

AN APPEAL TO COME HOME

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."
Hosea 14:1.

"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Jeremiah 3:22a.

A backslider is a child of God, who, through some sin or sins that he has allowed to enter his life, has wandered away from the Lord and gotten out of communion and fellowship with Him. His sin may be mere coldness of heart or grievous iniquity known to many. In either event it is sin in God's sight. A Christian who backslides is just like a child who disobeys his parents. It does not affect his sonship, but it does affect his fellowship, his joy and the approval of the Father. His standing is that of a wayward child. He has lost the peace and joy that he once possessed.

Backsliding consists in the Christian's withdrawing from the state of devotion to God and striving to please himself. Backsliding is that condition of life in which communion with God has been broken, love for God has diminished and joy has departed. It is a repudiation of the vows that the Christian made to the Lord when He saved him and the cessation of a life of dedication. It is a departure from the path of righteousness.

God's Word tells us of the failures, sins and backslidings of His people through the ages. God wanted us to know that His children were frail people and subject to temptation like we are. Many of them have yielded to the same temptations that we do.

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.

The backsliding of the Israelites was an indisputable fact. They mourned bitterly because of their bondage in Egypt. God delivered them out of the hand of Pharaoh. They were scarcely free from the whips of the Egyptian taskmasters when they began lusting after the fleshpots of Egypt, and complaining that they had not been permitted to remain there instead of being brought out to die in the wilderness.

Even 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. Later God told Moses 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, Moses took the rod and beat the rock in disobedience to the command of God. Water came from the rock, but Moses had sinned by losing his temper. Because of his backsliding Moses lost his opportunity 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 used to write many of the wonderful psalms, committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband, Uriah, slain in order to hide his sin.

One day Simon Peter told Christ that, even though all men should deny Him, he would die before he would ever deny Him. Then, three times individuals accused Peter of being a disciple of 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 was not a Christian, he started cursing. When he cursed and denied his Lord, he was certainly a backslider.

I. The Condition Of Backsliding.

Can any man, who has tasted the blessedness of fellowship with God, forsake the crystal fountain for the swollen waters of the world's pleasure? Reason would seem to say, "No." But Scripture, observation and experience unite in declaring the fact that many do. In your own sphere you know those who are the reverse of what they once were. There is no question about the reality of their declension.

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.

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.

The element of unconsciousness which characterizes backsliding is one of the most dangerous features in it. How can one slip away from earnestness in the Christian life into a condition of spiritual decrepitude without knowing it? It is due to the inclination to look more favorably on ourselves than on others. We mark the changes in the external appearance of others far more readily than we do those which manifest themselves in our personal appearance. We note the pallor of disease, or the wrinkles of care, or the stoop of old age in another far more readily than we do in ourselves. When disease is taking hold upon a person, others notice its progress far more distinctly than does the patient himself. So it is in the spiritual realm. We are more likely to discern the defections of others than we are our own. Like a dangerous disease, backsliding or a departure from God and the path of righteousness begins unexpectedly and steals into the life so secretly that the utmost vigilance is necessary lest one be taken unawares.

In the initial stages of backsliding the backslider is largely unaware of the change that is taking place in him. He gradually withdraws his affections from God and his devotion to Him, lives under the control of a self-pleasing spirit, becomes careless about discharging his religious duties, neglects to commune with God through Bible study and prayer, and loses his joy. If a person is in a backslidden condition, he is unhappy; in fact, a backslider is in reality the most miserable person in the world. Oftentimes his unhappiness is so plain that it is noticeable to others. He may even have a wistfulness which seems to say:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I found the Lord?"

Backsliding is so common today. In proportion to the increase of their material prosperity the spiritual health of so many has diminished. We are not obeying the commands of our Lord. God has said, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." But worldliness is the characteristic of our lives. Worldly people are our closest friends. Worldly place and power are the prizes we covet most eagerly. Worldly pleasure is our chief pursuit and our greatest delight. We call ourselves Christians, but it is very obvious that the motives which most powerfully influence us have nothing to do with Christ. What a contrast our lives present to that which our Lord desires for us! Our lives reveal cowardice instead of courage, fickleness instead of fidelity, bitterness instead of brotherliness, prayerlessness instead of prayerfulness and grumbling instead of gratitude. Any Christian who backslides is just like a child who disobeys his parents. It does not affect his sonship, but it does affect his fellowship, his joy, and the approval of the Father. His declension also acts as an opiate on his conscience and temporarily deprives it of its sin-detecting power.

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.

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.

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.