

Backslider

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[0 : 00] You will find my text this evening in the book of Proverbs chapter 14 and at verse 14. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Among the most miserable people on earth this evening are backsliders. Those who are true Christians, children of God, born again of the Spirit of God, but who have gone into open sin.

When I was a very young Christian I used to think that there were certain sins that a Christian just could not commit. A person could not be a Christian and do those things.

But that is emphatically not so. There is no sin apart from complete apostasy itself which a Christian cannot commit.

Such is the power of indwelling corruption within the Christian that unless he practices constant vigilance he will begin to slide backwards and that slide downhill will gather momentum.

[1 : 40] The classic example of this of course in scripture is King David. He stands out as a warning to us of this great danger.

There was David, a man after God's own heart. The man who wrote those magnificent psalms that breathed the very essence of true devotion to God.

And he lapsed terribly into adultery and even into murder itself. Yet I want to say this. That I believe that the true Christian, however far he goes in his backsliding, will eventually return to faithfulness to the Lord his God.

A person, a Christian, does not go from wholehearted faithfulness to God to open backsliding in one leap.

He is first of all a backslider in heart, as our text this evening puts it. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

[3 : 09] I want to notice with you first of all what it means to be a backslider in heart. What it means to be a backslider in heart.

The term heart in scripture, as I've said several times recently, means the centre, the core, the centre of the personality.

We are so accustomed nowadays to think of the heart as the seat of the emotions. But in scripture it means far more. It is a seat not just of the emotions, but of the intellect and of the will as well.

It has to do with our thinking and with our feeling and with our conduct. All backsliding begins in the heart.

For a long time, perhaps for a very long time, it is hidden from others. The church knows nothing about the fact that that member may be backsliding.

[4 : 22] For a time, even the person himself may know, may not be aware of the fact that he is sliding backwards. But, if a person is not making progress in the Christian life, he is going backwards.

This process, this declension, this sliding back is at work. If he is not making progress, then he is going back.

In the Christian life, there is no standing still. The cause of backsliding in heart is always a diminishing of one's love for Christ.

The early fervor of one's devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ is lost. Remember how it was with Peter.

He followed the Lord, we read, afar off, at a distance, before ever he came to that shameful, open denial of his master.

[5 : 35] This was the complaint that the Lord Jesus Christ had of the Christians in the church at Ephesus. I have somewhat against you, he said to them, that you have left your first love.

Recall, my Christian friends, the fervor and the devotion and the zeal of your early days as a Christian. Isn't it true that there was nothing you wouldn't do for your master then?

In your zeal, no doubt you made many mistakes. You acted unwisely at times, but you did it all out of zeal and fervor and devotion for the Christ who had saved you.

As it to be said of you tonight, as it was said of the people of Ephraim in the book of Hosea, that strangers have devoured your strength and you know it not.

That there is grey hair, there are grey hairs here and there, and you know it not. What are those other loves?

[6 : 42] Those strangers that enter in and that cause a diminishing in the Christian's love for Christ. There is first of all love for the world.

Love for the world. And is there any danger as great as that for the Christians? We Christians must realise that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

That is the plain teaching of scripture. This whole world, the Bible tells us, lieth in the evil one. Satan is the prince of the world.

Worldliness is the greatest enemy of your soul, my Christian friend. The standards of the world, the values and the attitudes and the ways of the world are the enemies of a healthy spiritual life.

If your life and attitude are being moulded by the godless world around, and by what is so often portrayed on many television programmes, then you cannot but become a worldly Christian.

[8 : 03] Indeed, there are legitimate things. A concern for one's business, or for one's profession, or for one's recreations.

Legitimate things in themselves that can sap one's spiritual vitality if they have a place in the heart that should be reserved for God alone.

If attention is devoted, time and attention are devoted to them, that should be given to God alone. Then too we have to say this, that sometimes love of others, creature love, can supplant in the Christian heart the love of Christ, love that should be given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now God, in his goodness and in his kindness and in his love, gives to us the love of others, and love for others. Love is of God.

But we love others best when we love God, when we love Christ, most of all. The Christian who puts love for another before love for Christ, who puts another person before Christ in his affections, is doing a disservice not only to Christ himself, not only to himself indeed, but also to the person whom he loves so dearly.

[9 : 37] For if our love for Christ is first, if we love him most of all, then our other loves will be sanctified and hallowed and intensified.

And God will use us as a vehicle of blessing to those whom we love. If our love for him is first, he will bind us to those whom we love in this world with yet stronger ties.

And then also, there is the love of sin. Another love, another stranger that enters in and devours our strength.

The love of sin. Love for sin always diminishes. Love for Christ. Love of sin, sin, unmortified and indulged in the heart, inevitably draws that heart away from the Lord Jesus Christ and from love for him.

It inevitably leads to backsliding. The true Christian who is being faithful to his Lord will vigorously, in the power of the Holy Spirit, mortify, sin in his heart and strive after righteousness.

[10 : 59] My Christian friend, I beg of you tonight, examine yourself. Are you backsliding in heart?

