

Heart Backsliding

by Catherine Booth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of confronting and repenting of spiritual decline, and returning to a life of obedience and devotion to God.

Scripture: Hosea 14:4, Matthew 16:24, John 14:23, Philippians 4:13, James 4:17, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Repentance", "Sanctification"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the importance of remembering our first love for God, repenting of our backslidings, and consecrating ourselves fully to Him. She emphasizes the need for honest self-examination, confession of sins, and renunciation of evil practices to experience true restoration and peace with God. Through various illustrations and biblical principles, she highlights that faith and healing come through obedience to God's will and a wholehearted commitment to Him.

Transcript

REV. ii, 1-5.--"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. 2. I know thy works and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted. 4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5. Remember therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

As introductory to my remarks on this passage, I want you to observe that this is a direct message from Christ Himself to a company of His own people in a certain state of religious experience. These Ephesians were Christians, born into the family of God, and for a long time, and to a great extent, had faithfully served Him. Hear what He says of them in this second verse: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."

He sums up their character most carefully, giving them the utmost credit for all the fruits of the Spirit found in them, He remembers their labour, their patience. their hatred of evil, their zeal for His glory in their intolerance of false teachers, their constancy in suffering, their purity of motive, and their continuance in

well doing. Not one of their good deeds is forgotten before Him; but the brilliancy and preciousness of the whole is marred by one defect which only He could see, but which His love and faithfulness compelled Him to reveal and to reprove. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

After such a repetition of their fidelities and graces, we, in our carnal wisdom, might have looked for a THEREFORE, instead of a NEVERTHELESS. We might have expected Him to say, 'I Thou hast laboured for me with much zeal, patience, and perseverance; therefore, I will excuse and pass over thy declension in love, thy defection of heart.' This is the way in which many of God's people seem to imagine that He regards heart unfaithfulness; but not so the Lord Himself. Notwithstanding all their labours, sufferings, patience, and zeal, He had a nevertheless against them, which compelled His reproof and endangered His anger.

And oh, is not this His attitude towards thousands of His people now? Is not this message to these Ephesian Christians equally applicable to multitudes in our day, who are serving Him with much zeal and patience; but they have left their first love, and are, notwithstanding all their outward professions and labour, backsliders in heart? Some of you start at the use of such a phrase, and you say, 'But these Ephesians were not backsliders.' Not in the general acceptation of the term, but in the estimation of their Lord they were backsliders in heart. They had partially fallen, partially gone from that whole-hearted service which once they rendered Him, and without which all outward works, however worthy or zealous, will not suffice. I fear that after this manner the great majority of Christians are backsliders. I have conversed with numbers up and down this land, and many who have occupied prominent positions in Christian Churches, who have confessed that they were secret backsliders, having lost much that they once enjoyed, and walking far less carefully than they once did. Taking these as representatives of others in similar circumstances I say, I cannot but fear that a very large majority of professing Christians have, like these Ephesian converts, left their first love. I have no doubt that there are many of this class here this morning, and I desire to speak especially to these.

Let me entreat you, my dear friends, to open your hearts to the reception of the truth. Forget the feeble instrumentality through which it comes, and if it commends itself to your consciences as God's truth, let it have its full weight upon your hearts. If you are right, it will do you no harm to examine yourselves. It will establish you and help you "to assure your hearts before Him." And if you are not right, who can tell the importance of making the discovery in time, while there is opportunity and grace offered by which you may be made right? I beseech you be honest with yourselves and with God. There is nothing to be gained by crying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. It is no use trying to persuade yourselves that you are right with God if your consciences tell you that you are not. You will find your consciousness too strong for all the false theories of men and devils, and true peace will be impossible to you until you come back to your first love. I think I hear some one say, 'Ah! that is just what I want! but how am I to do it? I know that I am a backslider in heart; it is not with me now as it once was; but I have tried and tried in vain to get back what I once enjoyed, and to live as I once lived.' My dear friend, you have not tried in the right way. Try your Lord's way; take His council, obey His commands, and you shall not only get back all you have lost, but an abundant increase of peace and power. This way, as pointed out here, seems to me to be

1. Remember:--realise your unfaithfulness.
2. Repent:--humble yourself, confess and renounce your sin.
3. Do your first works:--consecration and faith.

