

## **Canons of Dort–5<sup>th</sup> Head, Articles 4-6 – Backsliding Believers**

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: Do you know someone who has been in the church, who seemed quite committed to the Lord, and then leave the church and live like a pagan? You probably have! So what is the truth about that person's condition? And how do you deal with him?

Today you will hear the proper teaching from God's Word regarding a backslider and how you are to deal with him.

Our headings are:

**Believers Succumb to Serious Sins**

**Believers Suffer from Serious Sins**

**Believers Saved from Serious Sins**

Our goals are: That you will **praise God for the assurance of his salvation**, and that you will **not lose hope when you or someone you know backslides**, but that you will **call on the Lord for you or that person who has backslidden to be restored**.

### **Believers Succumb to Serious Sins**

**Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins** -The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is **more than a match for the flesh**. Yet those converted are **not always so activated and motivated** by God that in certain specific actions they cannot **by their own fault** depart from the leading of grace, **be led astray by the desires of the flesh**, and give in to them. For this reason they must **constantly watch and pray** that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only is it possible for them to be carried away by the **flesh, the world, and Satan** into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of **David, Peter, and other saints** falling into sins.

**1. God has equipped the believer with his Word and Spirit and therefore the believer has the perfect means to prepare and fight the Devil, the world, and his flesh, and win every single time.**

God doesn't give a screw driver and say: "Overhaul this diesel engine." God doesn't give an axe to do heart surgery.

**2. But the believer often fights God's Word and Spirit because he is not activated and motivated in his heart to stay close to God.**

He is not always drawing strength from God's Word and Spirit. **Sometimes he doesn't pray** as he should and he **doesn't devote his time to God's Word** as he should, so he becomes exposed to danger in a weakened state. **The root of this is selfishness**. He thinks he was put on this earth for his pleasure, rather than to serve for the pleasure of God.

### **3. Selfishness then leads to lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.**

Lusts lead him to violate God's holy decrees. He rebels against the authorities, murders, commits adultery, steals, lies, and covets. He lusts after other gods and makes idols of things. He cares less about God's name, and ignores the Sabbath. He breaks all of God's laws. **He forgets his weakness (and man, apart from Christ is weak)** and how easily he is drawn into sin!

**Luke 22:31** And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, **that he may sift you as wheat.**

### **4. Practically, look how this works in your life:**

**a. If you aren't close to God, when you work hard and get a lot of money you will forget to guard your soul against wealth and be lured away by others into sin.** With wealth you can feel powerful **so you don't love your wife and sacrifice for her as you ought to**, and you end in divorce. With wealth you can choose **creature comforts over kingdom work.**

**b. If you aren't close to God, when you choose a spouse, you don't pray for wisdom to make a good choice.** You then marry a woman that doesn't meet God's standards and you **end up worshipping her idols!** It is easy for you to be pulled into sin like Solomon was by his non-believing wives!

**c. If you aren't close to God you can become a follower of wicked friends and find out they pull you away from worshipping...or they change how you talk and walk...and you stop caring for the fellowship of believers.**

**d. If you aren't close to God and his Word doesn't resonate in your heart, and you sit in front of your computer, you are likely to wander into websites you shouldn't.**

**Don't think for a minute you are beyond backsliding into serious sins.** Look at David and Peter! Anyone can backslide. Your enemies are strong! Even ministers, elders, and deacons can be led down this path. The truth is, we **only have the beginning of obedience in this life.** That scares me, but fear can be a good thing!

### **5. God may permit you to be carried away by your lusts and backslide.**

This does not make the Lord the source or cause of sin. God simply leaves you to your own devices and you sin against God.

**2Samuel 24:1** Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and **He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."**

It looks like God caused David to backslide and trust in his military instead of God, but God simply left him to his own devices.

**1Chronicles 21:1** Now **Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David** to number Israel.

**When God left David alone, the Devil lured him to trust in horses and chariots instead of God.** So he numbered Israel. When God withdrew his support for David, he was exposed to an enemy he could not win. David lived in a backslidden state for a long time.

**6. But at the same time, even when a believer backslides, remember God is still in control and his hand is always on him.**

He didn't lift the believer up to let him down.

### **Believers Suffer because Serious Sins**

**Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins:** By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, **deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience,** and sometimes **lose the awareness of grace for a time**—until, after **they have returned to the right way by genuine repentance,** God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

**1. Because he knows and has been taught better, the one who backslides and offends His Holy Majesty in heaven, deserves death in hell.**

Look at an example of how God viewed backsliding...particularly backsliding in idolatry.

Exodus 32:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 "Now therefore, let Me alone, that **My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.** And I will make of you a great nation."

Again, look at the punishment God put on backsliding gluttons. God wasn't enough for them!

