

Why Do People Backslide?

by Albert M. Ewing

Backsliding is a state of spiritual decline or apostasy that can be recovered from with genuine repentance and a return to a life of obedience to God.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 10:37, Luke 9:62, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Peter 2:21, 2 Peter 1:10, 1 John 2:15, 1 John 3:8-9

Topics: "Spiritual Backsliding", "Eternal Security"

Description

Albert M. Ewing preaches on the concept of backsliding, emphasizing that although the term may not be explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, the theme remains relevant. He highlights the dangers of backsliding, attributing it to disobedience to God and reluctance in obedience. Ewing draws parallels between biblical examples like Lot's wife and individuals who prioritize worldly customs over strict obedience to God. He warns against the misconception of eternal security, stressing the importance of spiritual worthiness over mere moral goodness.

Transcript

We understand that the word "Backslider" is an Old Testament word, and does not occur once in the New, but this does not suggest to us that backsliding ceased with the Old Testament dispensation. Terms change, but themes remain. Jesus said, "No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." He is talking on the same theme ("backsliding") but is using a different term; yet the man that would do this would be doing the same thing as Lot's wife, who on leaving Sodom, looked back, and turned to a pillar of salt. Lk. 9:57-62.

Why do people backslide? Because, First, They do not obey God, and second, If and when they do, it is with reluctance. In the narrative given by the Master in the above scripture, where one said, "I will follow Thee whither soever Thou goest: But suffer me first to go and bury my father." This was a very reasonable request, if his father had been dead at that time; and requiring only a few days; but since his request, to remain at home until after the death of his father, which might be a matter of years, all because of a prevailing custom; was not considered strict obedience, by Him who said, "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me Mt. 10:37 and "Let the dead bury the dead" Lk. 9:57. Then another who thought his excuse more worthy than the former, said, "I will follow the Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house." I do not know who they were, he does not say, and it matters not. Which is of more importance, to quickly obey the call of God or to sob over our kin folk?

This is exactly what Lot's wife did, and became a monumental backslider to all generations to follow. We are to follow in His steps, I Pet. 2:21, not Mrs. Lot's steps. When we start following to Lamb, we will quit following the goat.

We do not mean to say that the term, "backslider in heart" is synonymous with final apostasy. While backsliding is apostasy, it is by no means a state or condition, from which we cannot or may not recover; but a state in which we are likely to remain. It is so dangerous to backslide: the hell pull is so strong, chances and circumstances, being unfavorable, may combine with many other things, and defeat our every attempt to return to God.

The Eternal Security gospel, "Once in grace, always in grace," "Will never be lost," "No backsliders in hell" and such like, just won't hold water: it is just one of Satan's nostrums to put the victim to sleep, and populate hell. I am sure there are plenty of morally good people that believe this doctrine, but there is a difference, between being morally good, and being spiritually worthy.

There are literally millions whose only hope of righteousness, is a mere moral assent, a nod of the head, a hand shake in confirmation of their acceptance of a compromise and emasculated gospel that gives no witness of the Spirit, or assurance of eternal life.

The class that we refer to as "the backslider in heart" is a different folk. They represent a group of people fallen from grace, and who do not or will not admit it, but as Jesus said, "make long prayers for a pretense, and love to stand in the market places praying, to be seen of men." One must be in possession of a thing, before he can leave it or lose it. One must be saved before he can backslide from it. Just when are we competent to say, when one is backslidden if we are correct in saying that the process of backsliding, is involuntary, gradually, unconsciously and imperceptibly in many cases? The Poet wrote,

There is a time, we know not when,

A place we know not where;

That marks the destiny of men,

For glory or despair.

There is a line by us unseen,

That crosses every path;

The hidden boundary between

God's patience, and His wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,

To die as if by stealth;

It does not quench the beaming eye,

Or pale the glow of health.

The conscience may be still at ease,

The spirit light and gay;

That which is pleasing still may please

And care be thrust away.

It is a sad moment, for souls to let carelessness steal into their life and rob them of their deep spirituality. Thousands living are burning incense to a musty, dusty, rusty, lusty, moldy experience. They have become infatuated with their own profession and have built up quite a market for their surplus of non-essentials; and being the good salesmen that they are, have succeeded in selling themselves at a moderately high market. But remember, that pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Not a small percentage of the average church enrollment could, with reasonable certainty, be included in this group denominated "The backslider n heart." I realize that the elucidation of our subject is rather difficult; in view of the many religious opinions, and standards of living as outlined by the various religious bodies, and even among our modern holiness movements.

I have heard ministers declare, "That if your experience was ever better than it is now, you are backslidden, and need to repent." Others would say, "Pay no attention to your feelings, as religion is not feeling, but faith." Well, I agree that it is faith, but it is feeling too. If we have salvation, we will have feeling; and to continue indefinitely without any feeling of God's divine presence is some evidence at least of being backslidden in heart.

Some preachers will kill the old fox with all the little ones, and some will kill only the big old fox and let all the little ones live. Solomon wrote, "It is the little foxes, that spoil the vines. Not many persons backslide because they killed someone. They may have killed some one because they were backslidden. Few people ever backslide because they commit big sins. It is because they commit little deeds that they have been told by holiness professors, there was no harm in doing; and things that they had seen their pastor doing.