1. Remember:--realise your unfaithfulness. Remember from whence thou art fallen. There are different degrees of backsliding; some have fallen from greater heights, and some to lower depths than others. But if you ever were higher on the ladder of Christian experience than you are this morning, to just that extent you are a backslider. Our Lord does not wish us to condemn ourselves for losing that which we never possessed; but to remember from whence, the exact degree of spiritual attainment we once realised, and to compare our present state with it. "Remember!" consider it; ponder over it; strive to realise it as the evil and bitter thing it is.

We fear that numbers of Christians reach a fearful degree of backsliding without knowing it. "Grey hairs are here and there upon Ephraim, yet he knoweth not;" and no wonder; they are so occupied with the externals of religion; they are so absorbed in business, or care, or pleasure, that they have no time to remember. They never stop to compare notes, to observe the landmarks, or take the soundings of their spiritual state. They have no time for the old-fashioned duty of self-examination; or if they have, it is so distasteful that they prefer to read, or hear, or talk. Sometimes the Holy Spirit, by some Word of God, some sermon, or providence, flashes the conviction on their minds that they have lost ground, that they "have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." But the conviction is painful; they are afraid of the revelation, they shrink from the consequences of its admission even to themselves, and instead of honestly examining into the state of their hearts, they fall back upon their conversion and early experience, and say, I Surely it must be all right with me, although I have no communion with God, no sensible joy or peace, and but little power over sin. I must be a child of God. Salvation is by faith, not by works; God does not look at me, but at Jesus.' Instead of remembering from whence they have fallen, they look only to what they have fallen, and try to accommodate the requirements of the word to their miserable experience. Having lost the faith that purifies the heart and manifests its existence by obedience, they try to take refuge in an Antinomian faith, which does neither the one or the other--a faith which makes void the Law of God, and makes Christ the minister of sin. Thank God, however, they cannot get peace this way; their countenances belie their creed, and their powerless lives tell to all around that they have only got the shell without the kernel, the form without the power.

If there are any of this class here this morning, my friends, I beseech you take YOUR LORD'S counsel--Remember from whence you have fallen. Reflect on what you once enjoyed. How was it with you in days gone by? Let me help you to remember by a few practical questions. Did you not once realise a sweet and blessed sense of your acceptance with God? and did not His Spirit witness with your spirit that you were a child of God? and did you not realise that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" How is it with you now? As you received the Lord Jesus, have you so walked in Him that your path has been like that of the just, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day? or have you lost your roll, and with it your peace and the joy of the Lord which once was your strength? Again, did you not once walk in daily communion with God, your prayers being not merely petitions, but mediums of sensible intercourse with Him? and did not His candle shine brightly on your head; What of your present experience in this respect? Do you still rejoice in this light? or are you groping after Him as an absent and far distant God? You once realised the power of Christ to rest upon you, so that you were more than conqueror over the world, the flesh, and the devil; sin had no more dominion over you; "old things were passed away;" the old spirit of bondage and the helpless misery of a merely convicted state were passed away, and you could sing, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ;" and, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."

How is it with you? Do you walk in the liberty wherewith Christ made you free? or are you gone back to the spirit of bondage again to fear, and to the helplessness of your convicted state, by reason of which you are crying, "O, wretched man that I am!" If so, oh, "remember from whence thou art fallen."

