

The Indications and the Guilt of Backsliding

by Charles Finney

A lukewarm state is a most guilty and hypocritical state, characterized by a lack of zealous love, spiritual zeal, and concern for the interests of spiritual religion.

Scripture: Revelation 3:15

Topics: "Backsliding", "Spiritual Zeal"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the issue of backsliding in the church, particularly focusing on the lukewarm state of the Laodiceans. He emphasizes that this condition is characterized by a lack of zeal for God, neglect of prayer and scripture, and a hypocritical profession of faith. Finney warns that such a state is not only guilty but also injurious to both the individual and the church, leading to spiritual apathy and the hardening of hearts. He calls for repentance and a return to fervent faith, reminding listeners of Christ's warning to the lukewarm: 'I will spew thee out of my mouth.' The sermon serves as a wake-up call for believers to examine their spiritual lives and rekindle their passion for God.

Transcript

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue [sic.] thee out of my mouth: Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.["] Revelations 3:14-20.

This is one of the Asiatic churches to which Christ sent letters by his amanuensis John. This church had not been long established, yet had even so soon begun to backslide; hence this letter of rebuke and warning.

In discussing this subject I propose,

I. To show what lukewarmness is;

II. To present some unmistakable indications of this state of mind;

III. Show that it is a most guilty state;

IV. Show that its folly is no less great than its sin; and

V. Explain the threatening--" I will spew thee out of my mouth."

I. The persons addressed were professors of religion. In this sense they were not cold;--as men who make no professions of attachment to Christ. Yet though professing much, they had none of that zealous love which belongs to the true Christian life. Indeed they were neither the one thing, nor the other;--were not what Christians should be, nor were they avowed enemies, as open transgressors are. Not as cold as they might be, and not as warm as they should be--they held a position if possible more loathsome than even the cold and the dead.

II. I am to present some indications of this state. In doing this, I shall naturally give a more definite view of what the state is.

1. A profession of religion with a worldly conversation. Christ said no new thing when he said--"But out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." Everybody knew this before. Everybody must know it. The tongue was made to give utterance to the heart's abundance. Hence that which abounds in a man's heart and fills it will seek utterance in the natural channel. Let the heart be full of the things of God, and the mouth will reveal it. When the heart is full of the world, does not the mouth show it? No matter what the particular form of worldly interest may be, whether stocks, or lands, or trade, or office, or honor, the tongue is not wont to be slow in revealing the abundance of the heart. Why should not the same law obtain in regard to a heart full of religious interest and love?

2. Neglect of the Bible. This is emphatically the Christian's Book. He will have one if he can, and having it, will read and study it. Religion presupposes a supreme interest in the Bible. Hence, when the Bible is neglected, you may be sure religion is not much in the heart. To the Christian the Bible does not wear out as other books do. It suffices to read most other books once. You get all they have at one reading, and can then recall whatever you want to reflect upon and use further. Not so with the Bible. No man ever exhausted that at one reading. To the Christian it is a well of water. He does not drain it dry at one draught; in fact he never drinks it dry; nor does it suffice for his wants to drink but once. His wants recur continually, and therefore he comes, and still comes again to draw. It is his daily business to draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Or still to vary the figure, the Bible is his compass, chart and guide: how then can he think to make the voyage of life heaven-ward without keeping this roll in his bosom? Hence, if he neglects his Bible, it must be regarded as an unmistakable evidence of a heart not full of religion.

3. When he can read his Bible without interest--when he goes to it as a task, and has no conscious sympathy with its spirit and no love for its principles, he is surely lukewarm. See that professor doing up his Bible reading as the Catholic tells his beads, in a hurry to get through and be off. Is his heart full of religion?

4. Neglect of secret prayer. What would you think of a wife who should shun, or should even neglect to seek and improve all opportunities of the society of her husband? Or of a husband who should neglect the society of his wife? In either case, do you think such neglect could be consistent with pure and strong

affection? Suppose you were yourself the party neglected; what would you think of professions of love, carried out by such manifestations?

Ask yourself--what is secret prayer? It is the earnest outpouring of the heart to God. Alone with God you enter into deep and unobstructed communion with him. If you love God, you will surely love and seek such communion. If you are debarred the possibility of retirement, still your inward heart will pray. Its inner chamber will become a closet and an altar from which the continual incense will ascend to God. The professed Christian who can neglect such communion with God may know that he is far from warm and earnest love to God.

