

Some Signs of the Backslider in Heart

by Albert M. Ewing

The sermon warns against the dangers of backsliding in heart, which can lead to a loss of spiritual power and a focus on one's own ways rather than God.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 12:7, Proverbs 4:23, Proverbs 14:14, Mark 14:38, 1 Timothy 6:10, 2 Timothy 3:5, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 3:17

Topics: "Spiritual Decline", "Backsliding"

Description

Albert M. Ewing delves into the topic of 'The Backslider in Heart' based on Proverbs 14:14, emphasizing the seriousness of backsliding in one's heart rather than just outwardly professing faith. He highlights the gradual and subtle nature of backsliding, leading to a loss of love for prayer, interest in God's Word, and zeal for spiritual work. Ewing warns against becoming self-indulgent, thinking lightly of sin, and neglecting known duties, which can ultimately result in feeling spiritually empty and blind to one's own condition.

Transcript

The subject under discussion, "The Backslider in Heart" verbs 14:14 are the words of Solomon, known as the wise man because of his great God-given wisdom. This exclusive statement, and I use the word exclusive as no other Bible character ever used, or spoke of backsliding in just that form.

The words, "The backslider in heart," occur only once in the Bible, and are very definite and emphatic. It is our purpose to deal with the subject, as it is stated, and not after the broader view, as meaning only one who has quit professing. Much is said about backsliding in every dispensation, after the general usage of the term, that of "turning away," "turning from," "turning aside" and such like statements. So much is said, that no one can consistently say, "There is no such thing"; and then teach "Once saved, always saved."

The text says, "The backslider in heart." He did not say, that if there be one, as though it was only a possibility. No, no, but he is very emphatic that there is a backslider in heart, and tells us exactly what he is like: "He shall be filled with his own ways." Just as surely as there is a backslider in heart, just so surely he will be filled with his own ways.

Self-indulgence is, "Going where, being what, doing as, it seemeth right in our own eyes"; in other words, miss nothing that you want to do, see, or be.

Backsliding begins unexpectedly and unconsciously, like many dangerous diseases. It steals its way into the heart so secretly, that the utmost vigilance is necessary, lest we are cut of gas before we are aware of it, and our ear begins to slow down.

Know first, that it begins in the heart, and finishes there: hence the admonition "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23. A backslider in heart, is not always a backslider in life. Many are often very zealous workers in the externals, and seem to be very much interested in the success of their church. They keep up very well their form of public Christian service but without spiritual power. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." II Tim. 3:5. Also Rev. 3:17: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." One would not think that so much could be the matter with him, and not know it. But Jesus said, "They knew it not."

The claims of the church made in this seventeenth verse are the claims of a lukewarm "spued out" church. The devil had stolen their gold, and they were shining up their old brass. Jesus said unto them, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." If they had ever put that old dry profession in the fire, a little heap of ashes would be all they would have left, and the wind would soon blow that away. They may have had worldly riches, but no true riches. Then He said, You need white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. They were naked and did not know it, and a lot of folk do not know it today.

They probably had on more clothes, than a lot of holiness professors, that claim to be sanctified; at least do not read of any complaints from their pastor or brethren about their immodesty of dress. It took Jesus to see their spiritual nakedness, and their filthy garments. They themselves did not see their wretched condition, for the reason that they had lost their spiritual vision, and needed to anoint their eyes with eyesalve so they could see.

We do not begin to strip and show our nakedness, until we begin to backslide in heart. When this happens to us, then we look like it and act like it.

I have observed this class of folk, under deep conviction from the faithful preaching of the word, come to the altar for prayer, how ashamed and miserable they were. They would nearly pull their clothing to pieces, trying to cover their nakedness. They could not see before, because they were off the beam. This is why Jesus told them to anoint their eyes with eyesalve that they might see.

No half baked lukewarm professor, can trust his vision in seeing right and wrong things. You will notice here that Jesus definitely outlined the way back to God, that they might avoid any substitution or reformation by ritualism, or sacraments, and have only one alternative viz, "Be zealous therefore and repent," Rev. 3:19. Samson "Wist not when the Lord left him" Judges 16:20.

Should it be thought a thing incredible, that this same thing might happen to us? No, this has happened to many a person, and they made the discovery a long time later. They reached for their hair, only to remember that they had lost it in the barber shop, and their spiritual power was gone.

Notice some signs of backsliding; then compare them to our own experience as a means of checking up on ourselves.