Your conscience was once tender as the apple of the eye; you eschewed evil, and kept as far from its very appearance as you could. You had no fellowship with the godless multitudes who crucified your Lord, and trampled under foot His blessed laws. You kept as far aloof from the world as you might, weeping over its sins, and looking down with pity on its hollow amusements. What is your present attitude in this matter? Are you still separate from sinners, following the Lamb wheresoever He goeth? or has the daughter of Zion come down from her holy mountain, and defiled herself with the abominations of the heathen round about? You were once full of zeal for the glory of your Divine Deliverer, and the salvation of those for whom He died. You could then reprove sin, and weep over and expostulate with sinners. You could deny yourself almost your necessary sleep and food, in order to promote the interests of your Redeemer's kingdom. Where is now your zeal for the Lord of Hosts? Can you deny self, sacrifice your ease, honour, reputation, or wealth, for His glory, as you once did? Remember!

Compare your present state with your former one. Let conscience speak, let facts speak, and honestly admit the truth; and if you are condemned, write yourself down--Backslider in heart. You say, 'I do not like the conclusion.' Perhaps not; but if it be true, honesty will be the best policy here, as in everything else. Look the fact in the face, and try to realise its desperate meaning. I fear too many Christians have far too light an estimate of heart-unfaithfulness. I have sometimes heard them speak of five or ten years' halfheartedness as a very light thing, slurring it over, as it were, with a very thin and superficial sort of confession; but our Lord does not so regard it; He looks upon it as a very serious matter, a very heinous sin, a most God-dishonouring experience; so much so, that He threatens these Ephesian backsliders that, unless they repent, notwithstanding all their good works, He will come unto them in judgement, and remove their candlestick out of its place.

This is a far greater sin than any you ever committed before you were converted; and you must look at it, reflect on it, remember it, until you have realised its bitterness. Do not be afraid because of the painfulness of the process. Painful operations are often necessary to save life. If you had a bad wound, which required examining and probing, you would not say to the surgeon, 'I cannot bear to look at it; I cannot endure the pain of dressing; cover it up and let it alone.'

No! you would know that, painful as would be the process of probing and dressing, it was necessary to save your limb, and perhaps your life; and you would, like a reasonable being, endure the pain, and save your life. Just so, if you have spiritual wounds; they need probing, and perhaps cauterising, before they can be healed; and it is of no use to shrink from the knife of the Great Physician. He knows that it will cause pain; yea, bitter anguish; yet he says, "Remember!" Oh, my backsliding friend, bare your heart before Him who walks amid the golden candlesticks, and ask Him to search it as with a lighted candle.

Ask for the realising light of the Holy Spirit to reveal to you your backslidings, and to set your secret sins in the light of His countenance. Ask Him to help you to remember by quickening your spiritual perceptions, and opening your eyes, to see the monstrous ingratitude and cruel infidelity of which you have been guilty. Instead of refusing to remember, because of the mental suffering involved in the process, methinks we should rejoice to suffer. Seeing that we have wounded our Lord in the house of His friends, we ought to be willing to weep our lives away, at the remembrance of our sin, and if we could, to shed tears of blood, as an evidence of our penitence.

To have been unfaithful to His saving grace; to have been untrue to His dying love; to have withheld from Him that which He purchased with His heart's blood, demands a deeper grief, a more bitter repentance, than that of our unconverted state. May the Lord help those of you who are convicted of this sin to remember; until the fallow ground of your heart is broken up, and your souls cry 'O, remember not against us former iniquities; let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

2. The next step is repentance. Now, true repentance implies humiliation, confession, and renunciation. When the backslider has remembered until he realises his unfaithfulness in its true heinousness, he will be so deeply humbled that he will be willing to confess his sin before God and His people. I have known Christians deeply convicted of backsliding, who were yet too proud to confess it. I have known them cover up their sin, and struggle, and pray, and weep, and labour to get back their peace and power, till they were almost driven to distraction; but I never knew one succeed who refused to make an honest confession. While the backslider in heart is too proud to confess that he is one, the laws of mind, as well as the Word of God, forbid that he should be restored to pardon and peace.