I must examine myself too. How is it that such backsliding in heart shows itself? How can we know that we are backsliding in heart?

There are certain questions that I must ask myself. Is prayer the delight that it once was for me?

Do I still love to go into a secret place, there be alone with God day by day and pour out my heart to him earnestly in prayer?

Or do I now have to drag myself to the place of prayer? Do I love to call upon God in prayer?

[11 : 57] Is the Bible still the thrilling book to me that once it was? Or has the Bible become dull and uninteresting to me?

Has my Bible reading become a formality? Am I still keen to meet with God in his word every day? Have I grown or am I growing lukewarm with regard to the services of God's house?

Do I long for the Lord's day to come round and the hour of public worship? Or do I have to drag myself now to church?

Does the do the services of the Lord's day and of the prayer meeting midweek still have the attraction for me that once they had?

With regard to the to prayer itself to private Bible reading to the services of God's house is there a weariness now about my attitude?

[13 : 04] Am I taking liberties with sinful things that I wouldn't take before? Your answer to those questions my friend will be an indication to you as to whether or not you are backsliding in heart.

What it is to be a backslider in heart and secondly we notice what it leads to. What it leads to. To what does it lead?

our text tells us the text says the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.

That's what it leads to. He's filled with his own ways. There are various steps that the backslider in heart takes. Let me try and outline them.

First of all it is his own ways that he follows and not the Lord's. He doesn't have time now nor the inclination for the things of God but he has time and inclination for the world and the things of the world.

[14 : 20] Less important things some of them things he ought to give time and attention to daily but nonetheless less important things fill his mind and his day and those things expel from his mind and from his day the things that are most important the most important things of all.

His work there's time for that. His recreations time for that. His social life time for that. But no time for the Bible no time for prayer no time for the work and the service of the church of Christ.

His own ways are the ways he follows not the Lord's ways. And then there's this second step he grows bolder he becomes more defiant he begins to put a bold face on it.

There was a time when you could have reasoned with him and spoken with him if you thought he was being overtaken in a fault a spiritual friend could reason with him and he would listen to him and consider what he said and thank him for his loving concern.

But it's all so different now. He's making his excuses now. Vigorously he defends his conduct and he does so because of those qualms of conscience which he has.

[15 : 53] Oh he says I was once too puritanical altogether. I was immature then and I was carrying things too far. I was being over scrupulous.

I've come to learn now that you just mustn't carry things too far. He's doing all that he can to justify himself. But his reasons and his excuses are not taken from the word of God at all.

He's filled with his own ways. And then there's this third step. Chastisement. Chastisement.

He's filled with his own ways. The rod that chastises him is a rod of his own making. It all takes time but backsliding in heart leads inevitably to a damaged spiritual life.

It has a deleterious effect, a harmful effect upon his spiritual life. It's inevitable. The Bible says whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.

[17 : 10] He has neglected prayer for so long and now he just cannot pray. He goes into the presence of God. He goes on his knees and he tries to pray but the words just won't come.

He can't pray. The Spirit of God has been grieved by his backsliding and by his sin and no longer helps him in his infirmities. He no longer prompts him and gives him that liberty in prayer which once he knew.

The Bible has been neglected for so long and he finds it so hard now to read the Bible. Indeed he has lost his desire for the word of God.

No longer as he turns to his pages does he hear the voice of God directing him and guiding him as he did formerly. Then there's that sin that he had been indulging in secret.

Nobody knew anything about it but it has enslaved him now. it has him in his grip and he cannot get free. It has usurped a prevalence in his life that he had never intended at all.

[18 : 29] Then too his influence over other people has departed. There was that friend perhaps a member of his own family or a close friend whom he was desperately anxious in the early days of his Christian experience to win for the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was his greatest longing but you see he has compromised and that person has seen the inconsistency that there is. He has failed to take his stand for Christ even though it may have been difficult to do so and his influence over that one and over others has waned.

Instead of winning them for Christ he himself is drawn away into unfaithfulness. If the man himself or the woman herself shows no enthusiasm for God and for the things of God, can he expect, can she expect the family or his friends or her friends to have that enthusiasm themselves?

His conduct has come back upon himself. He is filled with his own ways. But then there's a fourth step.

He becomes miserable. Miserable. He thought that in the way of compromise he would find satisfaction. He comes out and come back upon him.

[20 : 01] He is filled with his own ways. I'm sure, my friends, that we all know some who were once bright lights in the Church of Christ, whose history conformed to the pattern that I've been describing this evening.

Oh, my friends, my Christian friends, let us be constantly vigilant. every one of us, however far advanced he may be in the Christian way, is in danger of backsliding in heart.

And if that backsliding in heart is allowed to continue, it will lead to open shame. Examine yourself. Guard against it.

Be constantly vigilant. what it leads to, what it means to be a backslider in heart, what it leads to, and now thirdly, what must be done about it, what must be done about it, and what must be done about it is this, you must search out the cause of a backsliding in heart, you must discover what its cause is, this is a matter of the utmost urgency, take no rest at all until you have found out where it is that you went astray.