Or if not altogether omitting the form, he yet does it as a mere duty and a task, in which his heart takes no interest, he may equally know that his first love is gone. If prayer has become a burden, surely his heart lacks warm and earnest love. Do you remember the days of your first love? Where were you then? Not dreading and trying to avoid prayer.

Again, if prayer meetings fail and die out, it is a startling evidence that the church is in a lukewarm state. When Christians can live in the same neighborhood, under the same responsibilities, and yet sustain no meetings for social prayer, you may know they have but little of the life and power of godliness. Surely I need not say that when prayer meetings have fallen into decay, religion has fallen fearfully low. Hearts in which religion lives will make prayer meetings. If they take no interest in seeking and getting up such meetings, they are fearfully lukewarm.

5. Christians are lukewarm when they do not naturally care for the salvation of souls. When they feel and express more interest for anything else than for the souls of their friends, you cannot but know they are lukewarm towards Christ. Suppose these room-mates take less interest in each other's souls than in the health and welfare of the body; or suppose a teacher feels less interest for the souls of his class than for their progress in study, what must you think? Or of a parent who never speaks of the souls of his children? In short, if it be natural to neglect the soul, you know the cause. Who does not know that the love of God and of souls forbids this neglect and this unconcern? If religion lives in the heart it is impossible there should be such neglect of souls.

Again, neglect to inquire into the state of religion, reveals the same state of heart. He who never inquires whether there be any revivals, or conversions--who is not interested to know how these matters progress--is certainly lukewarm. If his heart is full of Christ, this will be his theme of chief interest. He will not inquire half so quick whether they have had rain as whether they have God's Spirit. He naturally wants to know whether the cause he loves is prosperous. You may know the man is lukewarm if his heart does not burn to know how religion prospers, and whether souls are turning to the Lord.

In like manner, persons are proved to be lukewarm if they neglect to pray for a revival and for the salvation of souls. Or if when they pray, it is for themselves only, you must make the same inference. If they do not pour out their hearts for others, but confine their supplications to themselves alone, you may know them to be lukewarm.

More still, if they pray for themselves in a manner that indicates present impenitence. Sometimes even professors of religion plainly indicate this. If they confess sin, their manner shows they do not repent of it, nor mean to forsake it. Sometimes they merely pray for conviction, or for that which if genuine would be mere conversion. Often after hearing persons pray for a season, I have had occasion to say to them--"If your prayer is answered, you will be converted. That is all you prayed for. Is that what you mean? Your

prayer calls for just that, and no more. Instead of praying as inspired men do, pouring out the heart of praying for the Zion they love, you are only praying that you become a Christian." Of course I do not allude to the case in which a Christian is speaking in behalf of others, using words in which they may join. In such a case, he will use language which calls for convicting and converting grace. Excepting such cases, you will often notice in prayer meetings that the very manner of their prayers and confessions shows that they are far from God. The very tone and laziness of their prayer shows how lukewarm they are.

You have another indication in the absence of a spiritual zeal. If you see no zeal for spiritual religion, no deep interest for the progress of Christian experience, no solicitude for that which constitutes the substance and essence of religion, none of that wakeful spiritual sympathy which seems ready to devour truly spiritual conversation--a state of feeling that naturally looks to the Bible for its spiritual food, which loves to talk about prayer and communion with God;--if these things are wanting, you may know that genuine piety runs low. Those professors are lukewarm.

Again, it is no less an indication when there is other zeal, but not a spiritual zeal. Some professed Christians have much zeal for objects in common with infidels, but none for objects in which infidels have no sympathy. It is a zeal of nature, not of grace. Often you observe there is no lack of zeal, but all in other than a right direction. It is the great peculiarity of our age that ungodly men are zealous in certain social reforms. Many of our most zealous reformers are professedly impenitent. Their zeal is such as one may have without any interest in the true spiritual life of the soul. In fact, there is often no God at all in it. He has no proper recognition of God and no sympathy with his pure benevolence.