"When I kept silence," says David, describing such a state, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; (then) I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." If we sin against an earthly friend or benefactor, the laws of mind require that, before we can obtain a sense of reconciliation and peace, we must confess the wrong. And all God's requirements and conditions are beautifully adjusted to the laws of our nature; therefore he requires us to confess our sins, and then "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Perhaps some one asks, But if I confess to god is not that enough? We answer, it depends on the nature of the offence: if it has been against God only, it may be so; but if it has involved or injured others, it must be confessed to them. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." "Confess your faults one to another, that ye may be healed." Now, the backslider in heart has necessarily influenced and injured others by his coldness, deadness, and inconsistency, and in many cases so deeply, that nothing but an honest straightforward confession on his part can win for the truth any influence over them.

The backsliding Christian falsely represents the religion of Jesus, and indirectly teaches men that it is what he exhibits it to be. Now, on conviction of his unfaithfulness, he is bound in common honesty to redeem his Christianity from the stigma which his inconsistency has brought upon it and to tell those who have witnessed his life, that its defects have been attributable, not to the religion of Jesus, but to the want of it. I have sometimes thought, on hearing the professions of the Lord's people, that a little CONFESSIO would do a great deal more good. There is a mighty power in confession. A thorough and honest confession of backsliding and inconsistency on the part of Christians would do more to convince and arouse the unconverted within their influence than all their professions have done for years gone by; because it would convince the unsaved that they were REAL AND SINCERE, which at present they do not believe. Many of you will remember reading a beautiful illustration of what I am saying in the Report of the American Revival, some seven or eight years ago, respecting a Christian merchant in that country. He does not appear to have been by any means an indifferent professor; on the contrary, he had felt some anxiety about the young men in his employ, and had, as he tells us, lent them books, and invited them to hear earnest ministers, and talked piously to them in a general and indirect sort of way; but all this, as it generally does, had failed to win any of them to Christ, or even to convince them that they were sinners. One day, as he was walking through the streets, reflecting on the failure of all his efforts, he was led,

doubtless by the Divine Spirit, to see the reason of this failure. He remembered. 'Is it any wonder,' said he to himself, 'that I have failed, seeing how inconsistently I have often acted; what a worldly spirit I have exhibited, what an undue absorption in business, and how little real anxiety I have manifested about the souls of my young men? I never took one of them aside and spoke to him directly and feelingly of his accountability and danger. O, how cold and dead and indifferent I have been.' These reflections so filled him with grief and humiliation, that he resolved on taking the first opportunity for confessing his unfaithfulness, and speaking pointedly and faithfully to them about their soul. This he did, and in a few weeks the majority of them were blessedly converted to God.

This was the effect of confession. That merchant might have gone on talking good to those young men until now, and no effect would have been produced. While his practice was so far below his profession, all his direct efforts were neutralised, and thus it is with thousands of professing Christians; they are not altogether indifferent about others, they try to do a little for the Lord; but their endeavours are all lost, because of their half-heartedness and inconsistency,

If there are any here who feel this to be true in their case, my dear friends let me urge you to follow the example of the merchant. Remember your unfaithfulness, till you are sufficiently humbled to be willing to confess it to those whom you have injured by it. This is just what is needful, and ALL that is needful in many an instance where Christians have been praying for years for unconverted relatives and friends. Suppose a Christian wife here this morning: you have an unconverted husband for whom you have been praying for many years; but you are conscious that he has witnessed much in your conduct and spirit which has been at variance with the Christianity which you have professed.

Now, this discrepancy between your practice and profession lies like an enemy in ambush against all extraneous efforts to bring saving truth to bear on the conscience of your husband; and no doubt an honest confession on your part would do more to break his heart and win him to the Saviour than all the sermons he has heard for years gone by. If you are in doubt, try it. If you are convicted of backsliding, go home, and with meekness and tears of bitter penitence tell your husband so; tell him that the Spirit has convinced you of your halfheartedness and inconsistency; tell him that you are ashamed of the past, and resolved by God's grace to lead a new life.

