

# Ministry of Grace Church

## 2 Peter 2:20-22 - Speaker Notes



### Background

We've now come to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter. And we will only be covering three verses today. Now, some of you may be thinking, "Oh good, we're going to be getting out early today!" The good news is that it's only three verses. The bad news is that they are some of the more controversial verses in the New Testament. So, I could just spout what I believe they mean and be done early. That way I can spend the remainder of my Sunday relaxing.

However, God has placed me as a shepherd, responsible for the spiritual health and wellbeing of the flock. I can't just feed you spiritual lasagna, because sheep don't do very well on lasagna, even though I love it. So, I'm not just going to tell you what to believe. I'm going to trust the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth, just as Christ told His followers:

*"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; ... (John 16:13)*

As we go through these three verses, keep in mind that Peter has spent this entire chapter talking about the false teachers who have crept into the church. We will consider in these three verses whether Peter is talking about the false teachers themselves or the people who are listening to these false teachers. Or, perhaps, he is talking about both. But no matter which of these is Peter's subject matter, the real question is:

Can a Christian lose his or her salvation?

In order to help you to know the truth, I have consulted more than 20 different commentaries written by some of the best Bible teachers in the English-speaking world from as far back as the early 1500's up to the present time. The consensus is that there is no consensus. Some commentators say that Peter is clearly talking about the false teachers, while others say that Peter is clearly talking about those who have been taught by the false teachers. Still others say that it is clear from Peter's teaching that he is referring to both the teachers and those who are taught. So far, I'm not much help, am I?

So – the question again is, can a genuinely saved, born-again Christian lose his or her salvation. The primary difference between those who believe that you can lose your salvation and those who believe that you can never lose your salvation comes down to who is responsible for your salvation. If salvation is based on something you do (receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior), then there is possibly something you can do to lose your salvation (turn away from God and/or commit that “mortal sin.”) If, however, salvation is something done to you (you were chosen by God), since you did nothing to obtain your salvation, then there is nothing that you can do to lose it.

We’ll get into the specifics in a little bit. First, though, let’s see what Peter is saying here. Just for context, here are the previous three verses, talking about the false teachers:

These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been kept. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by sensual lusts of the flesh, those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. (2 Peter 2:17-19)

## **2 Peter 2:20**

**For if they are overcome, having both escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and having again been entangled in them, then the last state has become worse for them than the first.**

In order to understand what Peter is telling us we need to have a good understanding of a couple of words in this text. The word translated “defilements” is the Greek word *miasmata*. According to Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible, “The word was anciently used...to express those noxious particles of effluvia proceeding from persons infected with contagious and dangerous diseases.” For further clarity, let me explain that effluvia is a reference to an unpleasant or harmful odor, secretion, or discharge.

From this we can understand that when Peter refers to the defilements of the world, he means all of those thoughts, attitudes, and actions of the world system that pollute and infect us spiritually.

An even more important word to understand is “knowledge.” This is translated from *epignōsis*, made up of *epi*, meaning “above or over” and *ginōskō*, meaning “to have intellectual knowledge.” The Greek word, *epignōsis* refers to “that which is recognized,” “acknowledged,” or “understood.”

This is one of those verses that, on the surface, appears to imply that it is possible to lose one’s salvation, so let’s look closely at it. These false teachers were “promising them freedom,” but instead what these false teachers did was: “by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.”

He now says, “having ... escaped the defilements of the world ...” What are these defilements that Peter is talking about? It is all the contagious, putrefied slop that is created by sin. Peter does not say that these people had escaped from sin but from the effects of sin in the world. And, he says that these have escaped “by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” It is through intellectual knowledge that these people are able to escape the pollution of the world; it is not by experiencing faith in the Savior. It is head knowledge, not heart knowledge. And through this great knowledge that they had acquired, they were able, in their own strength, to temporarily get away from the corruption and putrefaction of the world system.

But, because they had knowledge instead of faith, they “are again entangled in it and overcome.” And Peter says that their state is now worse than it was before they had escaped. They may have believed [John 3:16](#), they may have believed that Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world, but they are still in charge of their own lives, believing that they can continue in sin without any eternal consequences.

Now that they know that their sins are “under the blood,” they can live the way they want to with no need for repentance. However, even their great intellectual knowledge is not able to save them now (and, in fact, it wasn’t able to save them in the first place). These people have not just returned to their former sins in a casual manner, they are now totally entangled in them.

The point is not that one can lose one’s salvation; rather it is that salvation through human efforts is not salvation at all.

## **2 Peter 2:21**

**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.**

Once again, we see a form of the Greek word *epignōsis*, which is translated as “have known, and having known” referring to intellectual knowledge. However, it is not an experiential knowledge. There is a different Greek word that means experiential knowledge, the word *oida*. Had Peter used this word, he would have been referring to experiencing salvation rather than just knowing about it.

These people have escaped from the pollutions of the world system, and that escape came about by their intellectual knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have many in our churches today who are there, not because they have a saving faith in Jesus, but because they have knowledge of what Jesus did, and they are doing everything they can to be a good Christian. However, they are doing it in their own power because they don’t have the power of the Holy Spirit. I have no doubt that they actually believe they are saved, which is a supreme tragedy.

In fact, Peter shares that sentiment! He says that it would have been better for them not to have had full knowledge of the way of righteousness because in the end they will be more deeply entangled in the pollutions of the world. Our Lord, Himself, talked about such people. Here’s what He said of them:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’” ([Matthew 7:21-23](#))

Also, speaking in a parable, our Lord said:

“Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. “Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ “Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ “And He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; Depart from me, all you workers of unrighteousness.’ “In that place there will be

weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.” (Luke 13:24-28)

Just because someone claims to be a Christian doesn't mean that they really are. In fact, a recent poll showed that over 60% of the people in the United States claim to be Christians.