It is remarkable that this zeal manifests itself only against certain forms of sin. By how much the more these reformers become zealous in their special reforms, do they lose their interest in religion, their confidence in the Bible, their charity for mankind and for Christian people, their interest in the conversion of souls and in revivals of religion. They have the greatest zeal against certain forms of sin, but against those forms only. They have no zeal against commercial speculation, none against a worldly spirit, nothing to say against neglect of prayer or neglect to save the souls of men. They have no zeal against those terrible forms of sin which have done more mischief in the world than all things else combined. Nothing else that can be named has done so much mischief in the world as lukewarmness. This single sin has done more to curse the world than all the slavery and intemperance of the world ever have. But I cannot pursue this subject just here, it being my present purpose only to show you how to discriminate the lukewarm. I was saying, they may have a zeal of nature originating in natural constitution, instead of a zeal of the heart, originating in divine grace. It shows nature active, but grace dead.

Yet another indication of lukewarmness is, being blind to the true spiritual state of themselves and others. A deep interest in spiritual life makes persons sharp, eagle-eyed, wide awake to both a spiritual state and to those influences that bear upon it. Such persons cannot be indifferent, and of course will not be blind to any powerful agencies which bear on the great ends they love.

But this involves my next remark, viz., that a most decisive indication is a want of concern about the interests of spiritual religion. If they can be remiss and can neglect to make efforts to promote religion and save souls, you may know them to be lukewarm. If this is your own conscious experience, you may know that you are yourself lukewarm.

I wish I had asked you at every point to question yourself and see how each test applies to your own heart and life. You can do this now. Pause and review this entire list of unmistakable indications and see how

they apply to your own soul. This is the chief use you can make of these texts -- not to search other people, but to search yourself. I beseech you to do this in all fidelity to your own soul as you value its spiritual health and even life.

Yet another indication is, reluctance to give money for Christ's cause. Men give their money to the objects their hearts love. When you are called on to give for Christ's cause freely, do you meet the call cheerfully?

Again, every one who has any true religion alive in his heart is in an earnest state of mind. God is in earnest; the great depth and intenseness of his benevolence forbid anything less than this. Angels are in earnest. See them wherever you will in the sacred volume, they are full of the most intense activity and emotion. Saints in heaven are intensely wakeful and active. What did Isaiah see when the upper temple was opened to his astonished vision? Were those holy seraphs asleep? Mark their intense excitement. They cried one to another, "Holy, holy, HOLY, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The very nature of religion is love, and love arouses and fires the sensibilities as nothing else can do. Its objects are so vast, its scope so broad, its emotional excitement so pure and so intensely delightful, it has in itself all the qualities requisite for becoming naturally more intense than any other class of emotions can be. Hence the zeal of the Christian must be an intense state of mind. But the zeal of lukewarm souls would freeze heaven. Mark it--as cold as the north pole; one would suppose it could never have felt the warmth of the sun of righteousness.

Now I do not imply that religion consists in excitement, yet such is its blessed nature, and such is the hold it takes upon the soul, that it stirs up the sensibility intensely, and this intense action of the sensibility imparts amazing energy to all the powers of the mind. Hence religion makes everybody intensely active. Mark one of these living Christians,--his very sleep is so full of religion, he seems to sleep on the very borders of wakefulness; he can scarcely find time for needful repose. His mind is supremely interested in this subject. When you hear him talk or pray, you will see that his soul is full of intense feeling and tireless activity in God's work. Can he be full of the Spirit and yet not be intensely alive to all that concerns the kingdom of his Lord?

If you see one more easily interested on other subjects than on religion, -- if you find it almost impossible to awaken any interest in spiritual things, you may regard it as an unmistakable indication of lukewarmness.

Where persons do not care to learn about revivals, you must note it as indicating a similar lack of religious life. If they are full of the Spirit of God, you might see them take up a religious paper and run their eye over it for the word "Revival;" omitting everything else, they would look first for the column of revival news, and then for whatever else is most spiritual and tends to bring them nearest to Christ. If you see the opposite of this, you will of course know that that man's interests in religion is only subordinate--not supreme. Suppose you had a brother or a child in California;--how would you watch the steamers, and how anxiously you would run your eye over the list of deaths, and see if the loved name is there! But why this anxious eagerness? You have an interest there. So, if you had an interest in God and in Jesus Christ, you would watch for everything in respect to those objects of your warmest love.

