

Backsliding

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.”
Proverbs 14:14

Introduction:

1. The LORD has blessed us abundantly the last three years, but there must be a constant and holy fear of backsliding.
2. It is more a matter of *when*, rather than a matter of *if*; but we must guard against it with all His might and our might.
3. We live in the perilous times of the last days of a powerless form of godliness, and we must hate and reject it all!
4. As your pastor, I fear for myself and each one of you that we might slip from our holy zeal for the kingdom of God.
5. Yet we do not fear it enough, for it is a constant threat against our souls from within and without. Lord, help us!

I. The DEFINITION

- A. We will focus on backsliding *in heart*, since the sermon series from January, 2001, “A Pure Heart,” changed lives, and we have stressed it for the last three years! Consider Proverbs 4:23!
- B. If you are not born again or have never walked with God, then you cannot understand backsliding.
- C. We are not necessarily talking about falling into heinous sins or doctrinal heresy, but rather losing our first love, for which the Lord Jesus Christ condemned the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7).
- D. We are not necessarily talking about watching X-rated movies, but rather the more subtle sins of losing spiritual joy, giving up on prayer, watching more “good” television, allowing sinful thoughts, singing less, minding earthly things, loving family too much, exercising too much, etc.
- E. It is that insidious process by which we relax our spiritual guard and become dull to the Lord.
- F. At our baptisms, most of us were very committed to following Jesus Christ with our whole hearts.
- G. At various times the Lord has drawn us and drawn near to us so that we could taste heaven early.
- H. Backsliding is sliding back toward carnal Christianity or worldliness from a position of holiness.
- I. Incremental compromise is losing our love and zeal a little at a time, as with Lot; he pitched his tent toward Sodom, moved into Sodom, joined the city council, and ended up in a cave ruined.
- J. It is the opposite of what we studied this morning in II Thess 1:3, where faith grew exceedingly!
- K. Israel was well known for its backsliding (Psalm 78:32-42; Jeremiah 3; Hosea 4:16; 11:5-7).
- L. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). He is trying to go in two directions! And He will only go in one – down to hell (Matthew 6:24)! Such is spiritual adultery (James 4:4)!
- M. Sin takes us from the inside out – in the heart – as James warned specifically (James 1:13-16).

II. The WARNING

- A. Our text declares that the backslider “shall be filled with his own ways.” He shall be judged fairly!
- B. The jealous LORD will pound your soul, your health, your family, your business, or all the above!
- C. If the holy God of heaven can cast the wicked into hell for all eternity, then He surely will judge those of His saints who squander His grace and play with the things of the world!
- D. Consider the horrible judgments He brought on His beloved nation of Israel for backsliding!
- E. We are not of them who draw back to perdition, or perdition, but of them who believe to the complete saving of their souls (Heb 10:39). Though related to 70 AD, the principle applies to us.
- F. Jesus warned His own disciples that abounding iniquity would cause the love of many to wax cold, and that condition must be more true of our generation than it was of theirs (Matt 24:12).
- G. We must give earnest heed to the things we have heard, so we don’t let them slip (Hebrews 2:1).
- H. Stand fast like men (I Cor 16:13)! Hold fast like men (Hebrews 3:6; 4:14; 10:23; Rev 2:25; 3:3)!
 1. Pure and holy living should be stressed more than doctrinal integrity. It is our threat!
 2. We are to stand fast without moving (Philippians 1:27; 4:1; I Thess 3:8; II Thess 2:15).
- I. God sent me to warn you tonight. Don’t neglect it (Prov 29:1; Jer 2:14-19; 5:6; 8:4-12; 14:10-12).
- J. Those who are doers of the word are blessed in their deed as the children of God (James 1:25-27).
- K. Every man shall bear his own burden, for pastors are only bound to give the warning (Gal 6:5).

III. The FEAR

- A. We have three combined foes out to destroy us – our flesh, the world, and the devil himself.
- B. Those who imagine and fear political conspiracies fall prey to the only real conspiracy! They presume and boast that they well informed, but they are ignorant of the real war (Eph 6:12).
- C. Sin is deceitful and can turn us away from the living God (Jeremiah 17:9; Hebrews 3:12-13).
- D. Relaxing is folly – we will surely slide back; for we are in a war for our souls (I Peter 2:11).
- E. When God left David and Hezekiah and Peter for just moments, they backslid horribly.
- F. Every saint knows by experience the continual ebb and flow of their spiritual life from sin.

IV. The SYMPTOMS

- A. Prayer is the breathing of a soul in close communion with God – it will decrease and often end.
- B. Singing is the activity of a soul filled with the Holy Ghost – it will decrease and often end.
- C. Peace is the result of a holy life and pure conscience – it will decrease and frustration will mount.
- D. Joy is the light of God in the heart – it will decrease and unhappiness/discontentment will come.

V. The EXCUSES

- A. Some will blame the pastor, for he is “just not preaching like he used to.” A man walking with God will profit from even the singing. Instead of blaming the pastor, examine your soul and heart.
- B. Some will blame their circumstances, for they are just too beat down by life to live for the Lord.
- C. Some will blame their church, for the other hypocrites there do just not love them enough.

VI. The CURES

- A. **Remember** from where you have fallen – **Repent** – and **do the first works** (Revelation 2:5).
 - 1. This three-step process is what the Lord Jesus Christ taught for recovery. It is simple.
 - 2. When we are dull spiritually, it is usually because we are not doing what we once did.
 - 3. When marriages sour, it is because the spouses are not doing what they once did!
- B. Read David’s conviction and commitment and how God put his feet in an even place (Ps 26:12).
- C. Every sin that exists must be repented of, repudiated, and rejected (Job 33:27; Proverbs 28:13).
- D. Every temptation that could lead to sin must be removed (Rom 13:14; I John 2:15-17; Ps 101:3).
- E. You must examine yourself with the Lord’s blessing to search your heart and soul (Ps 139:23-24).
- F. You must seek the Lord by prayer, reading, and meditation. This takes time and commitment.
- G. You must have a personal and family revival of holiness by cutting out threatening influences.
- H. You must gird up your loins and tighten down the hatches to be more zealously holy for Him.
- I. The double minded man becomes single minded, by sober, personal sacrifice (James 4:8-10).
- J. David fixed his heart – he made it singleminded, without distractions (Psalm 57:7; 108:1; 112:7).
- K. Pray for restoration and grace and strength to stand (Ps 17:5; 18:36; 119:116-117,133; Jer 14:7-9).
- L. You cannot get comfortable as a Christian – you must be constantly sober and vigilant.
- M. We are in a spiritual warfare, where we need God’s might by armor and prayer (Eph 6:10-18).
- N. We must be pressing as running a tight race (Phil 3:11-14), not as belly worshippers (3:18-19)!
- O. God seeks our repentance after backsliding (Hosea 14:1-3; Jeremiah 3:22).

VII. The RESTORATION

- A. David describes the sometime slow and painful process of seeking the Lord (Psalm 42 and 43).
- B. The LORD will forgive and restore mercifully (Hosea 14:4-9). HOPE THOU IN GOD!

Conclusion:

- 1. Will you turn to the Lord right now and repent for any foolishness, slothfulness, or backsliding? He will forgive.
- 2. Will you commit yourself to go from this place and tear every idol and temptation out of your life to be holy again?
- 3. Do not say with Felix you need a more convenient season (Acts 24:25). Tonight may be your last chance (Pr 29:1).