Put your arm round his neck, and ask him to join you: then get on your knees and pour out your soul in confession to God, and see whether your husband's heart will not be moved, and admittance gained for the truth and Spirit of God. And vice-versa, let the husband do so with his wife. I tell you that your confession will do more than all your professions have ever done. And just so in the case of Christian parents who have lived in a half-hearted state before their children.

Oh, how much has been said and written as to the reasons why so few comparatively of the children of Christians get converted in early life. I think the answer could be given, and the mystery explained in one word--unfaithfulness. How can parents expect to win their children to Christ if they constantly exhibit an un-Christlike spirit, and trample under foot the plainest teachings of His Word? How frequently the children of professing parents seem to entertain a greater malignity against the religion of Jesus than do the children of thorough worldlings; and no wonder, seeing that the very name of Christianity has been made to stink in their nostrils by the inconsistency of the parents.

They are taught in precept that they are to be sincere, truthful, unselfish, unworldly, but they see in practice the constant exhibition of principles directly contrary; and hence they learn to despise both their

parents and the religion which they profess. If there are any inconsistent parents here this morning, my friends, if you desire the conversion of your children, go home and take down the barriers which your unfaithfulness has raised in their hearts against the reception of the Gospel.

Go and confess to your children, or, if their youth renders this inexpedient, gather them around the family altar, and confess it all to God in their presence; make a fresh and full dedication of your" selves, of your children, of your all to Him; beseeching Him with strong cries and tears to give you grace to live wholly for Him. Do this with godly sincerity your own hearts being truly broken up, and no matter how careless or ungracious your children may have. been, you will find them melted into tenderness, and in all probability convinced of sin.

So greatly does God delight in honesty of heart in His people, that He never fails to give the accompanying power of the Spirit to those who exercise it. I have not a doubt that an honest confession of backsliding on the part of all unfaithful ministers would open the windows of heaven' and bring down such a flood of grace on their barren and worldly churches as would shake our land from end to end.

I remember reading a very striking and affecting illustration of this some years ago, in connection with the experience of a dear man of God, who, during the early years of his Christian career, had been a man of extraordinary devotedness, zeal, and self-sacrifice, but gradually and almost imperceptibly to himself he had fallen from his first love. Though still abounding in good works, and looked up to by all as a pattern of piety, he had lost the power which once characterised him. The Lord showed him from whence he had fallen in a very simple and effective manner, by bringing him into close contact with a man filled with the Spirit, and burning with zeal for the salvation of souls, thus, by the law of contrast, flashing on him the conviction that he had lost his first love. The backslider in heart began to "remember." He said to himself, 'I was once like that man; I felt as he does; I rejoiced as he does; I prayed as he does; I laboured as he does; but I am not like him now. Oh, my God, I am a backslider in heart.' The discovery almost overwhelmed him. He realised its bitterness, and agonised over its consequences, until his distress reached a climax, and kneeling down he prayed in an agony, telling the Lord that if He would restore him to his first love, he would confess his heart--backsliding to his brethren, and do all in his power to counteract the evil effects of his former coldness and unfaithfulness. I need not say that the Lord heard and answered. This was all He wanted of His servant, in order to His pouring in the oil and wine of His love and consolation. Like the disciples on the day of Pentecost he rose from his knees filled with the Spirit. The next day there was an official meeting, in which he had to take part. At the appointed time some dozen of the leading men assembled. After the business was gone through, he asked to be allowed to make a few remarks; and then, with the simplicity of a little child, like an honest-hearted man as he was, he related the experience of the last few days. He confessed to his brethren is heart--backsliding, told them how the Lord had convinced him of it, and how graciously He had restored him to his first love. The brethren present were melted into tears; they sobbed and cried like children; and when he had done, broke out into a general confession of backsliding and unfaithfulness. They continued in the deepest humiliation of soul, confessing and bewailing their sins until midnight. As one after another poured out his soul in confession and supplication, the Holy Ghost fell on them, and. there commenced in that room on that memorable night a revival which swept hundreds into the Church of Christ, many of whom are now in heaven. All this was brought about by the power of confession. That man might have preached on until the end of his days, and never have done one tithe of the good which this one open, honest confession did.

