

The Perils of the Ephesian Church

by Albert M. Ewing

The sermon addresses the dangers of backsliding in the church, emphasizing the need for love and devotion over mere works.

Topics: "Spiritual Backsliding", "Christian Revival"

Description

Albert M. Ewing delivers a powerful sermon on 'The Backslider in Heart,' emphasizing the danger of neglecting to address backsliding in the church. He highlights the importance of maintaining our first love for God, as seen in Revelation 2:4, and warns against becoming lukewarm in spirit or substituting our ways for God's plans. Ewing stresses the need for daily communion with God, consistent Bible reading, active support of God's work, confession of sins, and public testimony to the saving power of Jesus Christ to avoid backsliding.

Transcript

While realizing that we are engaging in a most difficult undertaking in trying to elucidate, to the reader's mind, the full content of meaning expressed in the text that heads the chapter, and gives the title to this book; I am persuaded that my subject, "The Backslider in Heart" is too much, if not altogether neglected by the ministry. Too many are palliating sin, and waving their smooth palladium of oratory over superficial, and backslidden holiness professors; "having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Jude 16.

If we as ministers of the word of God, withhold the tenth, and shun to declare the whole counsel of God, for policy sake, whether it be for filthy lucre 'or popularity, we are become hirelings; and Jesus said "The hireling careth not for the sheep." John 10:12,13. That preacher may be esteemed very highly for his work's sake by his people; but God's estimate of Him is very low.

We are told in Ezek 33:6, very plainly the penalty required of the unfaithful watchman who fails to blow the trumpet with no uncertain sound.

The "backslider in heart" who is he? When the Lord said, "One of you shall betray me," they began to say, "Lord, is it I?" So the reader of this little book might say, to this question, "Who is the backslider in heart? Lord, is it I?" Well, t would not say that it was, but it could be. Now if you have left your first love, thou art the man; for the backslider in heart is one that has left and lost his first love. Rev. 2:4.

The word, "left" is used because, that is just what they did, and that the responsibility may fall where it belongs.

"Thou hast left." Of course when we leave it, we lose it. They left what is the most difficult thing in religion to maintain, viz "first love." "First" here mans, "in point of rank," "keen edge," love at its highest peak, or boiling point.

Wesley said, "few, ever get saved: and fewer still ever keep saved any length of time; fewer still ever get sanctified: and fewer still ever keep sanctified to the end." Many have left their first love; one time they ranked high in the spiritual life of the church, but now they are demoted to the lower levels of formality, and don't seem to be concerned about it, or even to realize it.

Let us look at Rev. 2:4. This church at Ephesus, Jesus said, "had left their first love," and as His custom was to mention all their good things before offering any criticism of their lives, He begins to enumerate them. First He said, "I know thy works." They had works, and I don't imagine it was running a culinary department, cream parlor in the church basement, or any social function. We think they were doing good works, such as a Christian church should be engaged in. It is sufficient to say that good works will not save us. No. good wife is satisfied with a husband that is a good worker, and provider, if he does not love her. She wants more than a mere living, she wants love and affection. We can do works; we know how to perform religious functions, but do we consider, whether they are done in a perfunctory way; or is the compelling force, that motivates us in doing work for God, coming out of a heart filled with pure love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said they had patience. Do we have patience? I have many say to me, "That is my trouble, I have no patience." Well these folk did have patience, and Jesus gave them credit for it; and that was not all they had. They could not bear them that were evil. "Thou hast tried them that say, they are Apostles, and are not, and hast found them to be liars; and for my name's sake hast not fainted." They seemed to be careful about their associations; they did not hobnob and join in with just every crowd. Are we that careful? They knew their book, so that they could square their leaders by the word, and so protect themselves from wolves in sheep's clothing. They had stick-to-itiveness, and were not easy to faint. In fact, Jesus said, "they had not fainted;" that is, they had not given up their profession. Well, the Bible says, "hold fast your profession" Heb. 4:14 and 10:23. But if we will examine the context we will make the discovery that we had better have something hot, to serve with it.

He said to the Laodicean church: "I would that ye were cold or hot" Rev. 3:16. This crowd was neither cold nor hot; So he spued them out of His mouth. We have no record that anyone had questioned the Christian piety of the Ephesian church until Jesus came along and looked them over; and when He saw their good things, He acknowledged them; and no doubt they thought their rating would be high; but when He said, "Nevertheless (notwithstanding all this) I have somewhat against thee," it was not the pastor making this claim against them, but Jesus. I do not know what the pastor thought about this criticism, after all the good things he had acknowledged, and said about his church: but Jesus does not always see eye to eye with the pastor of the church. I do not think that the pastor knew just how backslidden his church was. This is true in many places. My, my! if Jesus had just left off speaking, when He got through saying all those good things, and just before He said, "Nevertheless," the pastor surely would have had a wonderful write-up about his church. But Jesus was through saying good things, and now He must say, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Rev. 2:4. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

They had fallen from grace, and needed to repent, by going all the way back and bring up a clean slate, the same as John the Baptist required of the Pharisees. He was preaching to a crowd of backsliders, that had taken on the viper nature, and John knew that it is no use baptizing a viper: for they would still be vipers after the ceremony. If water would have done the work, Jesus would not have had to die for our sins, we could have just washed them away with water. In the commendation of Jesus of the Ephesian church, it does not seem that they were backslidden; but wait a minute: let's see. They had works, labors, and patience, and had a horror for evil workers, and knowledge of the truth, and they had borne and had not fainted; but they had left their first love. They were performing well outwardly, but inwardly, they were backsliding or backslidden in heart.

