

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

2 Peter 02: 20-22

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thanks to the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We will continue to read 2 Peter chapter 2. Let's read from verse 20 to 22 today.

Peter vividly portrays false teachers in chapter 2 to leave a lasting impression on us and prevent us from being misled by them. From the description of false teachers in verses 1-19, we can conclude that these false teachers are not saved because they do not acknowledge the Lord who bought them. If you do not believe in the redemption of Jesus Christ, you cannot receive grace and salvation, and consequently, there will be no life within you and no testimony of life externally.

However, in verses 20-22, we encounter some difficulties. It seems that Peter is not dealing with completely unbelieving false teachers but rather those who once believed and later fell away, or what we might call fallen teachers. These issues challenge our theological framework. Some people who adhere to the doctrine of predestination insist on "once saved, always saved" and therefore believe that these individuals were never truly saved from the beginning, thus they were false teachers all along. On the other hand, those who uphold the theological framework of free will believe that these individuals were once saved but later fell away and lost their salvation.

Personally, I lean more towards "once saved, always saved." However, I also understand that any theological framework, when pushed to its extreme, will encounter difficulties. Therefore, I prefer to leave some room for ambiguity. I recognize that God cannot be fully defined by any theological framework. These frameworks provide us with principles, but they should not be pushed to their extremes. Ultimately, the interpretation of a scripture verse must be sought before God, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us.

There is another interpretation of these three verses that can avoid this difficulty: considering that the verses do not describe the false teachers themselves, but rather those influenced by the false teachers. These individuals listen to the seemingly plausible but misleading teachings of the false teachers and possess some superficial knowledge of the Bible; therefore, they were never truly saved. This is the simplest solution. However, when we read the entire chapter, it is all about the description of false teachers. There is no reason for Peter to suddenly change the focus in the last three verses and say they are not about false teachers anymore. This doesn't seem consistent with the context of the entire chapter, so I still approach it from the perspective that these verses are referring to false teachers.

Those who have been studying the Bible with me for some time should know that I never avoid difficult issues, and I do not dare to claim that my interpretations are always correct. What I share is only my current understanding. I believe that God is faithful and His truth does not change, but my understanding of God may be inaccurate. In the face of truth, my self-awareness is insignificant. Therefore, as long as the Holy Spirit prompts me, I am always open to change. I hope that the saints can follow my line of thinking, and if you disagree with my conclusions, you can still arrive at conclusions that are more convincing to you.

Verse 20: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning."

Peter begins with a rather convoluted statement: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." Here, Peter mentions a dual layer of knowledge. They know the Savior Jesus Christ, and they also know the Lord. Logically, knowing the Savior Jesus Christ means recognizing Jesus Christ as their Savior, which includes understanding Jesus' person and work, as well as knowing Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Through what Jesus Christ accomplished, they receive

salvation—this is the objective aspect. Additionally, they know the Lord, meaning they are willing to let Christ rule in their lives—this is the subjective aspect. Therefore, their knowledge is comprehensive and without bias.

Peter uses the Greek word "epignosis" for "knowledge," which is a combination of "epi" (upon, intensify) and "gnosis" (knowledge, recognition). This word doesn't just denote ordinary knowing or recognition but emphasizes intensified and deep knowledge. This word is used in Ephesians 1:17, which says, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." In the Chinese Union Version, it is translated as "true knowledge" there. Because this Greek word has the prefix "epi," it indicates that this is a true knowledge, a true recognition. This true knowledge encompasses both objective knowledge and subjective experience.

They have a genuine recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and also a genuine recognition of Christ as their Lord. Because they know the Lord and recognize Jesus Christ as their Savior, they are able to escape the defilements of the world. This passage indicates that they not only have objective knowledge but also subjective experience; they have experienced being set apart as holy by God. However, they later become entangled and overcome by these defilements again. This also implies that their previous escape from defilement was not complete. Although they had some experiences of victory, because they did not completely separate themselves from the defiled environment, they were later entangled and even overcome, indicating that sin reigned over them again.

Peter's description of this person's "the latter end is worse for them than the beginning" seems to parallel what Jesus said in Matthew 12:43-45, "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation." Here Jesus is speaking of a person who had an unclean spirit, and when the spirit was cast out, the person experienced a temporary release from the

influence of the unclean spirit. However, the person did not progress further by allowing the Holy Spirit to dwell within. After the unclean spirit left, the person's heart remained empty for a time. Later, since the unclean spirit couldn't find rest, it returned with even more wicked spirits, leading to a worse condition for that person. Peter's description here seems to align closely with what Jesus described.

Verse 21: "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."

