

"BENT TO BACKSLIDING"

"And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him." Hosea 11:7.

"Backslider" is a word which occurs sixteen times in the Bible, all the passages being in Jeremiah and Hosea except Proverbs 14:14. A backslider is a child of God who has fallen into sin and gotten out of fellowship with his Lord. It may be gross sin known to many or mere coldness of heart. In God's sight there isn't any difference between the two.

Backsliding consists in the Christian's withdrawing himself from the state of devotion to God and striving to please himself. When a saved person falls into sin, fails to have sweet fellowship with God and loses his joy, he is a backslider. He has not lost his salvation, but the peace and joy which he once possessed. His standing is that of a disobedient and wayward child.

There are numerous examples of backsliders in the Word of God. The Bible tells us of the failures and sins of God's people through the ages. God wanted us to know that His saints were frail people like we are and subject to many of the same temptations and that some of them yielded to the same sins.

Noah was a saved man, but he was a backslider when he got drunk. Lot became a backslider, but there isn't any doubt as to his salvation for the Word of God refers to him as "just Lot," meaning that he was a justified man. The Bible refers to him as a righteous man. Lot sought the fellowship of the wicked Sodomites. Of course, he didn't move into Sodom in one day's time. The Word of God says that he pitched his tent toward Sodom. After a few moves, we find him living in the city of Sodom. There he became a big man politically. He was one of the civic leaders. But, he also became a backslider, lost his influence, got drunk, and ruined his own daughters.

Even saintly and meek Moses lost his temper and became a backslider. God told him to strike a rock and water would come from it. He obeyed and God sent the water from the rock. At a later date God told him to speak to the rock and water would flow from it, but Moses was angry at that rebellious crowd which he was leading through the wilderness. Chiding them for their rebellion and quarreling at them because of their rebellious spirit, he took his rod and beat the rock in disobedience to the command of God. Water came from the rock, but Moses had sinned. When he lost his temper and struck the rock, he became a backslider. Consequently, he lost his chance to enter the Promised Land, and died and went to heaven instead.

David, a man after God's own heart, and the one whom God so mightily used to write many of the wonderful Psalms, those blessed devotional messages for the saints through all the centuries, committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband, Uriah, slain in order to hide his sin.

One day Simon Peter told his Saviour that, even though all men deny you, I will die before I will ever do so. Then, three times individuals

accused him of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and three times he lied by denying it. Finally, when it got so hot for him that he felt that he had to prove that he wasn't a Christian, he started cursing. When he cursed and denied his Lord, he was certainly a backslider.

Joseph of Arimathea was a backslider, even though he provided the tomb and assisted with the burial of the Lord Jesus. Concerning him the Word of God says he was "a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews." Any person who is a secret disciple is a backslider. If you are a child of God, you ought to come out openly for our Lord. You ought to align yourself with His church. You ought to follow your Lord in baptism. You ought to take your stand for Christ and stand up for the things of God.

These scriptural examples should humble us and teach us that even the mightiest of God's saints sometimes backslide, fall into sin, and thereby lose the sweet joy that every Christian ought to have. A Christian who backslides is just like a child who disobeys his parents. It does not affect his sonship, but it affects his fellowship, his joy, and the approval of the Father.

I. The Condition of Backsliding.

Nobody can backslide until first he has been saved. And strange as it may sound, all Christians backslide because all of them sin. God's Word plainly says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). All Christians are commanded to pray, daily, "And forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4). When you remember that "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23), and that "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17), then it becomes clear that all Christians have fallen short or backslidden. All of us have left undone things that we knew were proper and right for us to do. Who would dare to make himself ridiculous by saying that every minute of his life he loves God all he ought to, that he never prays a second less than he ought to pray, and that he never leaves undone a single thing that God wants him to do?

Was there ever a time when you were nearer to God than now? Was there ever a happy time when you read and enjoyed the Bible more? Was there ever a time when you prayed more, and had your prayers answered more frequently? Was there ever a day when you won more souls than you are winning today? Was there ever a time when you were absorbed more completely in the Lord's work? Then, if there was ever a time when you were nearer the Lord than today, you are a backslider. You have backslidden, from that close intimacy with God, from that high place of blessing which you once enjoyed. Backsliding is not necessarily in getting drunk, or in committing adultery, or in swearing, or in any outward course of sin seen by the public. Backsliding is in the heart.

God's people are bent to backsliding, says the Word. In all men there is a tendency to sin. That old song, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," has the revealing heart-cry of every Christian who ever found himself a backslider. It says,

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above."

We are prone to leave the God Whom we love.