There are some papers, professedly religious, which show on their very face, either that the men who control their columns are sadly lukewarm themselves, or that they judge the churches to be so, and therefore fill their sheet to suit a fallen, backslidden state of Christian feeling among their readers. For months past I have taken up a religious paper, and read at the head of its first column--"Swiss

Scenery"--"Scenes in Switzerland" --&c., &c. The soul that thirsts for the waters of life is turned off with "Swiss Scenery," and travels, and things that come no nearer the gospel than the religion of nature. I will send that paper back. Why should I try over and over again to feed my soul on such food? And what a state of religion there must be in the country when editors can expect to feed and satisfy Christian people thus! How utterly dry and barren! If the religious readers of such papers depended on them for spiritual food, they must be starved to death!

Again, if people do not kindle up with interest when efforts are to be made for a revival, you must regard it as an unmistakable indication of lukewarmness. If you are not ready for these efforts, you are certainly in a miserable state.

Now in view of all these indications, will you be so kind to yourself, each of you, as to ask--Is this my state? Can you go on your knees before God and say--O, my God, thou knowest I am not lukewarm. How is this?

I have still to name one more indication--a life which fails to make the impression on all who see it that religion is your chief business--the one thing needful. For if religion is your chief concern and the thing of deepest interest with you, it is most certain and inevitable that your life will show it. Your life will make the impression on all who know you, that your heart is full of God and of love. The true Christian is a light which cannot be hid. His life will make its impression. He will be known as a zealous man, a self-denying man, as a charitable man, as a holy man--as one who lives in God and God in him.

But I must pass now to say,

III. That a lukewarm state is a most guilty one. As a general thing, these professors of religion are enlightened. The fact that they have publicly professed religion evinces this. By how much the greater their light, by how much the greater their guilt.

It is also a most hypocritical state. Backsliders are hypocrites. I do not mean that they have never been converted, but I do mean that they profess towards God what is not true. Their heart and their life belie their profession. They are living, walking hypocrites!

It is, moreover, a perjured state. That Christian has taken his oath to love and serve God, and has done it under most solemn circumstances--even at the communion table with the symbols of Christ's body and blood in his very hands! What has he sworn? To live for God; to observe all his statutes and all his ordinances; often the very terms of his covenant specify attending to all the general meetings of the church, and performing each and all of his duties as a member of the body.

Thus he solemnly swears--but thus he never does. At each successive communion season he renews his oath, only to break it again during all the next succeeding interval. He solemnly swore that he would renounce all ungodliness and every worldly lust--that he would walk soberly, righteously and godly in this evil world;--yet how constantly and universally does he violate each point in the solemn affirmation! Do I speak too strongly when I say that this man perjures himself? I am well aware of the technical distinction made in courts of law whereby it is held that there may be much falsehood without perjury--it being essential to perjury that the accused should deliberately swear falsely on a point material to the issue.

But let me ask you if the oath of the backslider is not taken deliberately? What could be more so? Let me also ask if it is not to a point most material to the main issue? Surely it is. The very thing he swore he

would do is the very thing he does not do. How horrible must such perjury be! Suppose you go into court and you see there a witness taking the stand and swearing to a lie--to what you know is a lie--and to what you know he knows is a lie! Would you not cry out, How awful!--What have we come to!

But what is this compared with that we see at the communion table? See there;--the table is spread, God's holy presence is solemnly invoked--the minister takes the holy Bible, and expounds the nature of the oath to be taken;--then backsliders come forward and solemnly swear to perform all their Christian duties;--solemnly avow their allegiance to Jesus, the crucified--profess supreme love to him, solemnly testify that they believe in his blood as the ground of their forgiveness and that they owe him the devotion [of] a thousand hearts and lives;--they solemnly covenant to walk with their brethren in labor and prayer--to attend the prayer-meetings;--but when the hour comes, he is not there!

Another season comes round; he is not there! He almost never comes. It is a very rare thing that he even pretends to do any one of the many overt tangible things embraced in his vow. He does indeed come to meeting occasionally on the Sabbath. But this costs him no particular self-denial. On the Sabbath there is nothing else he can do. He may not work his farm, or drive his trade, or open his store. So on the Sabbath he will come to the house of God. But really, and in the spirit of it, he breaks every material point of his solemn covenant. At the next communion he is ready as ever to renew it; the communion season once past, he is ready to trample it under his heedless foot again! Is not this a most guilty state?

Still further, it is guilty because it is a most injurious state. It does infinite mischief. Nothing so discourages a minister as to be shut up to the necessity of reaching the impenitent over the heads of backsliders. He preaches that religion is the chief concern; they deny it. He says, it is and should be the principal business; they give him the lie. He says, religion gives its possessor peace; they reply--that is all a lie. He holds forth that Jesus has died for sinners, and those who are bought with his blood must devote their whole life and heart to his service; they reply--we don't hold, in practice, to any such things. He preaches to sinners that the hearts of Christians are bleeding with sympathy for them; they can very promptly say--that is utterly false, for we know better. Let the minister say what he will to paint the glories of heaven, or portray the woes of hell; to urge the need and the value of gospel salvation, or to exhibit the power and the reality of religion;--the backslider rises before him and gives the lie to all he can say. Alas, it is almost a hopeless task to preach so! For to make the matter still worse--these professed Christians are supposed to know from experience. They have tried it and have gone back to the world again. The minister may have a good theory, but it don't [sic.] work in practice, and there is the proof. Or he may have some professional motive for such preaching; but, say they, do we not know that the proof of these things must lie in experience!

Hence, when backsliders come upon the stand and swear that not one word of God's can be believed--that all his promises are a humbug--that all the time prospects and hopes of the young convert are blasted, and he must needs return to the world again for life and joy; how fearfully injurious must this be!

It must be most injurious, because it hardens sinners in the worst way, and begets in them a contempt for religion. They see those who profess it go to the communion table and carefully maintain the forms of religion; but then they also see these same persons perjure themselves on all these vital points of their profession. They know that these professors have no deep interest in religion--no feeling about it; they see enough to convince them that their profession is nothing better than a blasphemous humbug. When they see masses of those who have made the solemn professions, absenting themselves from prayer-meetings, and really doing nothing to promote the objects they profess to love so deeply, is it any

wonder that they are hardened? Is it strange that they are made skeptics? I know, and everybody who examines the subject must know, that the backsliding of professed Christians does more to beget skepticism than all the writings of infidels. I have seen places--I have been called to preach in places, where the conduct of professors has begotten an almost universal skepticism, so that the very foundations of Bible truth had to be laid over again. Nothing could be done in preaching the gospel till you had gone back to first principles; till you had rolled aside the baleful influence of so much backsliding and apostasy, and shown people that they must examine the Bible for themselves and on their own responsibility--let apostates belie it as they might.

Backsliding does more injury to souls than any thing else, because it leads to false hopes. Men will form their notions on what religion is from the life of his professors. If this life belies religion, giving a false view of it, multitudes are deluded. Thus the backslider does much to confirm both himself and others in a false hope. Suppose a pastor becomes lukewarm, and that then his deacons also become lukewarm, their life and spirit still remain the general standard of piety. The masses, thinking themselves as good as the deacons and the minister, feel very much at ease in their state, and so go down in vast numbers to the depths of hell.

It is expected that young converts will be led by older and leading minds. The latter virtually say--We are older and have more experience than you; it befits you to follow rather than to lead us; modesty and humility are altogether becoming in the young. Thus backsliders throw themselves directly in the way of young converts. Twice within a few years have I heard ministers say--"O, if I could only take these young converts away by themselves, how easily could I train them up for God and form in them habits of earnest Christian activity. But now, what can I do? If the older, backslidden members are not kept foremost, they will become chafed, restive, and perhaps will wound the feelings of the young converts; while if the converts are kept back and under their influence, they will be frozen to death. If we could only take these young converts along as they now wish to go, what a noble church they would make, and what living, working Christians?"

Again, backsliding is fraught with mischief because it bewilders and stumbles inquirers. When they see professed Christians absent from church-meetings, and meetings for prayer, full of worldly interest and conversation, how fearfully does it retard God's work of grace in their souls!

Backsliding is fraught with guilt and unbelief because it naturally and greatly disheartens laboring Christians. Nothing discourages them more. Often have I heard such laborers mourn over the mischievous influence of backsliders, and say--How can we bear up against it? We cannot live so! We shall die!

Backsliding grieves Christ. What could grieve him more? You may judge of his feelings by the language he uses towards them--"I would thou wert cold or hot; because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Nauseated with a thing so loathsome, he will throw them off with unutterable loathing!