They still refer to these false teachers, who are acquainted with the way of righteousness. The Greek word for "acquainted" here is "epignosco," derived from the same root as "epignosis" used earlier, which was a noun, and now it's being used as a verb. Following the translation principles of the Chinese Union Versions, they also "truly understood" the way of righteousness, indicating that they not only knew about it but had also experienced it. However, they later abandoned the sacred command that was passed on to them, which includes the entirety of Scripture. They had received it at one point but later turned away. So Peter comments, "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness." Why does Peter make such a comment? It's because these false teachers had once received and even put effort into understanding it, so they had a rich knowledge of Scripture. However, they later abandoned it. Yet, their rich knowledge of Scripture easily gained trust from others, leading people to overlook questioning whether they were truly saved. This allowed them to assume the position of false teachers. Therefore, Peter says it would have been better if they had never known, rather than having known and then turned away.

Verse 22: "But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'"

Peter uses the metaphor of pigs and dogs to describe these false teachers. Pigs and dogs are both considered unclean; dogs vomit and then go back to eat it, making themselves unclean internally, while pigs, even after being washed, go back to roll in the mud, making themselves unclean externally. From Peter's perspective, these false teachers are like pigs and dogs—they are fundamentally unclean, implying that they are not truly saved. However, Peter also uses the term "true knowledge" in Greek. Peter seems to remind us that after someone hears the Gospel, they may verbally acknowledge it or claim to believe in their heart. From that point, there may be a period, which Peter calls a "window," during which some people may quickly progress while others may take longer. It's only when they establish a daily practice of reading the Bible, praying, and living a holy life that we can be completely sure they have received grace and salvation. Therefore, with newly baptized individuals or those willing to believe, it's important to promptly guide them in establishing a regular practice of reading the Bible and praying so that their spiritual life can take root, grow, and remain on the right path.

Actually, this is quite similar to the explanation Jesus gives in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:18-23. In that passage, Jesus talks about a sower who goes out to sow, and the seed he sows is the word of life. The seed falls on four different types of soil, representing four different types of hearts in people. The first type of person has a heart like the wayside, which is hardened, and the seed cannot take root, so it is eaten by birds. This person does not receive salvation at all.

The third type is the seed sown among thorns. The message of life takes root in the heart, sprouts, and begins to grow. However, as it grows, so do the thorns in the heart, crowding out the message, making it unfruitful. This person hears the message, receives grace, and starts growing spiritually, but later on, the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the message, making it unfruitful. We say this person is saved, but they are not victorious; they cannot overcome the worries of this life or the deceitfulness of wealth. They are a Christian who is saved but not victorious.

The fourth type is the seed sown on good soil, and it bears fruit—a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold. This represents the saints who not only receive grace and salvation but also achieve victory in their lives.

The second type, sown on stony places, is not easy to judge. Jesus explains it in Matthew 13:20-21, "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles." The stony ground lacks depth, so the seed quickly sprouts but with shallow roots; it can also germinate, but when the sun rises, it withers away. Whether this person is saved or not, we can only say we don't know. Perhaps this is like the false teachers described here—they initially receive the word joyfully but cannot endure tribulations, causing them to stumble. Until they truly meet the Lord, we cannot judge their salvation. Today they may be withered by the sun, but tomorrow a heavy rain may help the roots grow a bit. However, fundamentally, they must remove the stones from their hearts so that the roots can grow deep, allowing the plant to thrive.

Actually, older seekers in the church are like shallow, rocky ground because if they didn't believe at all, they wouldn't keep coming back. They hear and find it appealing, but there are still rocks in their hearts, preventing the message of life from taking root. Perhaps what Peter initially spoke of regarding these false teachers is this situation—they haven't truly been saved. At this point, they need help not with more truth but with facing the rocks in their hearts, helping to remove them and transform their hearts into good soil.

Peter gives us the image of false teachers in Chapter 2, portraying them as those who once knew the Lord Jesus Christ but later turned away; they once understood the way of righteousness but also abandoned it. Peter seems to remind us that sharing the Gospel and leading people to salvation must be complete; it cannot be halfway done. We must bring people to the presence of the Lord, into a healthy church life, and help them establish a life of prayer and Bible reading. As they begin to walk on the path of holiness, they can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, ensuring

they do not stray throughout their lives. Peter's message serves as a good reminder for us.

Let's pray together: Lord, thank You for granting us complete salvation, allowing us not only to believe in the forgiveness of sins but also to grow in life and live a holy life because of our faith. Bless the seekers in the church and the newly saved saints to root themselves in the truth, to experience the salvation of their souls in daily life, transforming Your Word from mere knowledge into life experience, and bearing witness to Your pleasure in their lives. Bless the newly saved saints in the church to walk on the path of sanctification and help the seekers in the church to truly receive salvation, accepting You as their Savior. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ.