False Teachers Bought By God
Scripture: 2 Peter 2
Code: BQ080813

even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. (2:1c)

The conjunction **even** underscores the unthinkable magnitude of the false teachers' arrogance—a pride that evidenced itself by **denying the Master. Denying** is a strong term meaning "to refuse," "to be unwilling," or "to firmly say no." The same verb appears in Hebrews 11:24 to describe Moses' refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Here in this passage, Peter used the present tense participle (*arnoumenoi*) to denote a habitual pattern of refusal, indicating that false teachers characteristically reject divine authority (cf. Jude 8).

Master (*despotes*, from which the English *despot* derives) means "sovereign," "ruler," or "lord." The word appears ten times in the New Testament and always refers to one who has supreme authority. In four occurrences (1 Tim. 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18) it refers to the master of a household or estate, who has full authority over all the servants. Here and in the other five occurrences (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Tim. 2:21; Jude 4; Rev. 6:10) it directly refers to Christ or God.

Thus for Peter the supreme sacrilege of false teachers is that they deny the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. Granted, they may not outwardly deny Christ's deity, atonement, resurrection, or second coming. But internally, they adamantly refuse to submit their lives to His sovereign rule (Prov. 19:3; cf. Ex. 5:2; Neh. 9:17). As a result, their immoral and rebellious lifestyles will inevitably give them away.

The phrase **who bought them** fits Peter's analogy perfectly. He is alluding to the master of a house who would purchase slaves and put them in charge of various household tasks. Because they were now regarded as the master's personal property, they owed their complete allegiance to him. While false teachers maintain that they are part of Christ's household, they deny such professions through their actions—refusing to become servants under His authority. **Bought** (*agorazo*) means "to purchase," or "to redeem out of the marketplace," and in this context is parallel to Deuteronomy 32:5–6 (cf. Zeph. 1:4–6). The false teachers of Peter's day claimed Christ as their Redeemer, yet they refused to accept His sovereign lordship, thus revealing their true character as unregenerate enemies of biblical truth.

Many take this statement **the Master who bought them** to mean that Christ actually has purchased redemption in full for all people, even for false teachers. It is commonly thought that Christ died to pay

in full the penalty for everyone's sins, whether they ever believe or not. The popular notion is that God loves everyone, wants everyone saved, so Christ died for everyone.

This means His death was a potential sacrifice or atonement that becomes an actual atonement when a sinner repents and believes the gospel. Evangelism, according to this view, is convincing sinners to receive what has already been done for them. All can believe and be saved if they will, since no one is excluded in the atonement.

This viewpoint, if taken to its logical conclusion, has hell full of people whose salvation was purchased by Christ on the cross. Therefore the lake of fire is filled with those damned people whose sin Christ fully atoned for by bearing their punishment under God's wrath.

Heaven will be populated by people who had the same atonement provided for them, but they are there because *they* received it. Christ, in this view, died on the cross for the damned in hell the same as He did for the redeemed in heaven. The only difference between the redeemed's fate and that of the damned is the sinner's choice.

This perspective says that the Lord Jesus Christ died to make salvation possible, not actual. He did not absolutely purchase salvation for anyone. He only removed a barrier for everyone, which merely makes salvation potential. The sinner ultimately determines the nature of the atonement and its application by what he does. According to this perspective, when Jesus cried, "It is finished," it really should be rendered, "It is stated."

Of course, the preceding interpretational difficulties and fallacies arising from this view stem from the misunderstanding of two very important biblical teachings: the doctrine of absolute inability (often called total depravity) and the doctrine of the atonement itself.

Rightly understood, the doctrine of absolute inability says that all people are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), alienated from the life of God (Rom. 1:21–22), doing only evil from terminally deceitful hearts (cf. Jer. 17:9), incapable of understanding the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14), blinded by love of sin, further blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), desiring only the will of their father the devil, unable to seek God, and unwilling to repent (cf. Rom. 3:10–23). So how is the sinner going to make the right choice to activate the atonement on his behalf?