It gratifies the devil. What could they do to please him more! He would rather have a few backsliders in a church than scores of infidels and universalists! What can infidelity do in the midst of a living Christianity? If his people lived religion, the minister would never need to open his mouth to defend the divine authority of the Bible. If there were a living, breathing, speaking Christianity abroad among the people, they would not need one word of preaching to withstand infidelity. Yet how common it is for a lukewarm professor to

rebuke and deplore the prevalent infidelity of the times; when it is a fact that all the infidels of his town do not work so fearful an influence against religion as he and his associate backsliders!

The Bible describes this class of people in most affecting and forceful terms. They are "clouds without water," clouds indeed--things that promise water and raise high hopes; but they bring no rain. We have had striking illustrations of this during the past weeks. Clouds have arisen upon the face of the sky--full of promise they were, and every man looked hopefully, perhaps confidently, to see them roll up their dark volume and pour out their crystal floods; but alas, the winds are up and tear the clouds to pieces; and we get not one drop of rain! So of the religion of these backsliders. At the communion table they renew their solemn oath; they seem to do it in all solemnity, and people say--now we may surely expect a religious life; now we shall have prayer and zeal and faith and labor;--but alas, the wind gets into that hopeful cloud! The spirit of worldliness is still there, and it scatters those hopeful clouds to the four quarters of the heavens! They are clouds without rain, carried to and fro by tempests.

Still varying the figure, the Bible describes them as "wells without water." We can begin to understand this. At every corner you hear the complaint, "My well is dry; my cistern has failed me; can you give me a pitcher full of water?" So in the backslidden church you might take your empty pitcher all around for a few drops of the water of life, and alas you find none!

How impressive these Bible figures! The Bible was written in a country subject to great and fearful droughts; and hence when we come to experience similar droughts we are thrown at once into circumstances to feel the force of those figures. Suppose yourself in an eastern desert; the whole caravan are famishing for want of water; they come to the wells of the country--no water there; after long marches and many raised hopes, they reach the spot--only to be once more disappointed. Alas, when the troubled sinner goes round among backslidden Christians, holding forth his empty pitcher for some precious drops of the water of life--and finds none, he understands the force of this figure!

Backsliders betray Christ with a kiss. Following Judas, they come to his table with fair promise,--they go away to blast those raised hopes in bitterest disappointment.

Look at Judas. He had been at the communion table; the solemn Passover had been enacted; he rises hastily--slips away to the Jewish officers,--gets a band of soldiers, and guides them stealthily to the place where he knew Jesus was wont to retire for prayer. See him coming! His men fall back and he advances; as if glad to welcome his Lord again, he rushes up to embrace him crying, "Hail Master," and kisses him. Jesus rebukes the traitor--"Judas," said he, "betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" So does each backslider. He comes to the communion table to greet his Lord with a kiss; then turns away to betray him!

By another Scripture comparison, they are "wolves in sheep's clothing;"--clad like a sheep, but really a wolf. They look so fair, no one fears them; the ewes will almost invite them to lie down among their tender lambs--but how long before he has those tender ones in his bloody jaws!

There is yet another illustration, not from scripture, yet too pertinent to be omitted. Along the coast it is common for reefs of rocks to project into the sea. To lessen the dangers to the navigator, especially in storms, light-houses are erected to indicate the harbors which vessels may safely make in a storm. Now there are human beings so lost to humanity and so full of Satan, that they build fires on a stormy night to allure vessels upon those dreadful rocks, that they may revel in the plunder! The fog is dense, the spray thick, the night dark and the mariner cannot distinguish these lure-fires from the genuine light-house; so on he comes, bearing down upon those roaring breakers! The wreckers are on the look-out; they see the

lights of the vessel as she bounds over the billows; they hear the last fearful crash as she strikes, and as the wails and shrieks rise above the roar of the storm--but they are ready for their work. What is it to them that human beings are dashed upon the rocks of ocean! They want plunder--at any cost!