Is it some sin that was being secretly indulged? Is it worldliness, an undue interest in material matters, in the things, in things, or in the pleasures of the world?

[21 : 48] Is it an unwillingness to face the laughter or the ridicule of others for taking a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it someone else whom one has put before the Lord Jesus Christ?

Is it negligent? Is it slow? And when one has discovered, when you have discovered what the cause of a backsliding is, then you must go into God's presence and make full confession to him.

Take time to be alone with God, tell him all, hold nothing back, make a clean breast of it, acknowledge your sin, say to him with a psalmist against thee, thee only have I sinned, in thy sight done this ill.

And then there must be an entire mortification and abandonment of the cause of the backsliding. You cannot know again the joy of God's salvation until that sin that has been unmortified and indulged is repudiated, is mortified and done to death and the cause of the backsliding is faced and forsaken.

You cannot play with this my friends. It is a desperately serious matter. You must take that thing whatever it is that is the cause of the backsliding and mortify it.

[23 : 26] Mortify it. Mortify it. Do it to death. You must utterly destroy it as Joshua utterly destroyed the city of Jericho and everything that he found within that city.

This is not a surface work. It is a dealing with the root of the matter. We must aim at the complete subjection of the principle of sin within.

Until that is done there can be no true return to the Lord. And the return of a backslider is not easy.

Indeed it is exceedingly difficult. It can only be done this work in the power of the indwelling spirit of God if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live.

Seek the enabling of God's spirit. Call out, cry out to God for his spirit. He will give his spirit to those who earnestly seek him.

[24 : 37] If we being evil know how to give good gifts to our children how much more will our heavenly father give the holy spirit Jesus said to those who ask him.

Is God speaking to you my friend this evening? If there is the least suggestion of backsliding in heart deal with it right away.

The longer you leave it the harder it will be to deal with it and the soarer will be the chastisement the more you will be filled with your own ways.

Deal with it at its earliest signs of such backsliding and if it has advanced somewhat then don't go to sleep tonight until you are in a right relationship with God.

Backsliding in heart unchained is something which is exceedingly dangerous. It causes untold misery. The unbeliever may do a thousand things for which he will not be chastised in this world.

[25 : 56] God reserves vengeance for him in the world to come but it's not so with a child of God. He cannot sin. He cannot continue in sin.

and not feel the rod of God's chastisement upon him. God loves him far too much not to discipline him.

What must be done about it? What it is to backslide in heart? What it leads to?

What we must do about it? And now fourthly the encouragement that is given. The encouragement that is given and we have it in the second half of the verse and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

The good man referred to here is the faithful Christian the Christian who is not back sliding in heart. He says the writer here shall be satisfied from himself.

[27 : 06] What is meant is that he shall be independent of outward circumstances. He will not be dependent upon outward circumstances for his happiness and his satisfaction his peace and his joy.

There will be a self sufficiency about him. A self sufficiency of course which is not independent of God but which he finds in his relationship with God.

The faithful Christian is aware that there is within him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

There is within him that spring of water implanted there by God himself and it is being constantly replenished out of the vast reservoirs of the grace of God the inexhaustible supply of God's grace.

It's within himself. He has within himself also the inestimable blessing of a good conscience. He has within himself also the Holy Spirit whom God has given him to indwell him and to fill him and the spirit within him is in him assuring him of his salvation and pouring into him pouring out within him the love of Christ and so that person is taken up with Christ and with his love and is able to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

[28 : 54] He has within him the Holy Spirit sanctifying him and subduing the inner corruption and producing within the fruit of a holy character.

The good man is satisfied from himself. He has within himself also faith, a faith that God has given him.

God has implanted it within him and that God given him faith unites him to Christ. He's satisfied with what faith brings him.

It brings him into a right relationship with God and gives him access into the realm of grace to the unsearchable riches of Christ.

He's satisfied with that. He's satisfied from himself. He has within himself also hope. A hope that God has given him.

[29 : 54] The assured hope of a glorious destiny to come. That satisfies him. He's satisfied. He shall be satisfied from himself.

With such encouragement given to you, Christian friend, oh, won't you be on your guard constantly. faith. And if you detect in yourself any sign, the least suggestion of backsliding in spirit, won't you want to deal with it at once?

Cleave to Christ. Walk closely with Christ. Abide in Christ. It's the way of peace. It's the way of satisfaction.

It's the way of happiness. it's the way of joy. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways. The good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Let us pray. Our gracious God, we pray that thou take this message from thy word and write it upon our hearts.

[31 : 18] May we take heed. May we heed the warning. May we be on our guard. May we be constantly vigilant and be earnestly and eagerly pressing on in the Christian way, making constant progress and so be advancing further and further in the way of holiness.

And we pray that if there be any of us in thy presence this evening of whom it is true that we are backsliding in heart that thou will convict us by thy spirit and give us no rest or peace until we have returned to whole hearted faithfulness to thee, the Lord, our God and our Saviour.

O hear us we pray and apply thy word mightily by thy spirit to our hearts now. For Jesus' sake.

Amen.