

# **DON'T CON OR BE CONNED**

## **II PETER 2:17-22**

**AUTHENTIC SALVATION MANIFESTS ITSELF IN HOLY LIVING.**

### **Outline**

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#### **II. DON'T FOOL YOURSELF (VS 20-22)**

GOOD OLD FASHIONED FEAR OF GOD CAN HELP KEEP US ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

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**DON'T CON OR BE CONNED**

## II PETER 2:17-22

As I read and study through this letter of Peter, it seems as if he is obsessed with the thought his congregations are going to be led astray by false teachers. I use the word obsessed because he is relentless at attacking these false teachers' characters and teachings.

I am coming to believe that the reason Peter is so obsessed with this is because he knows how easily we are fooled. He knows that false teachers are deceptive enough to con us into believing all sorts of crazy stuff. Their technique will be to use religious ideas, religious concepts, and religious vocabulary. Then they will appeal to our sinful desires and lusts, mix them all up together and totally confuse us as to what truth actually is. That is a very accurate description of where the modern church is, and sadly to say, many of us.

The further problem that exacerbates the whole situation is our ability to con ourselves. It is frightening to think about how easily we can fool ourselves into thinking we are good and right with God, when in actuality, we are headed for hell. We are easily fooled because we are not humble, we are not transparent, and we find it easy to fool others and even ourselves.

But hopefully, there will be many Peters among us that will bring us back to the truth. Let me give you an example. Most of you who know me, know that I like to joke around. One day, I was getting my portrait done. I said to the photographer, "Make sure this portrait does me justice."

Without hesitating she said, "What you need sir, ... is mercy, ... not justice."

I was joking, ... but she wasn't. We're not obsessed with guarding ourselves against false Christianity ... but Peter is.

The more I study and preach through this letter, the more I have come to realize how relevant it is for us today. Our world is filled with all sorts of people and ideas trying to pass themselves off as true spirituality. Peter's letter exhorts us to test the authenticity of these different spiritualities by measuring them against the truths of Scripture. True Christianity works itself out in our everyday lives. The main idea of this morning's text

is this. **AUTHENTIC SALVATION MANIFESTS ITSELF IN HOLY LIVING.** Peter has already showed us that we often fall for fake Christianity because false teachers often tell us what we want to hear. They appeal to our most sinful desires. In verses 17-19, he again warns us not to be fooled. We must remember this about false teachers, false theology, and sin in general. **THE WORLD AND FALSE TEACHERS PROMISE HAPPINESS BUT IN THE END THEY CAN'T DELIVER IT.** I think it's safe to say, that most of us who have been deceived by the world and followed it into sin, have found out that we have ended up with nothing but misery. Let's just review how all this happens.

First of all, as verse 17 points out, false teachers and false philosophies make big promises. In the 60's the world said that free and open sex would liberate us, make us happy, and leave us fulfilled. What it has brought our society is a 50% divorce rate, over 1 million abortions a year, and epidemic proportions of sexually transmitted disease.

The world promised us that if we worked hard, climbed the corporate ladder, and made tons of money, we would be happy. If we look at the people who have pursued this dream we come across a lot of broken relationships, broken homes, and very stressed and unhappy people. We often keep working harder and longer to keep up lifestyles that we think make us happy.

We in the United States have more than any other people in all of history, yet we are more frightened, worried, stressed, and angrier than ever before. We take sleeping pills to help us sleep, medications to calm us down, medications to get us going. We are a culture that has run amok. Did we do this on purpose? Was this our goal?

I don't think so. I think we were fooled by big promises of the so-called intelligentsia of our country. We have followed the world as it appealed to our lusts and desires. The sooner we realize this, the sooner we can cut our losses and get back on the right track.

We must understand that they make big promises. In verse 17 Peter states that they make great promises for satisfaction and eternal happiness. He describes them as springs without water and mists driven by a storm. If we were hiking through the

desert, and saw a spring marked on the map, we would excitedly proceed towards the spring. Without water we would die. We need refreshment for our thirst. But when we get there and find that the spring has gone dry, two things have happened. First of all, we are extremely disappointed, and secondly, we have wasted a lot of time going towards this spring which is dry rather than towards a spring that indeed has water.

Mists driven by a storm carries the idea of a country experiencing drought. The crops are dying and if rain doesn't come soon, the crops will die and the people will starve to death. All of a sudden, a dark cloud appears on the horizon, and the wind blows it in our direction. But when it reaches us, the wind continues to blow and the cloud passes by without dropping a drop of rain.

The world, our friends, television, movies and magazines promise us that we will find true love in sex. In fact the world refers to the sex act as being intimate. In the end, many young people and older people have fallen for this lie. Often people see their lives destroyed by getting sexually transmitted diseases; some curable, some incurable, some end up with unwanted pregnancies, and many feelings are hurt.

