

THE WAY OF THE BACKSLIDER

TEXT: PROVERBS 14:12-14

INTRODUCTION:

1. It has always amazed me that my most popular sermon (preached May 1, 2011) on Sermonaudio.com is “Return from Backsliding.”
2. This indicates that backsliding is a big problem. I get many emails and phone calls from backsliders all over the world.
3. And unfortunately, our church has always had a problem with backsliders.
4. I suppose I should explain what I mean by the term “backslider.”
5. Backsliders are people come to church, make a profession of faith, get baptized, and then after a while they go back to the world. Like the Prodigal Son, they often wind up in the hog pen.
6. But at least the Prodigal Son climbed out of the hog pen. Luke 15:17 says, “he came to himself.”
7. But some backsliders stay in the hog pen, and then they die a miserable death – dejected, depressed, desolate, despondent, disconsolate, dismal, distressed, doleful, downcast, disgraceful, lamentable, pathetic, pitiful, shabby, shameful, sordid, and wretched.
8. There is no neutral ground in the Christian life. We are either moving forward or we are sliding backward. Our Lord said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30).
9. Our Lord said to the lukewarm backsliders in the church of Laodicea, "I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16).
10. It grieves me when people tell me they see photographs of some of our backslidden church members all over Facebook, dressed immodestly, going to worldly parties, traveling to and fro on the Lord’s Day when they should be in church.
11. This grieves the pastor, and it grieves godly church members, but more importantly it grieves God! Ephesians 4:30 says, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."
12. Backsliders grieve the Holy Spirit and they quench the Holy Spirit. First Thessalonians 5:19 says, "Quench not the Spirit," but backsliders do quench the Spirit by their cold indifference, and their selfishness, and their carnality.

1. **THE CAUSE OF BACKSLIDING**
2. **THE RESULTS OF BACKSLIDING**
3. **THE CURE FOR BACKSLIDING**

I. THE CAUSE OF BACKSLIDING

1. William Arnot said, “If the secret history of backsliders were written, many startling discoveries would be made. Whatever the enormity it may end in, backsliding begins unseen in the heart. The Christian in name, whose fall resounds through the land, filling the mouths of scorners with laughter, and suffusing the faces of disciples with shame, did not descend to that depth by one leap from the high place on which he formerly stood. He does not by a sudden resolution of mind turn from virtue into vice” (*Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth*).
2. In other words, backsliding is gradual. Archibald Alexander said, “Backsliding occurs when the Christian is gradually led off from close walking with God, loses the lively sense of divine things, becomes too much attached to the world and too much occupied with secular concerns; until at length the keeping of the heart is neglected, prayer and the seeking of the Lord in private are omitted or slightly performed, zeal for the advancement of religion is quenched, and many things once rejected by a sensitive conscience are now indulged and defended. All this may take place and continue long before the person is aware of his danger, or acknowledges that there has been any serious departure from God.”
3. Backsliding is gradual, and it “begins unseen in the heart.” The backslider neglects reading his Bible and praying little by little. He starts skipping Sunday night and Wednesday night services, then he starts to occasionally skip Sunday School and Sunday morning services, and before you know it he stops attending all church services.
4. Backsliding begins unseen in the heart. Proverbs 14:14 says, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.”
5. William Arnot said, “Whatever the enormity it may end in, backsliding begins unseen in the heart.”
6. The Bible warns us of the danger of neglect – neglect of prayer, neglect of Bible reading, neglect of church attendance, neglect of witnessing for Christ, neglect of discipline. An undisciplined Christian is sure to backslide.
7. Each and every Christian has a bent toward backsliding. For some people, the bent is much stronger, but nevertheless we all have this bent toward backsliding.
8. The LORD says in Hosea 11:7, "And my people are bent to backsliding from me."

9. There are sinful inclinations in the heart of every man. First Corinthians 10:12 says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."
10. There are some Christians I thought would never backslide, but they did.
11. When we consider the cause of backsliding, there are three key words to remember: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

13. First: The world allures the backslider. To the backslider, the world is fun and exciting, and he finds the Christian life dull and boring. Archibald Alexander said the backslider "becomes too much attached to the world and too much occupied with secular concerns."
14. The Bible says, "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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (I John 2:15-17).
15. James 4:4 says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."
16. While the world allures the backslider, his flesh weakens him. Second Peter 2:18 says, "they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness."
17. Our Lord said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).
18. But the backslider stops watching, and he stops praying, and he repeatedly yields to the flesh. The backslider is prayerless, selfish, slothful, and lazy.
19. The apostle Paul said, "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," and "when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 13:14; 7:21).
20. The backslider is allured with the world. The backslider walks in the flesh, and the backslider is deceived by the devil.
21. First Peter 5:8 and 9 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith."
22. Satan is constantly hindering, deceiving, tempting, and distracting.
23. And Satan has a large army of demons working for him. Some people do not believe in Satan and demons. First of all, the Bible has much to say about Satan and demons.
24. Secondly, just watch television for about fifteen minutes. You'll see plenty of demons. Example: "Son of Zorn" on TV in diner last week.

