

Q. In 2 Peter 2:1, the apostle says that false teachers will deny the Lord that bought them and bring swift destruction on themselves. If Christians can deny the Lord who bought them and be damned for it, doesn't this mean that not all saints persevere and that Jesus purchased with His blood people who are not eventually saved? If so, this contradicts the teachings of limited atonement and perseverance of the saints that you say are biblical.

A. You are right that if Christians can deny the Lord who bought them and be damned for it, this would indeed prove limited atonement and perseverance of the saints as unbiblical and false doctrines. But we must be careful to fully examine this Scripture before reaching such a conclusion.

The verse in question, 2 Peter 2:1 states: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." This certainly does sound bad for limited atonement and the perseverance of the saints, and, indeed, all five points of the doctrines of grace. But let's look at the context of the verse and at some of the words that compose the verse.

Toward the end of 2 Peter 1, Peter explains that prophecy does not come from men but holy men speak it as they are moved by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter says that there were false prophets among the people—Old Testament Israel—even as there shall be false teachers among you. So, Peter has his focus on false teachers. These false teachers will bring in "damnable heresies" (*haireseis apōleias*—literally, "destructive choices").

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Now I want to examine the phrase, "even denying the Lord that bought them." Taken by itself, without further examination, this certainly seems to say that these false teachers will deny Jesus who bought them. But upon further examination, we see some things that should cause us to think twice before quickly assuming its meaning.

The word "Lord" in this verse is from the Greek word *despotēn*. The New Testament never uses this word as a title for Jesus Christ. When Jesus is called Lord, the word "Lord" is translated from the Greek word *kurios*. Whenever *despotēn* is used, it refers either to an earthly master (such as the master of a slave) or to God in general or as Creator or God of Israel. Again, it is never used of Jesus Christ. In fact, in Jude 1:4, *despotēn*, as used of God, is specifically distinguished from *kurios*, as used of Jesus Christ: "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord [*despotēn*] God, and our Lord [*kurios*] Jesus Christ" (what I have said here is based on the Majority Text [and the similar Textus Receptus], which I consider to be the more reliable text compared to the NU-Text). Further notice that, although this verse in Jude is somewhat parallel to 2 Peter 2:1, Jude does not say anything about these men denying Jesus Christ *who bought them*. He also calls these men ungodly (*asebeis*—the word literally means without reverence). Ungodly men have not been redeemed by Jesus Christ.

So, we should now suspect that, in 2 Peter 2:1, Peter was not referring to Jesus Christ when he used the word *despotēn*. We should also notice that Peter simply speaks of the Lord "that bought them." But when the New Testament speaks of our being purchased by Jesus Christ, it qualifies it with either a price or from where we have been purchased. Notice these examples: "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28); "ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20); "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23); "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13); "To redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians 4:5); "he might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14); "hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9); "which were redeemed from the earth" (Revelation 14:3); "These were redeemed from among men" (Revelation 14:4). But Peter does not speak of the price or from where we have been purchased. This should also make

us suspect that Peter is not speaking of our being purchased by Jesus Christ.

The clincher is in the fact that "denying the Lord that bought them" stems from the Old Testament. When Peter wrote, the church was still largely Jewish, and Peter was an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Notice that many of the references in Peter's writings, including in 2 Peter 2, are to the Old Testament. Even in verse 1, Peter likens these false teachers to the false prophets of the Old Testament.

"Denying the Lord that bought them" is based on Deuteronomy 32:6: "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?" This buying, then, is something that occurred in the Old Testament; it is the redeeming of Israel out of Egypt (see Exodus 15:16).

The false teachers Peter is writing about are Jews who, through their damnable heresies, are even denying the Lord God who redeemed them out of Egypt. These people are bad even by Jewish standards. In other words, this is not a reference to their having been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ and then receiving destruction. This has nothing to do with our redemption by Jesus Christ.

As Peter continues, it becomes increasingly obvious that these people were reprobate from the beginning and have never had a chance for salvation:

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes [notice again the allusion to Deuteronomy 32:5], sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.... These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

2 Peter 2:12–13, 17

Some might still point to verses 20-22, which might seem to be about saints who return to the sinfulness of the world and lose their salvation. But the previous verses we have examined show that these are unsaved people who may have temporarily escaped the foulness of

this world through a feeling of moralism brought on by a knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But they turn back to the world because they were never really regenerated and saved. In fact, I believe such moralism to be a common problem in the church today (see "Christianity or Moralism, Can You Tell the Difference?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/moralism.htm>). Notice how these people are similar to the shallow people in the parable of the sower: "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:20-21).

So, in summary, 2 Peter 2:1 is not speaking of people who have been damned because they have denied the Lord Jesus Christ who bought them. It is speaking of Jewish false teachers who, in verse 12, are likened to "natural brute beasts, made [*gegennēmena*—"born"] to be taken and destroyed," and even deny the Lord God who redeemed them out of Egypt and in return receive swift destruction. Thus, this verse in no way contradicts either limited atonement or the perseverance of the saints.

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