The world promises us we will find meaning in life through success, money, fame, careers or causes, only to find there is not much satisfaction in the end.

We often think we can find security by belonging to the right clique, the right clubs, or the right gangs. We think that we can be safe if we buy enough insurance or hedge our investments.

The world by way of false teachers, false philosophies, and most of the movers and shakers in society, tell us we can find lasting satisfaction by having sex, chasing after fame and fortune, and by joining the right clubs and being with the in-crowd.

Peter says that the darkest hell awaits all these leaders and teachers who have led individuals and cultures astray. We have already talked in depth about how horrible hell will be. Peter says that the worst section of hell is reserved for those leaders, movers and shakers who have led people away from God and His truth.

In verse 18, we see that they are so convincing because of their big talk. Keep in mind, it seems as if the false teachers were teaching that Jesus did not physically rise

from the dead and He would not return to judge what we did while in the body.

The first tactic they use is that they use big words. They talk as if they are intelligent and know what they are talking about. They try and impress us by using big technological and theological words. There are some pastors who love to use big theological words, and try to make things seem very complicated. I think if we can't say things in plain, simple language, then perhaps we don't know what we are talking about. My feeling is that I need to make things as simple and understandable as possible.

In his commentary on II Peter, Doug Moo points out that the word used to describe the words that come out of their mouths is the same word used to describe the words coming out of Balaam's donkey's mouth. In other words, in reality, they are no smarter than a jackass. Be wary of people who try to impress you with their big vocabulary or try and impress you with how smart they are. They are pretentious, not wise.

Next they easily fool us because they appeal to our lustful desires. Actually Peter says they appeal to our filthy lustful desires that are part of our sinful human nature. We are easily fooled because we want to be loved. We want to feel secure. We want to feel needed and useful. God spells out how we can achieve these things, but God's way doesn't seem as fun as the world's way. The world's way to seek love, fame, and fortune look exciting, glittery, and fun.

The last reason so many of us are fooled is because false teachers and false teaching appeal to immature believers. Listen to how these immature believers are characterized. Peter says they are just escaping from these fleshly lifestyles. Here is the point. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for ten days, ten years, or fifty years. We are considered to be immature if we are still attracted to the things of this world. New Christians and immature Christians are easy marks. Many of us like the flash and glamour of this world while still wanting to be Christian. We cannot have it both ways. We have to take a stand against the things of this world. Fleshly Christianity is appealing. Somewhere along the line, many Christians feel as if we can be just like our friends and neighbors, be part of the in-crowd, and still be Christian. We have come to believe that if we say these magic words, "Jesus come into my life,"

then it doesn't matter how we live, ... we are saved and going to heaven. That is just plain false. We'll talk about that in the next section but the promises of these false teachers and false philosophies are just big talk.

In verse 19 Peter goes on to say that this type of lifestyle turns out in the end to be a big disappointment. One of the major false teachings is that we are free. These false teachers say that we don't have to obey rules and regulations. They say that Christianity is too stifling to our freedom. They say the Christian life as described in the Bible is too narrow. They promise freedom, but in the end they are addicted to sex, drugs, alcohol, work, fame, money, what other people think of them. And this self-indulgent lifestyle leads to the worse addiction possible, we become slaves to our own lusts. We can never be happy because we will always think we need just one more thing.

I think we look at the powerful and glamorous people in our society, and envy who they are and what they have. We look at famous singers, actors, actresses, professional athletes, CEOs, and politicians. And we want to be who they are and have what they have. But it doesn't take much reading or simple observation to see what a mess their lives are. The great majority of them have lives that are messed up. And to make it even worse, there is almost always a string of broken people and lives left behind them.

Here is Peter's warning to his congregations and to us. **THE WORLD AND FALSE TEACHERS PROMISE HAPPINESS BUT IN THE END THEY CAN'T DELIVER IT.**

It's bad enough that we can easily be fooled by other people. The frightening thing is that we can actually fool ourselves into thinking what we are believing and how we are acting is consistent with authentic Christianity, ... when it's really not. In verses 20-22, Peter says don't fool yourself. His point here is that **GOOD OLD FASHIONED FEAR OF GOD CAN HELP KEEP US ON THE RIGHT TRACK.** This section is very interesting because it starts out by giving us an opportunity to talk about the nature of salvation in verse 20. Throughout the history of the church, there have been two major schools of thought concerning the nature of salvation in regards to whether or not someone could lose their salvation. One school of thought says that

once a person is saved, he or she can never lose their salvation. I won't be able to do justice to both views but I want to give you a flavor of them. Listen to these two passages taken from the Gospel of John:

<sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want. <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the last day. <sup>40</sup>For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life—that I should raise them at the last day” John 6:38-40 (NLT).

<sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me, <sup>29</sup>for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. So no one can take them from me. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one”

John 10:28-30 (NLT).

There are many other passages in both the Old and New Testaments that seem to clearly say that once we come to faith in God through Jesus Christ, we are saved, we will always be saved, and spend eternity in heaven with God. This view states that since God is the author of the whole salvation process, there is nothing or no one who can cause us to lose our salvation. Many of us grew up with sort of philosophy. I have seen parents comfort one another when watching children who have left the church by saying things like, “I know he or she will be alright, because they gave their lives to Christ as teenagers.” And to be quite frank, this is a very comforting view. It is comforting to Christians who are struggling with their faith and those who are having trouble defeating some particular sin in their lives. There are plenty of passages in the Bible that seem to demonstrate the truth of this view.

On the other hand, throughout the history of the church, there has been the exact opposite view. This view states that we can lose our salvation. In other words, we

made the decision to follow Christ, we can choose to leave Him as well. The passage we are studying this morning, as well as others seem to demonstrate the truth of this view. In most of the passages that support this view, Bible seems to describe a person who has authentically become a Christian, and then fallen away from the faith. There are many passages that support this view, but since we are studying through II Peter, we will just use this passage this morning. In verse 20, Peter describes the people described here as people who have acknowledged and received Jesus as Lord. Let me just make an aside comment here. There is doubt as to who these people are. In other words, it is difficult to determine from the Greek whether “they” describes the false teachers or the young Christians who were deceived by them and followed them. I want us to read this passage as a personal warning to each one of us.

If we read this carefully, Peter seems to be saying that if we escape the evil philosophy and magnetic pull of sin and the world on our lives, if we have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, ... and then once again become attracted to the world and all its lust and sin, pride and arrogance, ... leave Christ and return to our old lifestyles, ... we will find ourselves more enslaved to these desires than we were originally.

Look at the first phrase in verse 20. Knowing Jesus in New Testament language is used over and over again to describe saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Then it seems that for some reason, this person who has come to know Christ once again finds himself or herself once again, living just like they did before becoming a Christian and are now hopelessly trapped now by their own lusts and desires. They are addicted by the world.

There you have both positions. I think it is very right to try and understand these views as much as possible, but what I don't like is when each view tries to twist Scripture so that their view becomes the dominant view. As I have studied and wrestled with these ideas over the years, I have found myself on both sides of the issue. I think the most fair treatment of this issue is found in Dug Moo's Commentary on II Peter. He states that he comes to the problem believing in the eternal security of a believer. In other words, Moo believes that a Christian cannot lose his or her salvation. And then he proceeds to wrestle with the text. Once I am done preaching through II Peter, I will put his commentary in our church library. It is worth reading through his chapter.

I have to admit, that I cannot make a decision as to what school I think is right. I have to say, that I have used both schools of thought pastorally. In other words, there have been times in my life, and those around me, where our thoughts, words, and behavior were consistently worldly. I needed to preach to myself and others the warnings given here in II Peter and the other warning passages that seem to indicate that if we don't get back on track, we place ourselves in danger of losing our salvation. It is a good motivator to take our pursuit of holiness seriously.

On the other hand, there are times in my life that I have tried everything I could do to get rid of sin and strongholds in my life. Emotionally I felt that God could never love me or accept me. It is at those times that I had to preach the security passages to myself.

Here is what is interesting about this passage. Look at the last phrase in verse 20. Peter says, "they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning." Almost all commentators say this wording seems to point back to a saying of Jesus, "<sup>43</sup>When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. <sup>44</sup>Then it says, 'I will return to the person I came from.' So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and clean. <sup>45</sup>Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation" Matthew 12:43 through Matthew 12:45 (NLT).

Do you see the similarity of the wording? Jesus is talking figuratively about a person who seems to have been set free from a demon. The person had been cleaned up. However, he didn't use his newfound freedom to fill the house up with Christ and godly things. And so he once again became attracted to his old lifestyle, ... only this time when the demon gains access, he brings in 7 other demons with him as well. Now the guy is in worse shape than he was to begin with.

Which brings us to verse 21 where we can see that both views are about the same end. In other words, both views would say that living a holy life is what demonstrates the authenticity of our salvation. Again, in verse 21 Peter says that those who have come to know Christ, and then turn their backs on Him and on Christianity, are in

worse shape than those who have never known Christ. In this verse, the emphasis is on our Christian walk. Verse 20 focused on our relationship with Christ. Verse 21 talks about the way we pursue holy lifestyles. Here is where the two views ultimately come together. Let's take a person who professes to be a Christian, but is, let's say, having an affair and unwilling to repent. In fact, he says he no longer believes in God. The school that believes you can never lose your salvation may say that this person was never saved in the first place. The school that says you can lose your salvation would say that even though this guy was saved, he is probably no longer saved.

