

Sheep Stumble, But Swine Wallow

The Great Work of the Gospel: by John Ensor, p. 126-127

Sheep and swine both end up in the mire. Yet the essential difference in their two natures is quite visible from the reaction each has to its fallen condition. Why sheep do stray and stumble into the mire, they quickly loathe the situation and struggle to get free. They maybe dirty, but they desire to be clean. They may be stuck, but they bleat for their shepherd to come and save them out of the muck. But swine, in keeping with their nature, wallow in the muck, content to stay there all day.

When professing Christians behave badly, we are confused by the inconsistency. No matter what one's theology might say about assurance of salvation, where unbelief, disobedience, and sinful habits persist, there is an ever-shrinking inner witness of belonging to Christ. Those observing this persistent lack of obedient heart in a professing Christian will also lose confidence about the authenticity of that profession. A person who *consistently* says one thing while acting out another is called a liar. "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

But authentic Christians can and do fall under temptation and into the mire of sin. Their actions are often inconsistent with the way of righteousness. It is more a sign of immaturity or weakness, not hypocrisy. The apostle Paul prepares us for this: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

Contrast this with 1 John 3:6: "No one who abides in [Christ] keeps on sinning." One passage forewarns us that a brother will be "caught in sin," the other that true brothers do not continue sinning as before. How do we reconcile these two? I believe the answer goes back to understanding our nature. Do we have a sheep nature or a pig nature? If we have a pig nature, like a pig we will not only fall into the mire but will scramble for it; we will hunker down into it and roll our backs in it. We will live in sin, defend our sin, and surround ourselves with others in sin.