

AN APPEAL TO COME HOME

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

This message is a continuation of the one which I delivered this morning on "Bent to Backsliding." As a background for those who were not present then, I shall summarize the previous sermon.

A backslider is a child of God who had indulged in sin and gotten out of fellowship with Him. His sin may have been a mere coldness of heart or a grievous iniquity that is known to many. In either event it is sin in God's sight. When any Christian falls into sin he is a backslider. His backsliding does not affect his sonship, but it does affect his peace, joy, and fellowship, as well as the approval of the heavenly Father. His standing is that of a disobedient and wayward child.

I. The Condition of Backsliding.

The condition of backsliding is so common among Christians today as to be almost universal. We are not obedient to the commands of our Lord. For example, He said: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15), and yet worldliness is the characteristic of many of our lives. Worldly people are our closest friends, worldly pleasure is our greatest pursuit and delight, and worldly position, prestige, power, and possessions are the prizes which we covet and strive to obtain.

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, one can win the victory over the old nature through Christ.

2. Incomplete surrender.

Due to incomplete surrender backsliding generally steals upon Christians.

3. Neglect of prayer.

Any failure to the life of the Christian can be traced to the lack of prayer.

4. Disregard of God's Word.

A child of God cannot neglect the study of the Bible without becoming a backslider. Sin in the life keeps one from studying the Bible, but diligent study of it will prevent sinful living.

5. Irregular church attendance.

God has ordained that His children shall assemble in His house and worship Him publicly, and He always blesses those who do. Even though multitudes of church members do not consider it important or worthwhile for them to go to church, their empty pews testify to the backslidden and distressing condition of their souls. When people forsake the assembling of themselves together for the purpose of worshipping the Lord, you need not be surprised at the deterioration of character which

is so obvious in their lives. Any Christian who voluntarily absents himself from the worship services in the Lord's house is a backslider.

Now we shall consider some additional facts.

III. The Consequences of Backsliding.

1. To God.

The backsliding of one of His children always brings deep grief to the heart of God.

2. To others.

- (1) It embarasses all of the true friends of Christ.
- (2) It seduces the weak Christian.
- (3) It does the church an irreparable injury. If all of the other members of the church, of which the backslider is a member, should become cold and indifferent in heart, as has the backslider, the strength of the church would be sapped to such an extent that it could not be a faithful witness and the Lord would ultimately withdraw His presence from it.
- (4) It causes many to doubt the reality of the backslider's religious experience.
- (5) It supplies that for which the mocker is looking. The mocker is always quick to seize upon such examples.
- (6) It is a tremendous stumbling-block to those who are lost. It hinders their salvation. It is a fearful thing to live in such a way as to interfere with or prevent the salvation of a sinner.

3. To the backslider.

- (1) Less serious views of sin.
- (2) Open indulgence in sins formerly abandoned.
- (3) Less willingness to receive reproof for sin.
- (4) A spirit of self-justification. The average person can justify himself, to his own way of thinking, for anything that he wants to do.
- (5) A censorious spirit. A backslider is always ready to find fault with others, and harshly judge their motives and conduct. Wherever there is a censorious spirit, there is always a backslidden heart. When a child of God is not living as the Lord wants him to live, he tries to ease his conscience by saying that many others are as bad or worse than he is. He sets himself to the task of finding fault with the preachers and criticizing the church leaders.

Christ devoted a part of the Sermon on the Mount to this besetting sin of judging, criticizing, and condemning others. He commanded all of His followers to abstain from this sinful habit. He said, "Judge not." If any Christian is doing his duty, as he should and as Christ rightfully expects him to do, he is entirely too busy to be looking for the faults of others. It is a self-satisfied and self-righteous person who has a censorious spirit. In proportion as one is quick to discern the faults of others, he becomes less aware of his own shortcomings.

The censorious person is the last to perceive his own sin. His personal sin may be as huge as a beam; yet he is quite unable to see it because he is busy hunting for the speck of dust in his brother's eye.

(6) Unhappiness.

When a Christian fails to do his duty, or when he does that which he ought not to do, he always loses peace and contentment. It is impossible for anybody to be happy as long as he is living in disobedience to God. A backslider is the most unhappy and miserable person in the world. Oftentimes the unhappiness is so plain as to be noticeable to others. The backslider frequently has that wistful look which seems to say:

"Where is the blessedness which I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed--
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

The only people who are truly happy are the children of God who are living in accordance with his will for their lives. If one is not at peace or right with God, it is foolish to expect him to be happy or to be in harmony with his church. Backsliding always brings unhappiness.

(7) The loss of usefulness.

A backslider has less concern, less zeal, less ability to do good, and less influence for the Lord and the right.

(8) Remorse of conscience.

If the Lord saved you, then there is something within you that rebels against your sins. If you are God's child, the cup of sin will prove to be bitter to your taste before you have swallowed its contents.

After he had backslidden, David had such a remorse of conscience over his sins that he cried out to God and said: Psalm 51:1-12. If you, as a Christian have drifted away from God and the path of duty, the time will come when you will be ashamed that you did. After Simon Peter had denied Christ and then punctuated his denial with profanity, the Lord turned and looked at him. So great was his remorse of conscience that "Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). When a saved man does wrong he has a remorse of conscience. If a person does wrong and does not have any remorse, it is proof that he is not saved.

(9) The chastening of God.

God hates sin and He has promised to chasten His own that they sin. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). Sooner or later God chastens every backslider. He does it in love and for the purpose of correcting the backsliding. One of the sorrows of backsliding is the chastening hand of God which falls heavily upon the backslidden Christian.

IV. The Cure for Backsliding.

Thank God, there is a cure for backsliding! The backslider can come 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.