Is there any sure rule by which we may reckon the true spiritual condition of the group under consideration? Well what we have just been saying, is not looking up a blind alley. It is at least a clue. Jesus said, "By their fruit ye shall know them." But he said fruit, not actions. It takes a season to produce fruit; it takes only a moment, for an act. If I see a person do a thing that possibly he never did before, and may never do again, that is not sufficient evidence for condemnation, unless it was willful, and with the full knowledge that it was sin. But when that act is repeatedly indulged in, contrary to plain Bible teaching, then it is no more judging, but knowledge. We know that whosoever is born of God does not commit sin. I Jno. 3:9. So if one is continually committing sin, he is doing so because he is backslidden in heart. He is not only doing it willingly, but willfully. The objection to this conclusion is, that so long as one does not acknowledge that he is backslidden, we have no right to brand him as such. Well the Good Book declares that, "Whosoever commits sin, is of the devil" I Jno. 3:8. We need not judge, we have one that judgeth, even the Word Jno. 8:50: If we should discover the things that others are backsliding over, we should profit by it and turn away from them. "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." I Jno. 2:15, 16. This analytical interpretation of the writer is both emphatic and final.

The sensual indulgence of fleshly passions and appetites of our body and the carnal lusting of the eyes of adultery, feasting themselves on the shameful immodesty of womanhood, the pride of life, blatingly, brazenly, boldly burning incense to the fashion god of this world, at the expense of a well guarded Christian influence and strong character, and common decency: can only be, the fruit of one who is backslidden in heart. The above Scripture is a fearful arraignment of the sins of the backslider and leaves no room for doubt as to their source, "They are not of the Father, but of the world."

Backsliding has its beginning in the heart. This is its seat and source. It may be ascribed to various causes. If the heart is only regenerated, and not sanctified the enemy has a greater advantage through the works of the flesh; but if sanctified, Satan must enter through temptation. We are admonished, not to yield to temptation, for yielding is sin; and then he that is tempted is drawn away with his own lusts. Sanctification would deliver us from this source of danger, viz, "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." "Pride." One of the seven things that God hates, and one of the things the world loves is, regular old Lucifer pride; with its knee bob skirts, armholes dresses, ventilated necks, and bobby socks or no socks at all, and shoes with their toes out and no heels. I can remember when ladies just would not appear in public with -- their toes out, and with bare limbs, and now it is common stuff, even in holiness churches. Well they say, we can just get used to any thing, yes even just old-fashioned sin, if it is the style. Some one has said, "It is not pride, when one wants to look nice." Yes; it is pride only, that make one want to follow the fashions, no matter how ridiculous they are.

It seems some folk would rather be out of the world (dead) than to be out of style. I would rather be in the will of God, than to be either. I have often thought how much alike are the style feinds to the window models: They just wear whatever the stylists suggest, and think they are properly dressed. But remember God and the stylist, do not agree on this subject of the dress question. The physician says, "Watch your weight, and reduce." The stylist says, Watch your appearance, and reduce. Style does not require so much clothes, your body needs more air and sunshine. Not all, thank God, but all too many have listened to the voice of Hollywood and Paris, have reduced to the irreducible minimum, looking back like Mrs. Lot; Yes, not only looking back, but going back to their Big Sister Eve to copy her style, after she had backslidden, and who could satisfy herself with a few fig leaves pinned together to make a girdle.

This pinup dress of mother Eve was her own designing after she had backslidden and would compare favorably with the pinup style of today. When God got to her, He quickly slew an animal and taking its skin hurriedly wrapped Mother Eve up in it, and said to her, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" The man was the first to speak, and takes no responsibility; that is what the man of today would say. "If I would say anything about how my wife dressers, she would leave me." The poor parson says, "If I would preach against it, they would just leave the church, and we just cannot afford that." Mother Eve must square herself, for she was very much aware that her style did not meet God's approval: So she laid the whole matter at old Satan's door. I would to God our women would follow Mother Eve's last example as obediently as they have her first; and say, Yes, I know that my skirts. and sleeves, and necks, expose too much of my person, and although I am past the meridian of life, and no longer a young girl, I am wearing the same style hat and having the same hairdo that my young daughter wears. This is the fruit of the backslider in heart, and being filled with your ways. God said, women should dress in modest apparel, which becometh women professing godliness. I Tim. 2:9. What does modest mean; let's see. Read Rev. 3:18. "I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." You say, that it is all you have, and you have no money to buy more. Well, Jesus told the young rich ruler to sell what he had. Why don't you do that, and. get some clothes that God

can approve of. Well you say that it was old Satan that got me in this mess. Yes, no doubt he had something to do with it; but I would suggest to you to examine your proud heart, and my guess is, that you will find that it is backslidden and full of old carnal pride; and that you have been warming yourself with painted fire, and that the heart is a cage of unclean birds.

But there is another group who are clean, but empty. There is a crowd that would have none of this stuff, and, like Brother Peter with his two edge sword, cut the ears off that other liberal crowd, every opportunity they get. They are narrow, harsh, and critical: full of debate and argument; but at the same time so strict and clean of any worldliness and so much like the real, outwardly, that like the wheat and the tares, it takes time. Jesus said, "Let them both grow together until the harvest," and I will send my angels to gather them and separate them. They wanted to go out and pull them up, but Jesus said you will pull up good wheat. A very close imitation, when it requires the services of angels to do the job. The five foolish virgins live right with the wise in the same church, with a depleted experience and not ready for the coming of the Lord. And if the wise virgins knew it, there is no mention made of it. It took the cry of the crier at midnight announcing the coming of the bridegroom to awaken them.

The warning of the Bible is, Watch your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Prov. 4:23. Again, "He that thinketh that he standeth, take heed lest he fall." I Cor. 10:12. Also II Pet. 1:10.

Wherefore the rather brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things (spoken verses 1 to 9) ye shall never fall. Finis.

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