Let me tell you how I have used these ideas and passages throughout the years. If we come to the place in our lives where we realize how sinful we are and how lost we are without Christ, and come to the place where we confess Him as our Savior, the rest of our lives are to be lived out in faith and gratitude for what Jesus did on behalf of us at the cross. Our lives should be single mindedly lived in a pursuit of holiness.

I have had men who were having extramarital affairs come to me and say, "Pastor, I love my kids and I love the Lord, ... I just don't love my wife any more." My immediate response, ... with no confusion is, "You don't love your kids or the Lord. If you really loved your children, you wouldn't be creating this unstable environment for them by having sex outside of marriage. If you loved the Lord, you would be pursuing holiness. Having extramarital sex is not pursuing holiness. If you really love your children and if you authentically love the Lord, stop the affair and go back and love your wife." Almost always, these men will say, "I can't go back to my wife. I don't love her any more. I am in love with this new girl." If that man was dying, I could not give him the assurance of salvation. I would apply the verses to him that warn him about losing his salvation and facing an eternity in hell. Unrepentant sinners have no reason to believe they are going to heaven. I know many people who understand they are sinning, ... but refuse to confess the sin and repent from it. They should have absolutely no assurance of salvation.

On the other hand, I know homosexuals who do love the Lord. Let me explain. For whatever reason, these men are not sexually attracted to women, ... they are sexually attracted to men. However, because they know that engaging in homosexual behavior is a sin and displeasing to God, ... they abstain from acting out on their feelings, desires, and attractions. As they continue to struggle through life to remain sexually

pure, ... I constantly remind them of the verses that clearly state that God will complete the good work He started in them. Again, I don't know how to reconcile both positions, but I do know that both positions and applications have their place in practical pastoral ministry.

Whatever view we hold about this issue of salvation, verse 22 seems to indicate that how we act reflects everything about our nature. I think Peter is saying that how we act in the end will demonstrate who we are. Whether we were ever true Christians to begin with or if we have lost our salvation, the result is that we will prove who we are and who we belong to by our actions. Those who belong to Christ will continue to remain grounded in good and serious Bible study while pursuing holy lifestyles. Those who are attracted to the things of this world will return to follow the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. There are many people who have said those magic words, "Jesus come into my life." They go to prayer meetings, teach Sunday school, do all sorts of things in the church, ... but in the end are hypocrites. They have learned to fool others, ... and ultimately they have learned to fool themselves. But in the end, they always end up back in the flesh and the world. Peter says they are like dogs returning to their vomit and pigs returning to their mud. In these examples, the sin of self-indulgence is described as vomit and filth. How gross is it to think that a dog would vomit and go back, sniff it, and eat it. And we could scrub a pig clean, dress it up, and even put a bow on it. But the first chance it gets, it will run right back to the mud and roll around in it. The pig is not happy unless it is dirty and rolling around in the mud.

Authentic Christians are attracted to God's love and attempting to live out pure and holy lives. Unbelievers and fake Christians are attracted to the lust of this world and attempt to live out semi-holy lives while still trying to enjoy the pleasures of this world. It cannot be. God will not tolerate half-hearted or phony Christianity. He will send us to hell. Listen, **GOOD OLD FASHIONED FEAR OF GOD CAN HELP KEEP US ON THE RIGHT TRACK.**

One of the ways we can test the authenticity of our faith is to measure our lives up to the clear truths of Scripture and measure our thoughts and behaviors with the life of Christ. It's important how we live because **AUTHENTIC SALVATION MANIFESTS ITSELF IN HOLY LIVING.**

It is imperative that we have people around us who will challenge us and hold us accountable. Why? Because it's easy to con other people into thinking we are pretty good people. In fact, the most dangerous thing in life is that we are able to fool ourselves. If we do, the results could be disastrous.

Ken reminded me that Sammy Sosa was a player who had everything to look forward to. The problem was that he was fooling others and himself. In a series of unfortunate accidents, Sammy was exposed for all his lies.

Sammy claimed he did not leave the last game of the 2004 season early, ... but videotape later proved that he lied, and he did leave the game early. Ultimately, that turned out to be his last game as a Cub, ... and today he finds himself out of major league baseball totally.

His lie, and his character were revealed for all to see and any remaining legacy he had as a Chicago Cub hero was probably ruined.

The question is, "How would we fare if the cameras were turned on us? If our words and actions were played back, as they will be before the Throne of God one day, how will our character appear on that day?" We can fool people around us. We can fool people at church. Heck, we can even fool ourselves. ... But we will never fool God.

Let's start being brutally honest with ourselves and those around us. Let's commit ourselves to living holy lives while being held accountable by one another. There is a lot to be gained, ... or a lot to be lost.