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Q&A#29 How Can Peter Describe False Teachers as Having Been 'Bought' By Christ?

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Today's question: "Why does Peter say that the Lord "bought" false teachers in 2 Peter 2:1? How can Christ be said to have "purchased" or "bought" those who are unsaved?"

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, why does Peter say that the Lord bought false teachers in 2 Peter 2 verse 1? How can Christ be said to have purchased or bought those who are unsaved? 2 Peter 2 verse 1 reads, But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words. For a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. And then taking it up again in verse 18 after he's compared them to Balaam.

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh through licentiousness the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption. For

by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the truth proverb, a dog returns to his own vomit and a sow having washed to her wallowing in the mire.

I think this gives us a clearer sense of who these people are. These people are individuals who have come to a knowledge of the gospel in some level, they've become part of the church, they've become part of the community of Christ. And yet they have turned back, they've turned back to their old ways.

So you have this description which is very similar in some ways to the, maybe we could compare it to Jesus' parable of the sower, with the seed that falls on stony ground or among thorns, that's either choked or that doesn't bear, doesn't put down a proper root. And so they've escaped the pollutions of the world, they've become part of the community of the saints, they're people who have come to a knowledge of the truth. So they're no longer exposed to the same pollutions of the world in the same way, they've rectified their lives to some degree.

And they're people who have come to a knowledge of who Christ is, on some level they understand who Christ is and they see his works. And yet they turn back. Now the logic of Peter's argument here is almost, it was so in the past therefore it must be so here and now.

In the same way as it was during the exodus, there were these false teachers among the people, so there will be, or false prophets among the people, people like Balaam and others, so there will be false teachers among you. Now this can be borne out I think in Jude, which is very much a parallel book to 2 Peter. In the parallel section it says, Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness. And deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

And so they are being compared to the time of the exodus, there is a deliverance that has taken place, the grace of God has been shown at this moment in history, and yet

they are taking this grace of God, this deliverance that they have experienced from old ways of life etc, and then turning it into an excuse for licentiousness. And worse than that, they are acting as false teachers, leading others astray, people who have barely escaped, and they are trying to draw them back. So within the section I read earlier, While they promised them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption.

For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. And so these are people who do not experience true freedom themselves, they've known to some extent the freedom that Christ can bring, but yet now they've turned away from that, and they're bringing others into bondage, to the lusts of the flesh and to licentiousness. And so this is a description of a new exodus situation, where people are facing a situation where there are those within the church who are false teachers, who are not bearing true fruit, but yet are leading people astray, who are presenting some message, whether that's a message of hyper-spirituality, that means that you can do whatever you want, or some other message, maybe that God's grace is so great that we can sin, that grace can abound.

Whatever it is, the message that they're sharing, it's a message that gives people over to the lusts of the flesh, to licentiousness. And these are people who are in bondage themselves, who are not bearing fruit, who are wells without water, who promise but lack, and so they are leading people astray at this point. What does it mean to say that Christ bought these individuals? Well, I think it helps to stop thinking primarily in terms of individuals.

God has saved a group of people, he has formed a church, and there are people who are caught up into this, who will not remain in it. There are people who are part of the company of the saints, who will leave it, who will abandon it. But that company of the saints is broader than just a sum of detached individuals.

It's a body of people who are defined by the knowledge of Jesus Christ and by deliverance from the world. And those who are part of this community, even those who do not yet, who have not got any true root in Christ, who are not truly living out of his spirit, have nonetheless been bought in some sense. They are part of this reality, they are part of the church.

Now, it's just the visible church, but it is a real thing. They're not fully entering into it, but yet they are part of it in some sense. They will be removed from the vine, but for now, they are still part of it, and they've experienced many of the blessings that come with that.

They've experienced the blessing of knowledge, the knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ. They've experienced the blessing of deliverance to some extent. They're no longer ensnared in the pollutions, or they're delivered for a period of time from the pollutions of the world.

And so they have genuinely been part of Christ's redemption. They've been those who have experienced that, just as in the time of the Exodus, there were those who experienced the deliverance of the Exodus, but yet drew back to Egypt in their hearts, and ended up dying in the wilderness. They didn't truly enter into the deliverance.