25. Backsliders avoid godly Christians. They prefer associating with their worldly friends. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Be not deceived: evil communications (companions) corrupt good manners.”
26. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14). The backslider is full of self. When self is on the throne, God is taken off the throne.
27. When self is exalted, the Holy Spirit is grieved.
28. This is the cause of backsliding. Self is on the throne, not God.

II. THE RESULTS OF BACKSLIDING

1. Backsliding results in broken lives, broken homes, and broken hearts.
2. We could consider many examples in Scripture. Lot, for example. Someone said, “Lot got his daughters out of Sodom, but he couldn’t get Sodom out of his daughters.”
3. Lot lived comfortably in Sodom. He blended right in.
4. Consider Demas. The apostle Paul said, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (II Timothy 4:10).
5. Backsliders have left their first love. Revelation 2:4 says, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”
6. The backslider loves the world.
7. The backslider loves his worldly friends.
8. The backslider loves himself.
9. But the backslider does not love God.
10. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). But the backslider does not keep the Lord’s commandments because he doesn’t love the Lord.
11. The Lord commanded us to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, but the backslider doesn’t share the Gospel. Sinners (even his unsaved relatives) could all go to hell and he doesn’t care.
12. The Lord commanded us to attend church services and to support the church financially but the backslider avoids the church the same way a criminal avoids the police.
13. The backslider loses all influence for good. Does a backslider sit among sinners in a worldly party and suggest they pray and read the Bible? No, because he has lost his zeal for God, and in any event, he knows they will laugh him to scorn.
14. The backslider loses power with God. The Psalmist said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).
15. The backslider is like Samson, who did not know that “the LORD was departed from him” (Judges 16:20).

16. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14).
What does it mean to “be filled with his own ways?”
17. It means that the backslider’s heart is filled up to the brim with foolishness, and sin, and disappointment. The backslider enjoys his sin for a short season, but it is only temporary.
18. Dr. Payson said, “The symptoms of spiritual decline are like those which attend the decay of bodily health. It generally commences with loss of appetite...for prayer, reading the Scriptures and devotional books. Whenever you perceive these symptoms, be alarmed, for your spiritual health is in danger: apply immediately to the great Physician for a cure.”
19. A friend of mine told me he that knew his dad would die soon because he lost his appetite and stopped eating. In like manner, backsliders are dying spiritually because they have lost their appetite for prayer, and reading the Bible, and attending church, etc.

III. THE CURE FOR BACKSLIDING

1. Jeremiah 3:22 says, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” The only cure for backsliding is repentance – “return.”
2. It is important to distinguish between a backslider and an apostate. Some people use the terms interchangeably but there is a difference.
3. Webster’s Dictionary says, “a backslider is an apostate; one who falls from the faith and practice of religion.”
4. I do not agree with that definition. I believe a backslider is a professed Christian who has stopped living for God. And while it is true that could also describe an apostate, there is a distinction.
5. H.A. Ironside said, “The backslider is one who fails to carry out the truth of his profession into his life. The apostate, on the other hand, gives up the truth entirely, even denying the Lord; this proves his falseness, whatever his previous profession may have been.”
6. Apostasy is a permanent condition. Backsliding is a temporary lapse. However, if the backslider does not repent, God could kill him. First John 5:16 says, “There is a sin unto death.”
7. Many backsliders have died suddenly and unexpectedly because God judged them. Like one of our backslidden members who died suddenly at a slot machine in Atlantic City.
8. The only cure for backsliding is genuine repentance. Not half-hearted, wishy-washy repentance, but real repentance.
9. But there is no cure for apostasy.

CONCLUSION:

1. Back in December 1863, *The Atlantic* magazine published a short story written by Edward Everett Hale, entitled "The Man Without a Country."
2. It is a fictitious story of an Army lieutenant named Philip Nolan, who was tried as an accomplice at Aaron Burr's trial for treason in 1807.
3. During his testimony, Philip Nolan bitterly renounced his country, shouting, "I wish I may never hear of the United States again!"
4. Because of this terrible outburst, he was consequently court-martialed for treason and sentenced to spend the rest of his days out at sea, without so much as a word of news about the United States.
5. The judge was shocked at Nolan's outburst, and after convicting him, he exiled and sentenced him to life on U.S. Navy warships. The man was transferred from ship to ship, and was not allowed ever again to set foot on U.S. soil.
6. The backslider is a lot like that man without a country. He doesn't fellowship with Christians, and he doesn't really belong to the worldly crowd either. He doesn't belong to either group.
7. Consider Lot. When he tried to stop the lascivious Sodomites from molesting his guests, the scornful Sodomites said, "This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them" (Genesis 19:9).
8. And then when Lot tried to warn his sons-in-law that God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, they did not take him seriously.
9. Genesis 19:14 says, "But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law." They thought he was joking.
10. Or consider backslidden Peter, the night he denied Christ three times. Peter sat outside in the courtyard of the palace, but the sinners didn't trust him, and they didn't want him around.
11. "A damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock

crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly”
(Matthew 26:69-75).

12. The bitter tears of a backslider!