:11
2. In Biblical times, packs of savage dogs would roam the streets, scavenging for food, and were a posed a threat to people
3. Dogs are used figuratively in Scripture to describe sodomites (Deuteronomy 23:17-18), the heathen (Psalm 22:16) and false teachers (Philippians 3:2-3)
4. Swine were an unclean animal (Leviticus 11:7-8), known to be destructive (Psalm 80:13) and thoroughly filthy
5. The Lord Jesus used these two animals figuratively when he said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." (Matthew 7:6)
6. Peter uses this graphic illustration to describe the disgusting and depraved course of the apostate, who, having for a time left the vomit and mire of the world to embrace righteousness, finally chooses to go back to the filth of sin that he always loved

B. The apostate never changed his nature

1. Though the dog and swine may have been removed from their filth and cleansed from them, they remained a dog and a swine all along
 - a. This perfectly describes formalism and nominal Christianity – multitudes of people think that being a Christian is merely following a certain lifestyle or being baptised or attending church
2. True Christianity takes the dogs and swine of this world and transforms them into sheep of Christ's fold by the power of God

3. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

C. True religion is distinguished from false by its permanent effects

1. God will perform to the end the good work of grace he begins in us (Philippians 1:6)
2. Those who are justified will also be glorified (Romans 8:30)
3. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.
(Romans 11:29)
4. We are "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5)
5. No man is able to pluck God's people out of the Father's hand
(John 10:29)
6. Those who come to Christ, he will in no wise cast out (John 6:37)
7. Christ's intercession preserves our faith from failing (Luke 22:32)
8. The true believer holds fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Hebrews 3:6)

D. Apostasy demonstrates the absence of true conversion

1. They have no root (Luke 8:13)
2. "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19)
3. Not all who profess to be saved are truly saved (Matthew 7:21)
4. True believers fall but they are not utterly cast down (Psalm 37:24)

CONCLUSION

1. How often have we heard people say, “I’ve tried Christianity and it wasn’t for me”
2. They may have tried a nominal profession of religion, but never experienced true salvation
 - ✓ The new birth
 - ✓ Joy in the Holy Ghost
 - ✓ The love of God shed abroad in the heart
 - ✓ Christ indwelling
 - ✓ Peace of conscience
 - ✓ A renewed mind
3. The world abounds with the false professors described in this chapter, and the Holy Spirit has given us this description so we can be on guard against them, expose them, and warn others of them
4. In time these professors show their true colours and go back to the world
 - ✓ Because their hearts were not renewed by grace
 - ✓ Because they remain slaves to sin and the flesh
 - ✓ Because they do not possess God’s grace to preserve them
 - ✓ Because they cannot endure the world’s persecution
5. All of us should search our hearts to discern whether we are truly saved
6. Do you find any of these characteristics of false professors in my life?
 - ✓ Your religion is more to be seen of men than to be seen of God
 - ✓ Your lifestyle is not consistent with your profession
 - ✓ You are a different person in private than in public
 - ✓ In your heart you love the things of this world
 - ✓ You feel shame when the world mocks your Christian profession
7. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)