In the same way, there are those within the church who've entered in, who've experienced the deliverance, who've been part of this new Exodus, but yet will fall away. And so the paradigm that Peter presents us with here is one that parallels these two events, the original Exodus and this new Exodus situation, where the church is wandering in this wilderness place, and it's faced with false prophets and false teachers, new figures who are comparable to Balaam, who will lead others astray. And they promise much, but deliver little.

They have no root of life within themselves. They're empty wells. They're storm clouds that don't give what they promise.

They are people who are blown this way and that. There's no stability to them. And they are people who are in bondage and will bring others into bondage, people who have just barely escaped from the pollutions of the world.

And so when we talk about salvation, very often we can think about, for instance, the doctrine of perseverance, and we can fail to take seriously the way that God causes us to persevere through promises and threats. And these threats are not empty threats. There is a genuine threat if you turn your back upon the gospel.

If you've experienced this deliverance as these people have, and you've not remained in it, then you'll become ensnared in the pollutions that you once escaped, and your latter state will be worse than what you were in in the beginning. And it's a revelation of these characters as well. It's an event that displays who they were.

So the dog returns to its vomit and the sow to its wallowing in the mire. This is something that tells us who these individuals are, who they were even, that they had no true root in themselves in the same way as Jesus' parable of the sower. The quality of the ground is revealed through its reception of the seed.

Not initially, there can be an initial response and then a falling away or choking. Likewise, in the wheat and the tares, it takes time for these things to be revealed, but in time, it will be revealed. And there's no knowing where you stand except by faith.

We stand by faith and we must persevere by faith. And that sort of presumption that thinks that I'm in, I'm okay, is something that God wants us to beware of. And these sorts of passages are written for us so that we will not become complacent.

We know that we have been delivered from the pollutions of the world. There is the possibility of going back to them, of being caught up in them again, of being in a worse

state than we were in at the beginning. And so we must beware.

We must pay attention to teachers. We must pay attention to the fruits of their lives. We must pay attention to our own lives and our own behaviour and our own doctrine to ensure that we are not led astray in this way.

We are part of a people that has been delivered by Christ, but we shouldn't rest on our laurels or some past achievements that we have had in the growth of grace, because we can fall away from that. We can escape from these pollutions and then return to them. There is no guarantee that we will remain.

The only guarantee is Christ, and so we must stick to him by faith. And so as we endure by faith, we can persevere. We can, as we look to Christ, Christ grants the gift of perseverance, but we must seek him for it.

Complacency and falling away will go together. If we become complacent, like these false teachers and those who listen to them, we will be like those who died in the wilderness. And the repeated emphases on that parallel within the New Testament is one that we should pay great attention to, because there is not a guarantee once saved, always saved.

No such guarantee exists. You can be delivered from the pollutions of the world. You can come to a knowledge of the truth and fall away again.

Now God causes people to persevere, but he causes them to persevere not by some automatic gift from the very beginning that ensures that they will never change, but by wrestling with them by his spirit and causing them to wrestle with him. And this is only something that works out over time. And we must be faithful.

We must not depend upon past events, upon a past deliverance as if that is sufficient. We must endure to the end and only those who endure to the end will be saved. There are those who have truly been redeemed for a time and then have turned back to what they left behind.

And so this is a very salutary and important warning to each one of us, I think. Very often we can become complacent. We can become lazy.

We can lack the perseverance that we are called to. We are called to exercise perseverance, to be those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. And just as in the author of Hebrew says, can have confidence in Christ to give us this strength to pull through.

This is not something that we find within ourselves. Rather, we look to Christ for perseverance, for strength to endure. But there is always the possibility, those who do not look to Christ, who do not draw upon the root by faith, they will fall away.

And their last state can be worse than they ever were at the beginning. And so whatever theology you might have, if you're a Calvinist, this is not against Calvinistic theology. It's recognising that God deals with us in, he keeps us through promises and threats.

And these things are not empty promises and empty threats. There is a real danger of falling away. And some people really do fall away.

They've experienced a deliverance of kind, but never entered into the reality of it. And we must not become like that. If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account.

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