

## **“The Latter End”**

*“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 therein and overcome, **the latter end** is worse with them than the beginning, (v. 21) For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. (v. 22) But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire;” 2 Peter 2:20-22.*

These scriptures suggest more than just the fact of the possibility of apostasy. Concerning those who, upon obedience to the gospel, had *“escaped the pollutions of the world,”* but who afterwards became *“entangled therein and overcome,”* Peter said the **“latter end is worse with them than the beginning!”**

**Why** is *“the latter end worse?”* **Why** would it have been *“better for them not to have known the way of righteousness?”*

Perhaps some may say this teaches degrees in punishment. However, whether or not there will be degrees in punishment is not the matter discussed in **these** verses. Please note that it was through the *“knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* that the persons herein alluded to were enabled to escape *“the pollutions of the world.”* But when said persons, who in spite of their knowledge of the truth, allow themselves to again become *“entangled”* in *“the pollutions of the world,”* they run the risk of their conscience becoming *“seared”* (or branded). Elsewhere, Paul wrote of those who, in *“departing from the faith,”* would speak *“lies in hypocrisy”* which would result in their conscience becoming *“seared as a hot iron,”* I Tim. 4:1-2. If *“speaking lies in hypocrisy”* will result in *“seared”* consciences, will not **living** a lie also result in the same?

An animal, whose hide is *“seared”* with a *“hot iron”* (branding iron), is permanently marked. Eventually the pain leaves, but the mark remains with the branded spot becoming hardened, calloused, or unfeeling. Thus we see the danger which God’s children, who possess a *“knowledge”* of the truth, face once they presumptuously depart from the paths of duty and of righteousness. Frequently the chance of reclaiming such wayward members becomes even more remote than the possibility of converting an “alien sinner” to Christ. So, *“the latter end is worse with them than the beginning”* with their spiritual condition being likened to the most disgusting habits of unclean animals.

We admit that even the most mature Christians are fallible and subject to mistakes. John wrote, saying, *“If we say that we have **no sin**, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,”* I John 1:8. However, John also wrote, saying, *“and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous”* Who is *“the propitiation for our sins..,”* I John 2:1,2. By walking *“in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,”* I John 1:9. God is merciful, anxious, and willing to forgive His erring children who *“confess”* their sins, cease to walk *“in darkness,”* and begin again to *“walk in the light.”*

But God children can *“sin willfully,”* after receiving *“the knowledge of the truth,”* Heb. 10:26), *“fall away...crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”*

and, thus, deteriorate into a condition in which it is virtually “*impossible*” to be renewed “*again unto repentance*,” Heb. 6:4-6! It is not “*impossible*” **for God** to forgive, but a person’s conscience can become so “*seared*” that **he** finds it “*impossible*” to truly repent, and sin is not forgiven unless penitence is first manifested. So, in such cases “*the latter end is worse...the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*,” 2 Peter 2:20-22. How tragic!

It is quite possible that some who may chance to read this bulletin are approaching such a condition. This is **not** a light matter! To become so caught up in sin, and just plain unfaithfulness, that “*the latter end becomes worse than the beginning*” is to commit spiritual suicide. If you are approaching such a condition, we urge you to “*remember therefore from whence thou art fallen*,” Rev. 2:5, and “*be zealous therefore, and repent*,” Rev. 3:19. Do it today! Tomorrow may be too late in more ways than one! Consider ye well!

\*\*\*\* —Bobby Witherington

### “Of Any Private Interpretation”

“*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*,” 2 Peter 1:20.

This verse, like so many other verses, is frequently lifted from its context and made to appear to teach something which the apostle never intended. Cardinal Gibbons in his book, “**The Faith of Our Fathers**,” in a chapter entitled “The church and the Bible,” labored at length to prove that “*the church*” (i.e. the Catholic Church, B.W.) *is the divinely appointed and Custodian and Interpreter of the Bible*,” and that “*God never intended the Bible to be the Christian’s rule of faith, independent of the living authority of the church..*” (p. 98). He maintained that “*The word of God, as well as the civil law, must have an interpreter*” (p. 103). Of course, there is no question as to **whom** he considered the “*interpreter*” to be! Gibbons cited 2 Peter 1:20, which prefaced this article, as proof that man, unaided by the authority of the Church (i.e., the Catholic Church), can not understand the Scriptures.

Now, please open your Bible and read the entire context wherein this verse is found. Read especially verses 16 through 21.

In these verses, Peter shows that prophecy was a “*sure word*” which seemed even more sure when it was fulfilled in Christ, specially in view of the insurmountable evidences which exist as proof that Jesus was the Christ of Whom the prophets spoke. He declared that “*no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*,” or “*origin*,” Mar. Ref). Contrary to Cardinal Gibbons, this verse does not show that we are dependent on the church to “*interpret*” the Bible for us. Rather Peter explained it in the next verse, saying, “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*”

Taking these verses together and in their proper context, Peter is simply teaching that the truths, which the prophets communicated, did not **originate** with the prophets themselves. He shows that what they spoke was not an unveiling of the knowledge and feelings of the prophets, but rather was an expression of the will of God. Peter was affirming **the inspiration** of the scriptures — their supernatural origin — that “*no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*,” (or origin), but that “*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*” The “*holy men of God*” herein referred to did not originate the scriptures; rather they spoke what the **Holy Spirit** revealed to them!

Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that we are dependent upon some ecclesiastical power to “interpret” the Scriptures for us. To the contrary, we are commanded to “*study*,” the word of God, 2 Tim. 2:15, to so “*read*” that we might “*understand*” the apostles’ “*knowledge in the mystery of Christ*,” which “*mystery*” is now “*revealed*” in the inspired book. Cf. Ephesians 3:3-6.

We need to discard the “*cunningly devised fables*” (2 Peter 1:16) of Tradition, ecclesiastical decrees, creeds, dogmas, catechisms, manuals, disciplines, etc., and simply return to the Bible, studying it to be “*approved unto God*,” 2 Tim. 2:15. The Bible is easier to understand than the creeds of men, because **it** is consistent; it is inspired of God, and happens to be “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*,” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. **Read** it to be wise. **Obey** it to be saved!

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