Peter now gives a graphic word picture of these people who have never truly committed themselves to their Lord.

## **2 Peter 2:22**

**The message of the true proverb has happened to them, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”**

Peter is talking about people who confess to be believers but who never really became Christians. These people, under their own power, have attained a sort of intellectual salvation from their former way of life but without the quickening of the Spirit of God. Because they never were truly saved, they are often lured back into their former sinful ways. It just becomes far too difficult to obey all the rules and make all the pretenses about being saved. So, eventually they just give up and go back to their old ways which were much easier.

Peter describes this return to their former manner of life with two proverbial expressions. Keep in mind that in the first century dogs were not the cute “man's best friend” that we have around us today. To them a dog was a vile, unclean thing that was considered only slightly better than a pig. Peter describes the dog with a reference to **Proverbs 26:11**, which says:

**Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.**

This is Peter's off-handed way of saying that these people were fools to have thought that they could have attained their own salvation. They have proven their folly by returning to their former vile manner of life.

The other proverbial phrase that Peter uses is not a reference to anything found in the Bible, but it is common in rabbinical writings and is also found in classical Greek writings. No matter how much effort you put into cleaning up a pig, when left to its own devices it will return to the mud as is the manner of pigs. They like it in the mud! It's where they feel “at home.”

## **So What?**

These three verses have been used by some to show that it is possible to “fall from grace” and lose one's salvation. However, as usual with proof texts for false doctrines, it actually demonstrates the opposite. Peter points out that these people never were changed. If they had been truly saved, they would have had a different nature and would never have returned to their former manner of life. Peter even used this image in the opening verses of this epistle where he said:

**For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:4)**

The Apostle Paul said it another way in **2 Corinthians 5:17**,

**Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

According to Paul, when we get saved, we become a new creature. And even though we still have our sin nature and our propensity to sin, we are truly changed, and we will demonstrate that change by developing different habits and a different lifestyle.

So – the real foundational question is, “Is God the source of our salvation, or are we?” This goes back to a discussion that has been going on for centuries. Does salvation come from the sovereignty of God (did God choose who would be saved), or is it the responsibility of man (does each person make an independent decision to get saved)?

Let’s look at what the Apostle Paul said to the church in Ephesus:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

But, does Paul mean that “grace” is the gift of God, or are we “saved” as the gift of God, or does he mean that “faith” is the gift of God. Church fathers who lived in the first few centuries (who knew Greek a whole lot better than we do) contended that it is “faith” that is the gift of God. And – if we believe by faith and that is a gift from God, then God is the one responsible for our salvation.

Not convinced yet? Let’s go to another section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians.

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (Ephesians 1:4-5)

According to Paul, God chose who would be saved before he created the world. That’s before any of us were born. However, some have argued that according to Romans 8:29, God knew who would accept Jesus as Savior and those are the ones he chose.

Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers; (Romans 8:29)

But, this verse doesn’t say “what He foreknew” but “whom He foreknew.” It doesn’t say that God knew everything we would do (our actions). It says that He foreknew us. Consider this, if it is our actions that God foreknew, then He foreknew what everyone would do. And, if God foreknew everyone, according to this verse, everyone would be predestined to salvation.

But didn’t God foreknow everyone? To answer that, let’s look again at one of the parables that Jesus taught.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

This shows that God did not “foreknow” everyone, only those who would be saved. And these whom He foreknew are the ones to whom He gave the faith to be saved.

But – that’s not fair. It’s not fair that God would choose some people to go to heaven and others to go to hell. A loving God wouldn’t do that! Well, what does Paul say about that?

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? Will the thing molded say to the molder, “why did you make me like this”? Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? (Romans 9:18-21)

Just because He is a loving God doesn't mean that there aren't things (and people) that He hates. For instance, we are told in both Romans 9:13 and Malachi 1:2-3 that God loved Jacob but He hated Esau. Are you going to be the one who tells God that He can't do that?

The bottom line is that true salvation is something that God does (not based on our actions but based on His choice), not something that we do. It is as we saw in Ephesians 2:8-9, where we started this discourse.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But - how do I know if I am chosen? If you are truly born-again then you are chosen. Remember, no matter how much you know about the Bible and no matter how much you deny your own desires and sinfulness, you cannot be saved apart from submission to God Almighty, confessing (agreeing with God regarding) your sinfulness and accepting the blood of Christ to cleanse you from your sins.

Have you ever completely submitted your life and your will to God, confessing your sinfulness and your need for salvation? Have you accepted the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross as the payment for your sins? Or do you believe you are saved because you followed some methodical process that finally made you worthy of salvation? There's a big difference between these two. One leads to eternal life, while the other leads to weeping and gnashing of teeth!

But I still sin! Does that mean that I'm not really saved? Let's look again to the Apostle Paul for the answer to that one. He is among the best examples of a genuine Christian and yet he fought the battle against his own sin nature.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the working out of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. (Romans 7:18-19)

If the Apostle Paul was still battling against sin in his own life, then you are not alone. All Christians still have a sin nature and until death or the Rapture, we will battle against sin, but that doesn't make us any less saved. Praise God!

In light of all that the Apostle Peter has taught us, let us all live like the new creatures we are, forsaking our old way of life. Stop living for yourself and your fleshly desires. Live for Him, for He is worthy!

Let's pray.