

Don't Be Fooled, Be Transformed

In his book, *Psychic Blues*, self-proclaimed psychic, Mark Edwards, admits that he faked having supernatural powers. Among his many roles were a dial-a-psychic with Psychic Friends Network, a party psychic, a palm reader, a fortune teller and a mentalist. He openly admits that neither he nor any other psychic he knows has any form of paranormal powers. But still, he believes he's meeting a legitimate need in society. In his words, "I have offered the meaning that many folk feel that they need, but cannot find elsewhere."¹ Isn't it interesting that he believes he can provide "meaning" by lying to people?

In our next section of Peter's second letter to the churches, he opens up a topic most of us would really rather not deal with. He writes about people interested in spiritual truth who are being deceived by false teachers: (2 Pet. 2:20, 21)

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Since we were dealing with this difficult passage, like a fool, I decided months ago that we might as well deal with Heb. 6 where we find an equally problematic passage which says:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Heb. 6:4-6)

Is it really possible that these passages are actually teaching that it is possible for bonafide Christians to lose their salvation? If so, then I've been misleading you all these years, because I've been proclaiming that it's NOT possible for real Christians to lose their salvation. So, some of you are thinking, "Well pastor, these verses seem pretty clear. I think you've painted yourself in a corner this time."

Perhaps you're right. And can you see why I've waited 27 years before preaching from 2 Peter? But let's take a run at these verses anyway and let's begin by considering a biblical definition of freedom. (Actually, I'm just stalling to give this paint time to dry!)

I. What Is Biblical Freedom?

First, how is this question relevant to these verses? It's relevant because if it were possible to be saved spiritually and then be unsaved, it would have to be accomplished through some expression of individual freedom, right? In other words, if you have freedom to choose to receive God's salvation as a gift, that same freedom should allow you to change your mind and give it back. Isn't that logical?

Yes, it's somewhat logical, but it's not biblical. It's not biblical because, these verses notwithstanding, God makes it clear in many other verses that He won't take it back. Let me quote just a few:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35, 37-39)

And Jesus said: (John 10:27, 28)

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

What kind of life? Eternal life! But if you can lose it then it's not eternal, is it? This passage also makes it clear that once Jesus has a grip on you, ...*no one will snatch you out of his hand*. But He doesn't even stop there! He underlines your eternal security by saying further:

“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.” (Jn. 10:29, 30)

So, whatever biblical freedom means, it DOESN'T mean that once you are a Christian you can become a NON-Christian. Jesus and His Father aren't going to let that happen.

Then what is biblical freedom? Back again in Rom. 8, it says:

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:2)

One law overpowers another law. How does that work? You experience it every time you get on a plane. The law of aerodynamics “overpowers” the law of gravity.

The same is true of the Law of the Spirit of Life. In Christ, living within the law of the Spirit of life, we experience great freedom from the law of sin and death. But what if we, who are real spirit-filled Christians, step out of the freedom we have in Christ? What if we break the law of the Spirit of life? Or what if we ‘know’ about the law of the Spirit of Life but we never truly activate it through a personal commitment to Jesus? That's what these verses from 2 Peter and Hebrews 6 are about. First, Peter says that we'll experience:

II. False Freedom Offered by False Christians.

How would you feel if you took your kids to swimming lessons and found out that the instructor didn't know how to swim? This is the problem being uncovered in 2 Peter 2. It says:

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. (2 Peter 2:17)

Peter is obviously speaking of non-Christian false teachers. They're spiritual swimming instructors who don't know how to swim themselves. Next Peter describes their method:

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. (2 Peter 2:18)

Here, Peter is describing pseudo-Christians – “...*those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.*” And these false teachers are enticing them into a false freedom using proven methods of persuasion, loud boasting and appeals to ‘passions of the flesh.’ Reading this, I couldn't help but think of *The Music Man*. Con-man, Harold Hill, takes advantage of the residents of a small farming community in Iowa by posing as a music teacher who will develop a youth band to keep the young people safe from ‘trouble’ in River City. He sells them instruments and band uniforms and loudly boasts of how fine they look but the kids never become real musicians because he doesn't know how to play a single instrument! Peter is warning us about spiritual Harold Hills. (2 Peter 2:19a)

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.

While we smile and sing along with Harold Hill and we laugh at the naïve town people, we wouldn't be singing and laughing if it were real life and our child were entangled in a cult. It's been recently estimated that there are approximately 5,000 active cults in the U.S today with as many as 200,000 minor-aged students involved. How is this possible? *"They promise them freedom..."* What high school student, what person, doesn't want to be more free?

Peter is speaking of people "interested" in Christ being enticed! He goes on to say:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

(2 Pet. 2:20-21)

He's not describing Christians but people with the veneer of Christian spirituality. They've escaped the 'defilements of the world,' through 'knowledge' of Christ. They know OF Christ, but they don't have a relationship WITH Christ. We know they aren't true Christians because verse 21 says that they have rejected the "holy commandment," singular. What's the greatest commandment? Jesus said that the number one commandment is to *"love the Lord your God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength."* If you've heard that commandment but never obeyed it, you're not a believer. You're still spiritually lost because you were never born again.

