

An Exposition of the 2nd Epistle of Peter

“The Futility of Self-Reformation”

2 Peter 2:20-22

Theme: The Perseverance of saints” demonstrates the true believers.

I. THE CORRUPTIBILITY OF SELF-REFORMATION – *2:20a*

A. The Superficial Appearances of Self-Reformation

1. The reference here is to the false teachers who are clearly not genuine believers – who are involved in defiling others in sensuality and false teaching.
2. There is no reference here to suggest that they were genuinely born again – *“For it, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, ...”*
 - a) The term *“escaped”* [ἀποφεύγω] – literally means to “shun” or “avoid” – describing the fact that for a season they seemed to be pursuing righteousness.
 - b) *“knowledge”* [ἐπίγνωσις] – describes the kind of knowledge that “recognizes” something – that is, they provided mental acknowledgement of the fact of the ministry of Christ.
3. What is described here is a hollow, outward conformity to the standard of God’s Word produced by their recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
4. The New Testament provides ample evidence that not everyone who professes faith in Christ is genuinely born again – cp. *Matthew 7:22; 2 Corinthians 13:15; 2 Timothy 2:18-19; 1 John 2:19.*

B. The Seductive Appeal of Former Defilements

1. The Because they do not have the power of God’s Spirit sanctifying them, it was only a matter of time before they were once again drawn back to their former defilements – *“... they are again entangled in them and are overcome.”*
2. Notice however, that their going back to these sins was not the act of a moment, but a gradual process – *“entangled”* [ἐμπλέκω] – describes *becoming involved in an activity to the point of distraction* - cp. *2 Timothy 2:4*
3. It is back to the *“defilements”* [μίασμα] they return – a literal reference to “dirty hands” – a reference to shameful deeds.

4. Once the tentacles of these defilements had wrapped themselves around these self-reformed people, they were inevitably “*overcome*” [ἡττάομαι] – “to be defeated, vanquished,” or “to succumb.”

II. THE CONDEMNATION OF THE SELF-REFORMED – 2:20b-21

A. The Description of Their Condemnation – vv. 20b-21a

1. Peter indicates just how serious the result of this process is – they are better off never having heard than after having understood the Truth to apostatize – “... *the last state has become worse for them than the first.*”
2. Peter declares that “*it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away.*”
3. “... *to turn away*” [ὑποστρέφω] – is the word to “return” to their previous bondage and state of defilement –cp. Matthew 7:21-23.
4. The reason is that their heart is hardened to the point where the Truth no longer has an impact on them – familiarity here breeds contempt.
5. It is also clear that they are hopeless since they’ve rejected the way of Righteousness – cp. Hebrews 10:26-31.

B. The Defense of Their Condemnation – v. 21b

1. This condemnation is even more harsh because of a despising of the Truth – not only did they not accept Christ, but they actively and deliberately rejected Him – “... *to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.*”
2. The “*holy commandment*” deals with the entire Christian message with a corresponding demand on ethical and moral conformity.
3. The crime is that after having had the Truth entrusted [προαδίδωμι] to them, they rejected it themselves – they betrayed their opportunity.

III. THE CONSISTENCY OF SELF-REFORMATION – 2:22

A. The Illustrations of the Principle

1. The two illustrations used here indicate the defilement associated with those who defect from the Truth – “*It has happened to them according to the true proverb ...*”
2. The comparison is that there is an inevitable affinity between the actions and the nature of these animals:
 - a) “... *A dog returns to its own vomit*” – cf. Proverbs 26:11

- b) *“... A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire”* – probably a secular proverb borrowed by Peter

B. The Implications of the Principles

1. The implication is that there is an inevitable connection between the condition of a man's heart and his conduct.
2. If a person's heart is unregenerate, there is an incredible draw to the defilements that correspond to that heart – cp. **1 John 3:7-10**.