

The Danger of Backsliding

by Albert M. Ewing

Backsliding is a spiritual heart condition that can lead to self-indulgence, unbelief, and a loss of salvation, but can be restored through repentance and faith in the blood of Christ.

Scripture: Proverbs 14:14, Jeremiah 17:9, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Hebrews 11:6, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Decline", "Repentance"

Description

Albert M. Ewing preaches on the dangers and consequences of backsliding in heart, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the inward condition that leads to spiritual downfall. He highlights the risks of losing one's soul, bringing shame to the cause of Christ, and the deceitfulness of the heart that can lead to unbelief and self-indulgence. Ewing urges repentance, emphasizing the need for godly sorrow and a return to the first works to restore a clean slate before God.

Transcript

It shall be the purpose of this little volume to discuss in each of its eight sermons that special group mentioned in the title of the book, viz, "The Backslider in Heart." Proverbs 14.14.

The subject of backsliding is one that should be given great consideration by every individual.

First: because of one's liability to backslide: for regardless of how confident we may be, there is always that danger of being led away from our mooring and fall from our steadfastness. II Peter 3.1. Also, "He that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall" I Corinthians 10.12.

Much is said of one's falling into the condemnation, and reproach of the devil. This is one of the games of old Satan, that he so shrewdly works to accomplish his purpose. If, and when, he can cause us to fall into condemnation and reproach enough to discourage us; then he will push his claim, in accusing us of wrong doing, until he will finally overcome us and -accomplish our backsliding.

Second: Our second reason, for giving serious consideration to our backsliding, is the danger of losing our souls: the chance that we will ever come back to God is decidedly against us. We do not believe in the doctrine, "Once in grace, always in grace," no matter how much disgrace. The devil can bring up so many reasons why we should never try again -- and many never do try again. We may be one of those many that will never try, by reason of the circumstances, environments, associations, and dispositions, that one takes on after falling from grace.

Third: A third reason why we should use great care not to backslide is that we bring a great smear on the cause of Christ if we do; and we also contribute discouragement to others, and although we come back to God, we will suffer the loss of some things, that will never be restored. "The testimony of an unbroken fellowship will be lost forever." We will always remember when that break came. Also, we will always remember what caused that break.

It may not be thirty pieces of silver, but something of much less value.

It could be the unholy desire for painted nails, painted lips, abbreviated skirts, ventilated dress necks, short sleeves, or no sleeves at all, bobby-socks, cheap jewelry, lodges, clubs and such like. These are all signs of a heart condition, for when these things are indulged in, or even desired, we know it is because of the condition of the heart. For if the heart be holy, these things would not even be desired, much less indulged in. We know that salvation is not the outward appearance, yet we insist that it controls the outward appearance. Peter said, "Let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, or putting on of apparel." You can plainly see that he was not preaching in favor of these things, for he said, "let it not be." Salvation is not a make-up or make-believe, and there is just no use for anyone to indulge in those things and say, "Poo, that has nothing to do with one being a Christian"; your "Poo" doesn't make it salvation. What condemns is wrong no matter how much we try to justify ourselves in doing it. The trouble with many folk is that "the word preached, does not profit them, not being mixed with faith upon the part of those that heard it." Hebrews 4.2. The Word says, "Let it not be."

Now just what was He objecting to? Plaiting the hair? No, no; He was objecting to plaiting, or filling the hair with shining ornaments. I have gone into homes where old grandmas were sitting there with their hair all done up on metal, enough almost to make a wash basin. Grandma, did you say? Yes, Grandma, and a professor of religion at that. Be careful with your hairdo.

The Quizzer once asked the question of his auditors, when he had used a French word meaning "hairdo." "What is it?" The answer came back, "It is a horse." "Well," the quizzer said, as he smiled, "it may look like a horse, but it is a hairdo." Again he said, "Nor the wearing of gold." No comment on this. If you do not understand a statement as plain as that, you no doubt will get to heaven anyway. Again, "Nor the putting on of apparel."

It must be the hidden man of the heart, which is not corruptible, "even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" I Peter 3.3, 4.

Backsliding is, of course, inward first, then outward. We do not do wrong outwardly until we are wrong inwardly. The heart is first frost-bitten, then the leaves begin to show the effect of the frost bite. Sometimes it is only a light frost and, to all appearances, not a lot of damage is done.

It is not always a killing frost. By this we mean we are not to think that because there have been no violent and wicked sins committed that there has been no harm done. For it is the little foxes that spoil the vines. Song of Solomon 2.15. The backslider is already in a position to not be too hard on himself, but to justify himself by saying, only mistakes have been made.

We are not to classify mistakes with sins. Of course we know that mistakes, when they become known to us, must be immediately corrected, or they will become sins. Willful and malicious wrongs are mistakes, but they are more; they are sins. The difference is that one is committed without the consent of the will and the other by our own voluntary and willful choice.

We should give serious consideration of our deeds, and not be too casual about them, for the heart is very deceitful. Jeremiah 17.9. God said, "Man's heart is evil from his youth" Genesis 8.21. Mark declares "The heart is where deceit comes from." "For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these things come from within and defile the man" Mark 7.21.

Satan shot man in the heart: he knows where to shoot, and is a good shot. To be shot in the heart is fatal; and so "Death was passed upon all mankind." But it also says, "Ye who were dead' in trespasses and in sins hath He quickened" "made alive" Ephesians 2.1. "I will give him a new heart," or make him a new heart, Ezekiel 18.31. We don't have to go around having a heart with a bullet hole in it; we can have a new heart. God did not plug up the old bullet hole Satan made, but just did away with the old heart, and made a new one and put His Holy Spirit in it. God does not believe in patch work. Adam and Eve tried that, and it did not work. It failed to cover their sin, and it will not cover ours either, unless they are confessed and forsaken.