Now, this sounds bad but, if we combine it with what Hebrews 6 says, it sounds like even real Christians could be lost AFTER they've been saved. Heb. 6:4-6 says:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and then the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Many, many Christians over the years have stumbled over these verses believing that what they teach is that a Christian CAN lose his or her salvation and they CAN even be deceived to a point where they can no longer be restored. Is that, in fact, what these verses teach?

No. We'll come back to the 2 Peter passage in a minute but first let's look at Hebrews. It seems to be the more difficult passage because its language is more severe and more terminal. It sounds like it is saying that it is impossible for a Christian who has 'fallen away,' rejected Christ, ever to be restored to a state of salvation. But it's not saying that. So, what is it saying?

What I'm about to share is not my own thinking alone but also that of Dr. J. B. Rowell, a former pastor of Central Baptist Church of Victoria, British Columbia. First of all, he points out that salvation is not the question being discussed in Heb. 6. What the writer is speaking of is rewards which are the result of salvation. In verse six, he says:

...and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance... (Heb. 6:6)

Repentance isn't only something non-Christians do but Christians as well! In Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches in The Revelation, He asks every one of them to repent. So, the writer of Hebrews six is talking about the *fruit* of salvation not the *root* of salvation. And we see this again in verse nine which says:

...yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things –things that belong to salvation. (Heb. 6:9)

The Greek word translated *'belong,'* is *exomena*. It means things that accompany salvation, things that come as a result, as the fruit of our salvation, not things that cause us to have salvation. Dr. Rowell describes it this way:

The whole tenor of this passage is that he is warning them of the possibility of losing their reward. There is danger, Paul said in I Corinthians, of our entire works being burned up so that we will have nothing for which we could be rewarded. ²

...each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (I Cor. 3:13-15)

When this Hebrew passage says that it is impossible to *'restore them to repentance,'* it is speaking of severe cases of sin on the part of Christians: cases where they haven't just sinned the same sin once or twice or three times like Peter, but where they have begun living a lifestyle of sin. This passage isn't saying that those Christians will lose their salvation, but that while they are still sinning, they cannot be restored to a place of fruit-bearing for the kingdom of God. They might be going through the motions of ministry, but that ministry will be fruitless. Why? Because...

...they are (present tense) crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Heb. 6:6)

While a Christian is living in sin, he can't restore them; he can't force them to repent. They're still a Christian going to heaven, but their work on earth...

...it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. (Heb. 6:8)

The Christian won't be burned, but he'll have nothing to show for his time on earth. Which means there will be very limited rewards. That's the warning of Heb. 6.

Now, let's go back to Second Peter. Peter isn't talking about Christians, but those who THINK they're Christians, those who have, *"the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,"* but no relationship with Him. He says: (2 Peter 2:21)

...it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Then, he proves that he's talking about non-Christians by saying:

What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:22)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee says that this verse about the dog and the pig reminds him of something he learned from the story of the Prodigal Son. He says that story reveals the heart of the Father who will not only save a sinner but will take back a son who sins. Someone asked a pastor friend of Dr. McGee, "Suppose the boy had died in the pigpen? What then?" His friend responded, "Well, if he had died in the pigpen, there is one thing for sure: he would not have been a dead pig! He was a son. He was a son when he left home, he was a son when he got to the far country, he was a son while he was living in sin, and he was a son in the pigpen. And because he was a son, he made a statement that no pig could ever make. He said, 'My father lives up there in a big, beautiful home. I will arise and go to my father.'"

Friends, every city with a church has a road. At one end of the road is the Father's house and at the other end is a pigpen. All day, every day, the Father is watching for sons and daughters who will leave the pigpen and come on home.

Every once in a while, a pig will tag along with one of the sons or daughters and when they get to the big house at the end of the road, they get all scrubbed up, just like the son. They get new clothes and they're invited to dinner and they sit at the beautiful table set with china and silverware. And a pig might stay for a day or a week or a month, but inside, he's still a pig! And pigs don't like clean, they like mud! They don't like orderliness; they like muck and mire. They don't like banquets with fine food. They like scraps and garbage. So, no matter how long a son or a pig is away from home, eventually they both will say, "I will arise and go to my father's house."

False teachers can produce convincing arguments and even environments that will give you a temporary, ecstatic high. Warren Wiersbe has something to say about this last verse where the dog vomits and the pig is washed. He says, "The dog felt better and the pig looked better... but neither one had changed!" They were still a dog and a pig! Cults and other religions and humanitarian groups can teach you lots of forms of new thinking or even give you some exciting and amazing new psychic and emotionally tingling experiences. But there's one thing they can't do for you. They can't make you a son or daughter of God! They can't transform your desires from pig-like desires to son- and daughter-like desires. And they can't bring you to your Father's home. Only Jesus can do that.

More than just 'knowing about Jesus,' are you a true friend of Jesus? Have you made a commitment to Him? Have you surrendered to Him? If you're not sure, let's get sure today.

And if you know you are the Father's son or daughter today, which end of the road are you living at? If you're at home with the Father, awesome! But if you're in the pigpen, then this is the day to say the one thing you know you need to do. Say, "I will arise today, and go to my Father." (Luke 15:18) Let's talk to the Father about that right now...

¹ Andrew Stuttaford, "Medium, Not Rare," National Review (2-11-13)

² Dr. Rowell is quoted by J. Vernon McGee in his commentary, *Thru the Bible, Volume V* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 546