Clearly, salvation is solely from God (cf. Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9)—He must give light, life, sight, understanding, repentance, and faith (John 1:12–13; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:8–9). Salvation comes to the sinner from God, by His will and power. Since that is true, and based on the doctrine of sovereign election (1 Peter 1:1–3; 2 Peter 1:3; cf. Rom. 8:26–30; 9:14–22; Eph. 1:3–6), God determined the extent of the atonement.

For whom did Christ die? He died for all who would believe because they were chosen, called, justified, and granted repentance and faith by the Father. The atonement is limited to those who believe, who are the elect of God. Any believer who does not believe in universal salvation knows Christ's atonement is limited (cf. Matt. 7:13; 8:12; 10:28; 22:13; 25:46; Mark 9:43, 49; John 3:17–18; 8:24; 2 Thess. 1:7–9). Anyone who rejects the notion that the whole human race will be saved believes necessarily in a limited atonement—either limited by the sinner who is sovereign, or by God who is sovereign.

One should forget the idea of an unlimited atonement. If he asserts that sinners have the power to limit its application, then the atonement by its nature is limited in actual power and effectiveness. With that understanding, it is less than a real atonement and is, in fact, merely potential and restricted by the volitions of fallen human beings. But in truth, only God can set the atonement's limits, which extend to every believing sinner without distinction.

Adherents to the unlimited view must affirm that Christ actually atoned for no one in particular but potentially for everyone without exception. Whatever He did on the cross was not a full and complete payment for sin, because sinners for whom He died are still damned. Hell is full of people whose sins were paid for by Christ—sin paid for, yet punished forever.

Of course, such thinking is completely unacceptable. God limits the atonement to the elect, for whom it was not a potential but an actual and real satisfaction for sin. God provided the sacrifice in His Son, which actually paid for the sins of all who would ever believe, the ones chosen by Him for salvation (cf . Matt. 1:21; John 10:11, 27–28; Eph. 5:25–26).

Charles Spurgeon once gave a pointedly accurate and convincing perspective on the argument about the extent of the atonement:

We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it; we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer, "No." They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say, "No, Christ has died that any man may be saved if"—and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, "No, my dear sir, it is you that do it." We say that Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your

atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it. (Cited by J. I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* [n.p., n.d.; reprint, London: Banner of Truth, 1959], 14.)

Contemporary writer David Clotfelter adds these observations:

From the Calvinist point of view, it is Arminianism that presents logical impossibilities. Arminianism tells us that Jesus died for multitudes that will never be saved, including millions who never so much as heard of Him. It tells us that in the case of those who are lost, the death of Jesus, represented in Scripture as an act whereby He took upon Himself the punishment that should have been ours (Isa. 53:5), was ineffective. Christ has suffered once for their sins, but they will now have to suffer for those same sins in hell.

The Arminian atonement has the initial appearance of being very generous, but the more closely we look at it, the less we are impressed. Does it guarantee the salvation of any person? No. Does it guarantee that those for whom Christ died will have the opportunity to hear of Him and respond to Him? No. Does it in any way remove or even lessen the sufferings of the lost? No. In reality, the Arminian atonement does not *atone*. It merely clears the way for God to accept those who are able to lift themselves by their own bootstraps. The Calvinist does not believe that any fallen person has such power, and so he views the Arminian atonement as unsuited to the salvation of sinners and insulting to Christ. (*Sinners in the Hands of a Good God* [Chicago: Moody, 2004], 165; emphasis in original)

Therefore, false teachers’ sins were not paid for in the atonement of Christ.

Contrary to what some Christians believe today, people who reject Christ’s lordship are not merely to be designated as second-class Christians (as *believers* but not *disciples*). Instead, those who reject Christ’s sovereign lordship will face **swift destruction** if they do not repent from such rebellion (cf. Heb. 10:25–31). **Swift** (*tachinos*) means “quick,” or “imminent,” and **destruction** (*apoleia*) refers to perdition or eternal damnation in hell (cf. Matt. 7:13; John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3). This horrible fate, coming either at death or at Christ’s return (John 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7–10) awaits false teachers and all who follow their unrepentant path.

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