Heart disease has first place, physically and spiritually, because the heart is the chief organ of life, for both soul and body. Neither the soul or the body can be healthy when the heart of either is affected, and, unless immediate help can be obtained, death will sooner or later be the inevitable result. Our subject of course confines itself to the spiritual heart, and to one that has given up their spiritual heart and has gone back to their dead heart: the one with a bullet hole in it. "Slid back in heart," and while very religious, yet not spiritual.

The text talks about the backslider in heart, not in practice. There is a difference. He did not say that they were backslidden in worship, or in works, but in heart. This is a condition that cannot be cured by better practices, or by increasing our church activities, "doing more work," or by being more often at the sacraments. This can only be healed by godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto salvation that needeth not to be repented of. He said to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2.5), "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent." He did not suggest that they could pay their fine by doing good works, or going into hiding until people quit talking about it, or even staying the fine, until they were good and ready to pay it. He said repent and do the first works; go all the way back to the beginning, and bring up a clean slate. This is what John the Baptist required of the Pharisees; also John the Revelator of the church of the Ephesians. "Repent, or else I will come quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." Notice "Except thou repent and do thy first works." Yes very much backslidden, they were.

We will notice some signs of this particular backslider spoken of in the text, as the reference is made entirely to an inward condition, viz, "In heart," and no reference is made to any outside irregularities of the religious profession. It is not likely that the religious performance will be perfect, but good enough to escape the criticism of the brethren, and to retain a good name. The church at Sardis had a name that lived, but they were dead, said Jesus.

First, let's notice the text says, "He shall be filled with his own ways." Proverbs 14.14. Now since there can be no vacuum, we are either filled with the Spirit of God, or we are filled with our own ways, as the wise man has said, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man (natural man) but the end thereof are the ways of death" Proverbs 16.25. This way evidently is self-indulgence, and whether willful or willingly, it is all the same, as self-indulgence is the fruit of the backslider in heart, and is the way of death.

To backslide in heart is first to invite unbelief. The law of faith is unalterable. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not on the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him" St. John 3.36. "Oh, wherefore didst thou doubt" Matthew 14.31.

How unreasonable it is to doubt Jesus. "It is impossible to please God without faith" Hebrews 11.6. But this is not a chapter on faith, although it is faith or backslide. We are endeavoring to show how our weak faith, or the lack of faith, has substituted our own ways, and this has taken the place of Holy Ghost leadership, and has greatly hindered Holy Ghost revivals.

Many people are backslidden in heart, and do not seem to be conscious of it; this state of heart exists far in advance of any outward manifestation. We are inclined to think that because we do not do wrong things that we are all right. It is not because we do no wrong things, but because we do not do enough good things to keep us spiritual. We must be spiritual or we are nothing, in the way of a Christian. Now when we say that we have done nothing, we say the truth, and most of us have never been accused of doing anything. If we had done something, we would not have backslid. When we do something, that is something, that something will amount to something.

You will notice that the church had not as yet made the discovery that they were on their way out, and must repent at once. Being self-willed will license self-indulgence and sin. They reserved the right to make their own classification of right and wrong, so that their actions and conduct would be according to their own interpretations of this classification.

The expression, "My Bible says" is wrong, and should never be used. You have no Bible, unless God's Book doesn't suit you, and you want to make your own, like Hitler. He did not get along very well with his book, and you will not get on very well with yours, unless it is God's Book. I shudder almost when I hear preachers make this statement. It may seem innocent, but it seems to have a subtle approach to filching glory that does not, or ever can, belong to us. This statement "My Bible" would be very misleading to the heathen the missionary is trying to convert, as he would likely think that the missionary had written a Bible of his own. I have noticed that the backslider in heart can make his Bible say just what he wants it to say. But God's -- well, it just won't bend to our preconceived notions about things. The Bible is good enough as it is, for God's true children. And every one that has a Bible and reads it to his own accommodation is backslidden in heart. "Let God be true, and every man a liar" Romans 3.4. The man that reads and believes God's Book will, as the writer has said, "Swear to his own hurt, and change not" Psalm 15.4.

He means that he will tell the truth, even though he may suffer for it.

The backslider in heart will invent a way around the truth by explaining things in his own way. The things that he denied to others, and unChristianized them for doing, he will justify himself in doing. This very inconsistency he will observe in others, but will overlook in himself. The man in grace will claim no more for himself than he will allow in others.

Are we, or have we been, more severe in our criticism of others than of ourselves? If this is so, it is an evidence of backsliding. It may not be charitable to say that one is entirely backslidden, but we can truly say that he is on his way out, and unless he makes this discovery soon, and repents and has the blood applied to his heart, he will finally be enrolled in the class that my subject talks about: "The Backslider in Heart." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" I John 1.9. In summing up for the backslider in heart, we will say that, "To be filled with our own ways is to be self-willed, self-indulgent, full of arrogance, and to be possessed of an uncharitable

spirit."

All this is more than a weakness with us; it is sin in us, and though we may be as beautiful as a whited sepulcher on the outside, we are full of dead men's bones on the inside. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.

The blood, the blood, is all my plea; Hallelujah, for it cleanseth me.

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