Numbers 11:33 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the **LORD struck the people with a very great plague.**

Ultimately, remember what God did to Jerusalem when the Romans surrounded it in AD70!

**2. Furthermore, backsliding causes the Holy Spirit in a believer to grieve, and when he is grieved the believer can expect to live a life of discomfort!**

**He loves the believer, but he can't look at sin.** So he wounds the believer's heart!

Ephesians 4:30 **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,** by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

There is nothing more difficult to deal with than **spiritual pain.**

Psalms 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my **groaning all the day long.** 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; **My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.**

### **3. Practically, if you are seriously suffering in a backsliding state, you show it!**

You will **not sing** like you ought to sing. You will **not be as friendly** as you ought to be. You **won't look forward to celebrating the Lord's Supper**. You may even **deny knowing the Lord**. Life becomes an exercise in existing. You may outwardly do what God requires, but it is all fake, like the Pharisees who kept the Sabbath, but saw it as a weariness-a headache.

### **4. When you are a backslider and face severe suffering, you might even think you are no longer a Christian.**

### **5. You will stay in a backslidden state until you come to your senses and cry for God's help.**

### **Believers Saved from Serious Sins**

**Article 6: God's Saving Intervention** - For **God, who is rich in mercy**, according to the **unchangeable purpose of election**, does not take the Holy Spirit from the chosen completely, even when they fall grievously. **Neither does God let them fall down** so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by God, into eternal ruin.

### **1. The backsliding Christian is not saved by his own strength, but he is only saved from his condition when God intervenes and grants him aid and bends his will back to look to him.**

2Samuel 24:10 And **David's heart condemned him** after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done..."

### **2. God restores the backslider because God elected him to eternal salvation.**

He justified him. He adopted him as his child. God does not help the backslider because the backslider is good. He helps the backslider because he (God) is good. So God never lets the backslider fall so far that he cannot return.

Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore **you are not consumed**, O sons of Jacob.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you **will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ**;

### **3. God will even protect the backslider so he does not blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, which would have left him in eternal ruin and under the condemnation of hell.**

### **4. Arminian brothers argue against this doctrine in 2 ways.**

**First, they believe a Christian can be lost completely; he could become a pagan again.**  
But hear God's Words!

John 10:28 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

Second, they believe if a Christian backslides and becomes a non-Christian, he can get up by myself. (The Reformed Christian says: How grateful I am because God picked me up after I fell down!) To try to prove his point, the Arminian uses passages like Luke 15, the Prodigal son, to teach man can come to his senses by himself. But that parable was not intended to teach the principles of restoring the lost. That parable taught that heaven rejoices when a sinner repents. **Parables have only one meaning!** And even so, there is nothing that proves the Prodigal son was not a Christian when he lived wickedly. He was just a straying Christian...like David and Solomon!

One more passage Arminians use to suggest a Christian can become a non-Christian.

Hebrews 6:4 **For it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 **if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance**, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

This passage was not intended to teach a believer could lose his salvation. It was intended to teach the impossibility of losing your salvation! How can eternal life stop being eternal life? Arminians make the wrong conclusion because they don't read the rest of the passage. Look at V9.

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, **we are confident of better things concerning you**, yes, things that accompany salvation, **though we speak in this manner.**

The writer was saying there was no chance of this happening! He was simply emphasizing the greatness of our salvation. God would keep you and prevent you from losing your salvation.

We say similar things: "If the stock market crashes, I will lose all my money, but God will restore my money!"

Even if this verse meant you could lose your salvation, then it is also teaching that one who loses his salvation could never get it back. This, of course, would contradict the Arminian theory, because they believe you can become a Christian a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

### Conclusion:

Believers succumb to very serious sins at times and can suffer serious spiritual and physical pain from them. They may even be away from the church of God for a long time. The only way a man can come back is when God works in him by his Word and Spirit. He hears God's Words from you and the Holy Spirit changes his heart.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Praise God for his protecting power of his children. Though you or your loved ones stray, he brings you back.** He tied you with a golden chain with beautiful links. And **praise God for his willingness to bring you back when you stray.** He could have left you alone, but he didn't. You are his treasured possession.

**2. Love him and stay close to him.** Just as the one who stays close to his spouse will not stray into sin, so if you stay close to God, you will be safe.

**3. Let others know of his love. Tell them the old, old story of Jesus...of the cross and of his love!** Let them come. There is always room at the cross for them!

Finally, while straying Christians will be returned to the fold of God, if you are not a Christian, you will walk, holding on to the Devil's hand, right into hell, that is, unless you get God to be your Father. To get God to be your Father, your sins have to be paid for in Jesus Christ. He offers that payment to you.