Backsliders are spiritual wreckers. They set mountain fires for the mariner. They say--We are spiritual guides; we will lead you in the way of life. See them in all the solemnity of an oath, professing to live and labor as Christians, and to lead the multitudes to God!--Whither do they in fact lead them? See the man come up to the communion table in presence of the ungodly. Hear him; he says, "I am a Christian; mark my Christianity and take it as your model. I am in the way to heaven; follow me." They follow till he has lured them along and dashed them on the rocks of damnation! Let him not say--"I ask no man to follow me; I can take no responsibility for their being misguided;"--the fact is, his very profession does the mischief; his very profession proclaims--"This is a Christian life, and whoever will follow me shall reach heaven." So he need do nothing more than be a Christian backslider, and he becomes a spiritual wrecker, luring souls upon the rocks of spiritual death.

But again; backsliding is great folly as well as great guilt. The backslider gains nothing. His life is utterly inconsistent, odious, loathsome; indeed the Bible describes it as insupportably odious and disgusting. Christ says--"I will spew thee out of my mouth." He cannot hear them, and will quick relieve himself of the dreadful nausea! Some of you know what it is to drink tepid water to produce nausea and vomiting, and you can appreciate the force of this figure of speech.

What is there more loathsome than fair professions and a false life? I have suffered but too much from this very thing myself. Many a man begins with saying I am Mr. Finney's friend; I esteem Mr. Finney highly;--but--but--I cannot approve his measures--I cannot endorse his course." So having begun with gaining public confidence, they end by using it all to injure me and my usefulness in the worst possible way. They come up to salute with a kiss--and then give the fatal stab! This is the surest way to do mischief. This is the backslider's course. He says--See how I love the dear Savior! Then he goes his way and lives out the utmost dishonor against his name. Some writer has said -- "Protect me from my friends; I can withstand my enemies myself." No wonder Christ should feel so, as to his backslidden people.

REMARKS.

This course is a most deceptive, because a most hardening process. You may take any number of infidels or universalists, people of most irreligious, prayerless character, place them under the same preaching and the same influences for conversion with an equal number of backsliders, and nine of the former will be converted to one of the latter. Where did infidels or universalists ever resist faithful instruction and warning, as backsliders have done in this congregation? The reason is, backsliders deceive themselves to their fearful hardening and sudden destruction. Hear what Christ said to the Laodiceans --"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent." His fearful threatening was--"I will spew thee out of my mouth." So he did. He warned; they repented not; and now their candlestick is removed from its place. For long ages past, the Mussulman has muttered his blasphemies on the very spot where those churches stood. Yet who heeds the warning!

2. The absence of religious zeal is scarcely considered a sin. If you speak to people about their great sin, they look up in surprise and say--what! whom have I cheated? Whom have I overreached or slandered? They will tell you of David's great sin, of the awful dishonor which he brought upon God. True, David's sin was a horrible affair; doubtless his heart felt it most deeply; but he did not begin to dishonor God as the

backsliders of our day are doing it. He was in the main a good man, and a laborious and useful Christian; and all the nation knew it. The closing scene of that sad transaction shows it. A humble prophet could come to the lofty monarch of Israel and pierce him through and through with the arrows of convicting truth, and even be received gratefully. His repentance and future life told the story. From his smitten heart flowed strains of sorrowing penitence and holy resolve all along down the history of the church to this day! Reproach him for dishonoring Christianity? His case is not to be named in comparison with modern backsliders.

3. It is most remarkable that churches now tolerate backsliders, while Christ spewed them out of his mouth. Angels know them as outcasts, and pass them by; but the church retains them, and allows them still to come to her holy table with mummeries and lies. They go on, swearing falsely, full of levity and worldly mindedness. Do you think this is saying too much against them? The very thought shows where you are.

4. "Whom I love, says Christ, I rebuke;" "Behold, he says, I stand at the door and knock"--ready to enter and to bless. I come even to your house and to your heart; if you will but hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and all the past shall be forgiven and forgotten. We shall be friends again as ever, and you shall have all the precious tokens of my love.

Who of you stand here to-day convicted of backsliding and lukewarmness--having these indications manifest in your spirit and life--saying, My peace of mind is gone; I have lost my light, lost my way. And are you willing to acknowledge it? Will you confess it to yourself--and confess it also before earth and heaven? Many know they are in a lukewarm state, yet would as soon die as confess it. Are you convinced of your sin in this matter? Then "be zealous and repent." Nothing short of earnest zeal to repent will suffice. Shrink not back in cold unbelief. Hear the tender appeal--"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-indications-and-the-guilt-of-backsliding/>

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