

Backsliding



"I will heal their backsliding, I will
love them freely: for mine anger
is turned away from him."

Hosea 14:4

Backsliding is a condition when a believer drifts away from the living God and falls back into his old ways. The Bible warns us saying: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Heb. 3:12-14) and "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:35-39). Jesus said: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Backsliding is no happy condition. When David fell into sin, he also fell into misery. David's unconfessed sin caused him much distress. In the 32nd Psalm, he says: "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4). And in the 51st Psalm, he says: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.... Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness" (Psalm 51:7-14).

No believer should presume that he is strong enough and is exempt from backsliding. David, who was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), committed murder and adultery. Peter

denied Christ three times, not long after saying: "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matt. 26:35). The Bible warns us saying: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Backsliding usually follows the neglect of prayer, Bible reading, fellowship with believers, watchfulness, and walking with God. David was prone to falling when he remained idle in Jerusalem during a "time when Kings go out to battle" (2 Sam. 11:1). He fell into temptation one evening as he arose from his bed and walked on the roof of his house. He saw Bathsheba bathing and went and took her (2 Sam. 11:2-4). Christ came to Peter in the garden shortly before he would deny Him and said: "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:37-38).

Our great defense against backsliding is prayer, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray saying: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13). David prayed saying: "Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:12-14). The Psalmist said: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:9-11). The Holy Spirit is very active in our sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). The Bible says: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-25).

Though we are saved and justified after believing in the Lord Jesus yet the old nature and the old man still remains in us until "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). We are to mortify our sins and put off the old man. The Bible says: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:5-10). Jesus said: If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more

profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30). We are not to "continue in sin" (Rom. 6:1) but to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). The Bible says: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6:12-13).

Christ is our great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses for He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15) and "for in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Christ can deliver us from the bondage of sin. He said: "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:34-36).

God promises to forgive us if we but return to Him. He says: "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Return to Me," says the Lord of hosts, "and I will return to you." says the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 1:3) and "Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up" (Hosea 6:1). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God says: "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners." (Isaiah 57:15-18) and "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4). If you have backslidden my dear reader, don't hesitate to return to the Lord for He is willing and more than willing to receive you. Remember how the Father of the prodigal son was willing to receive and forgive his son and how much more is God willing to forgive us, His dear children when we return to Him with "a broken and a contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). Jesus said: "Him that cometh to Me I will in wise cast out" (John 6:37). So "return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:13).

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above*

Peter Sarkis

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