First. We notice a loss or lack of love for private prayer and communion with God. One time it was a relish, and we had a pull for the secret place and we may still keep it up, but do not enjoy it as we did at one time. Jno. 15:9.

Second. We notice a loss of interest in the reading of God's word. David said, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee" Psa.119:11, also 119:97. "Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." We may continue to read it, but it is not as interesting as it once was. The precious blood is not precious, any more to the backslider in heart. How sad is this condition.

Third. We notice them thinking lightly of sin: gradually becoming used to it and moving a little closer to it all the time. It becomes Lot's Little Zoar "small thing." Lot's daughters justified themselves and left the place where God put them and went up the mountain and into a cave, and said, "No one sees us." But God saw them and their sin. He was watching them, and He is watching us. What won't people do when they think no one sees them. Well they will soon bring shame and disgrace, and a curse as well, upon their lives, and a stigma upon the cause of Christ and the Church.

Fourth. We notice a loss of zeal for real spiritual work, and a criticizing spirit for others who exercise their spiritual freedom, saying that they do not believe in too much emotionalism and demonstration. He does no soul winning any more, and becomes irregular in his attendance at the means of grace. The Bible says, "The time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." II Tim. 4:2,3. You see, he wants church and profession: it is not the church that he is through with; it is the old fashioned truth. He does not want that anymore, neither does he want deep piety. He may have some extreme lines, that are nil, as he is compelled to major on externals in an attempt to cover up and to make up for the deficit in spiritual things.

He tries to appear spiritual by outward Pharisaical strictness, but like the wolf in sheep's clothing, he is discovered. The faithful preaching of the word of God, is what it takes to pull down their munitions of rocks, and discover their hiding places. "When He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will reprove of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John 16:8.

Lastly. Some causes.

First. Getting off guard through unwatched avenues, and approaches to the many problems of life. "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation" Mark 14:38. "The spirit is willing (ready), but the flesh is weak."

Second. The love of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Jno. 2:15. You may say, "I do not love the world," and you may not love its sinful pleasures; and the class that I am writing about are usually strong in their opposition against worldly amusements; but love their houses, and lands, and money, and are trying to get all they can of them for their own self-preservation. Demas, you know, forsook Paul, having loved this present world: and Achan, how he coveted after silver and gold and a Babylonish garment, until his hand reached out and laid hold on it, and it cost him his life and soul; and not only his life, but his entire family.

But not Achan alone; for Paul says, that others have done the same thing: "The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I Tim. 6:10. The Apostle declares that he had coveted no man's silver or gold. Acts 20:33. He had kept a watchful eye on that avenue, that would lead to backsliding, and by-pathed around it.

Many are so greedy for money, that they will work on Sunday for time and half pay; buy and sell and merchandise in questionable things, and buy and sell in the house of God to get gain. I heard an evangelist say one time that he had two reasons for selling his books; one was to "scatter literature," I expect it was like "scattering litter," and his second reason was he "needed the money." That reason is selfish and mercenary, and a road that leads to backsliding. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and 'see that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Jer. .2:19.

Third. Neglect of known duty, and practice of it; like Jonah. He knew what he should do, but substituted his own way for God's way, and received a whaling for it,. and he had it coming to him.

The indulgence of a single known sin, or sparing what we call no harm sins ("just a look") like David, will bring God's voice to the conscience, saying, "Thou art the man" II Sam. 12:7. And again we read verse 8. "I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things." Two kingdoms and his master's wives and his master's house, was not enough to satisfy a heart that had broken with God. This would be a good Bible narrative to read, if and when you have a little time. "Little foxes spoil the vines." It was just a look, but that look caused him to commit adultery and murder. It was a look of sin, that only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse away. I Jno. 1:7.

Lastly. The results. Not only backslidden, but filled with his own ways; which is feeling that we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. A professor said to me, "I am clean, I never had a sinful habit in my life; I don't need anyone to tell me anything, I don't need any instructions.

The man in the Bible was clean, and Satan acknowledged it; but he was empty.

He had nothing to keep the devil out. We must be filled with the Spirit, to be acceptable and safe. This backslidden church know not that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: that they had not enough clothes on, and what they did have on were soiled and filthy. Israel was filled with their own ways, and was full of grumble, and this led to doubt and faultfinding, alienation and despair; "would to God we had died in Egypt."

We should watch the above four avenues, as main roads to backsliding; and avoid them by daily reading the word of God; and by magnifying the blood, and making much of the Holy Ghost. This will be our shield and security against backsliding.

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