To perform the functions of the Christian life perfectly, we must keep the fire of devotion burning constantly on the altar of our heart. It is love, not activities, that counts the most in Christian service. If love is not felt as at first, then we have left and lost our first love altogether, or we are losing it. Rev. 2:1-7. We are either spiritual, or we are nothing so far as God is concerned. "Ye must worship me in spirit and in truth" says the Master.

Jesus called the Pharisees' attention to what their prophet "had prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written,, This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" Mark. 7:6,7. "In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." He said, "Make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit." Matt. 12:33. When and if you have a little time, please read this portion of the 12th chapter of Matthew's gospel.

In the Ephesian Church we find a state or condition of backsliding in heart, existing with an outward maintenance of works that made them look like real Christians. Perhaps everybody around them thought they were real saints: only the keen eye of the Savior could detect that they were not. His message was surely a great surprise to them, for they were ready to measure spiritual arms with any church in their community or country. But alas! All the good works, and hatred of evil, could not refute the fact of their backsliding. There was a break, not in their works so much, but in their spiritual life, and a lack in their love as a consequence of this break. The reason people do not find their religious trouble is, because they look in the wrong place. They examine their works, when they should look to their spirit.

Jesus looked at their spirit and found their trouble. He did not say, "You are losing out." He said, "You have left your first love repent therefore or I will come quickly, and remove thy 'candlestick'" (or church). They were to repent while they still had the light. They still had some dim, shimmering light of a past experience, as every backslider remembers when he had better days. They were not to allow this memory of their yesteryears to be blotted from their minds, for He said, "If the light that is in thee become darkness, how great is that darkness."

We have found that the experience of backsliding is perfectly compatible with great zeal and activities. The Church just described was so far backslidden, that it was necessary for them to go all the way back, and do their first works, of bitter repentance, and begin all over again, notwithstanding they were very zealous, and very active.

There is no doubt, but this is a bit confusing to many: How any people can be interested in church work, and backslidden in heart at the same time. Well they may be following blind guides. A blind leader that knows how to get people in love with him by flattery, is a dangerous leader. There are many people, who are only religiously infatuated; they will work themselves down, on committees; they will work in the

culinary department making soup, and the cream freezing department, and when they are through stirring, their religion is as thin as their soup, and as cold as their cream. There are a lot of willing folk in the church. There are some that are willing to work, and then there are some that are willing to let them do it. They are members of the church, but not members of the prayer meeting group. They are thrilled with the social functions of the church, but are not interested in old time, Holy Ghost, fire baptized, Spirit-filled meetings.

Again, backsliding will exist with the maintenance of strong discipline and sound orthodoxy; but these can identify the Christian, only, if and when, they are shown in the spirit of love. We are to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. II Timothy 4:2. Also we are to speak "The truth in love" Ephesians 4:15. "Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity (divine love) ' it profiteth me nothing" I Corinthians 13:1. "I am become as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal." In this manifestation of divine love alone is the equation between success and failure in our service for God.

Lastly. We will sum up for the backslider in heart.

First. He has left his first love; that high ranking love, and the light of the Spirit has died in his soul. The love of God going out, creates a vacuum which must of necessity be filled with something, as we can not have a vacuum.

If something goes out, then something will come in to fill that vacancy and that something will be "his own ways." There is a congruous correspondence between the church described in this chapter, and the church at Rome.

They had known God. Romans 1:21-25. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened (backslidden). Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: and changed the glory of God for idols, and for this cause God gave them up to serve their uncleanness, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator."

They did all these things because "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" Romans 1:28. "Then God gave them up unto a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient." Just like the low lands when the flood gates are opened, they are immediately filled with all unrighteousness. Romans 1:28, 32.

Second. He is lukewarm in spirit. He has only the form left; his fire and power is gone; he may, and often times has plenty of zeal, but not according to knowledge and love.

Third. He is filled with his own ways and methods of doing things. He thinks little or nothing of substituting his ways, for Cod's plans; and like Nadab and Abihu, get out of their place and offer strange fire on the altar of God. There are just a lot of folk that will jump up and take the place of the priest, and especially if he happens to be a little late. I have seen them jump up, and the preacher, that the people wanted to hear so badly had to wait, while they took his precious time, burning incense to their own experience, and said nothing that they could riot have said at other opportune times. The Bible says, "Give place to the gospel." What happened to them that offered strange fire? The Bible says they died. Numbers 3:4. "Them that will honor Me, I will honor, and they that despise me shall he lightly esteemed." I Samuel 2:30.

Fourth. The cares of life have overcome and taken possession of his life, and now it is his meat and drink to do his own way.

Fifth. He is filled with Ego, and there is a complete absence of real humility. He will not only offer his service, but he will insist on it being accepted. He is often very radical, and harsh in his defense for his non-essentials. He has his own gospel as he sees it, but it is the gospel of the backslider in heart: cold and without mercy and sympathy.

Lastly. How do we backslide? We will notice only a few contributing causes.

1. Neglect of daily communing with God in prayer. We must meet God at the mercy seat, and get His touch on our souls, else we die.

2. Neglect of daily Bible reading and study. We must feed on the Word.

3. Neglect to support the work of God, with our presence and finance. It is not enough to send our tithe to church, God said to bring it. "Bring ye all the tithes into the store house." Notice it says "Bring ye" Malachi 3:10. He wants us to come to church. I have heard people say that the Lord can keep us at home. Well, He can, but He would rather we would go to church. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:25.

4. Suffering things to remain unconfessed in our lives, instead of frankly acknowledging them and getting them out of the way.

5. And lastly, failure to witness publicly to the saving and sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus Christ. We cannot keep saved if we fail to bear this testimony.

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