Backsliders may be divided into three classes:

1. Those who are backslidden in heart.

They may still be regular in their church life, but are unhappy in their hearts. Some even do not realize that they are backsliders. Before they are aware of what is taking place, their peace is gone. The most dangerous element is that the backslider is largely unaware of the change that has come over him. To those around him he is far from being what he was once. How comes it then that a man may slip away from earnestness in the Christian life into a condition of spiritual decrepitude without knowing it? Because all are inclined to look more favorably on ourselves than on others.

We mark the changes in the external appearance of others far more readily and exactly than we do those which manifest themselves in our own. We see the pallor of disease, or the wrinkles of care, or the stoop of old age, far more readily in another than we do in ourselves. When disease is invading the frame, the observer notices its progress far more distinctly than does the patient himself. So it is in spiritual matters, we are far more quick to discern the defections of others than our own. The person who is declining in spiritual health is often blind to his own defections, but he still retains a clear perception of the backslidings of others.

This insensibility to spiritual deterioration may be due largely to the gradual way in which the backsliding steals upon a man. If one's hair were to change from raven blackness to snowy whiteness in a single night, he could not fail to be impressed with the alteration in his appearance. But because the gray hairs come one by one, increasing by slow degrees, and mingling with the others almost imperceptibly, he takes little knowledge of the transformation through which he is passing. "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (Hosea 7:9). Because the process is gradual, he is apt to think that there has not been any such process going on at all, and that everything is and will be as it was. Furthermore, this unconsciousness of backsliding may be accounted for in many cases by the fact that the individuals are absorbed in other matters to such an extent that the state of the heart is forgotten.

2. Those who are backslidden from duty.

Those who are backslidden in heart easily turn aside from their obligations to Christ and His church. When a man becomes careless about his relationship to God, he will soon manifest the defect in his conduct. Ere long he becomes less active in service for Christ and frequently ceases to attend church services. At least, he usually becomes very irregular in his attendance and Christian activities.

3. Those who are backslidden into wickedness.

Those who are backslidden in heart soon lose interest in the activities of the church, and frequently they descend farther and become wicked in conduct. By so doing they become a stumblingblock to others and stand in the way of sinners who might be saved if it were not for them.

II. The Causes of Backsliding.

1. The old Adamic nature.

Every saved person has this old nature, and he will never get rid of

it as long as he is here in this world. Thank God, there is victory over it through Christ.

2. Neglect of private prayer.

Any failure in the Christian life can be traced to lack of prayer. He who is in the habit of reviewing the transactions of the day in his closet in the presence of God is not likely to fall under the chloroforming influence of backsliding. If you would save yourself from unconscious backsliding, be regular and earnest in private prayer.

3. Disregard of God's Word.

A backslider always neglects the study of God's Word. While the heart is full of love for God, no book is so precious as the Bible. But when love for God grows cold, the Bible is no longer interesting reading. Feed upon God's Word daily, and it will give you the strength to stand openly and publicly for God.

4. Forsaking the means of grace.

"And we will not forsake the house of our God" (Nehemiah 10:39). "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." (Hebrews 10:25).

5. Worldly-mindedness.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

6. Light thoughts of sin.

"But they made light of it, and went their ways." (Matthew 22:5).

7. Indulgence in secret sins.

"But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

III. The Consequences of Backsliding.

1. Less serious views of sin.

2. Falling into open sin.

3. Less willingness to receive reproof for sins.

4. A self-justifying spirit.

5. A censorious spirit.

A backslider is always ready to find fault with others, and judge harshly of their conduct and motives. Wherever there is a censorious spirit, there is always a backslidden heart.

6. The loss of all true enjoyment.

When a Christian does wrong or fails to do his duty, he always loses peace and contentment. There is no satisfaction for you as long as you are living in disobedience to Him.

7. The loss of usefulness.
A backslider has less ability to do good, less concern, less zeal, and less influence.
8. The chastening of God.
God still hates sin, and He has promised to chasten His own when they sin. Sooner or later, God whips every backslider, and does it in love. He does it to correct the backsliding.
9. Remorse of conscience.
If you have been saved, there is something in you that rebels against your sins. If you are God's child, the cup of sin will turn bitter to your taste before its contents are well down. You will always be ashamed that you drifted away from God and the path of Christian duty.

IV. The Cure for Backsliding.

Thank God, there is a cure for backsliding! The backslider can come back to God, and have delightful fellowship with Him. God appeals to the backslider to return to Him. It is an appeal of mercy. There is no excuse for the backslider to stay away from the Heavenly Father. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Are you backslidden today? Have you lost the joy of the Lord out of your life? Have you gotten cold in the service of the Master? Would you like to walk with Him more closely in the future than you have in the past? Then, confess your sins to God. Tell Him that you have done wrong, that you are sorry for it, that you are anxious for Him to forgive you and to cleanse you. You will find that He will forgive you and cleanse you and restore you to fellowship -- not relationship, but fellowship.

There is a life of joy and victory for every Christian, and you, as a child of God, may have it. Come back to God now and get right with Him.