Oh, what a deal of praying there is for revivals, and for spiritual visitations, which is sheer hypocrisy. The Church might have a revival as wide and deep and powerful as she asks, if she would only comply with

the conditions on which God can grant it--if she would remember her unfaithfulness, honestly confess and forsake her sins, and bring into God's storehouse the tithes of which she is so flagrantly robbing Him; but it is easier to utter vain repetitions and leave the responsibility of the damnation of souls upon God, than for Christians to humble themselves, confess before the world their fallen and powerless condition, and pay their vows unto the Lord. The Lord only wants a whole-hearted faithful people, and the walls of many a Jericho would fall, and a nation be born in a day. Oh, may the Lord send upon his backsliding Israel the spirit of conviction and of mourning! May He open her eyes to see from whence she has fallen, and enable her to repent, to come down into the dust, and cry, "Unclean, unclean!" until her iniquity is purged, her backslidings healed, and her lips touched with living fire from off His pure and holy altar.

But further, repentance not only implies humiliation and confession, but RENUNCIATION, sometimes the hardest of all. "Put away the evil of your doings," is an indispensable condition of restoration to the favour and peace of God. Christ Jesus came to save His people from their sins, not in them, and those who will not be saved from their sins prove beyond a question that they are none of His. I have known many professing Christians try hard to get peace while holding on to some sin, or allowing some idol, but I never knew one succeed. You may preach faith for ever to a soul thus temporising with evil, but its consciousness will be too strong for your theories. You must show that soul that it can never believe till it is willing to part with evil. Not that it must save itself, but that it must be WILLING TO BE SAVED FROM SIN.

This was the principle on which Christ dealt with the young ruler, and which is insisted on again and again by Christ and His Apostles. I am satisfied that thousands of professing Christians are kept in bondage and darkness through not understanding this fundamental principle of the economy of salvation. They hear so much about faith, and so little about the conditions of faith, that they get bewildered; and instead of repenting and putting away the evil, that their sins may be blotted out, they spend all their time in trying to work themselves up into a faith as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural. Consequently, they fail to get peace, and live in perpetual condemnation and misery. So it must ever be with those who ignore God's way, and take their own,

I remember a striking illustration of this, in connection with some services I held in a distant part of the country. A gentleman called on me, and sent in to ask if I would see him without an introduction, as he did not wish to reveal his name. I said, 'Oh, certainly; if I could be of any service to him, I did not wish to know who he was.' Accordingly, he came in. and told me his story, He said that he had been attending my Thursday morning meetings for believers, and he thought perhaps I could help him, as he was in a most difficult and painful position. I found that he had once lived very near to God, and known much of His grace and love; but, in a time of partial backsliding, he had been induced to enter into partnership in business with an unconverted man. His partner, though a respectable, moral man, after the standard of the world, practised and allowed things, in the management of the business, which my visitor's conscience condemned; 'and though,' said he, 'I protest against them, and have no share in their preparation, yet I share in the profits of the business, and my name goes forth to the public as responsible for all that is done, and I feel condemned on account of it.' He told me that he had lost his peace, and had tried in every way to regain it. He had fasted and prayed, and wept and struggled, till his body was quite worn. He had been to seek the advice of every minister for miles around, and had sought the counsels and prayers of his Christian friends, in vain. 'What am I to do?' said he. I have considerable capital invested; my friends are very anxious that I should get on; and others are involved in my success.'

I felt the importance of the case, and truly sympathised with the young man; but to me his path seemed plain as daylight.

I looked up for a word that should convince him, and then said, 'Well, my dear sir, I can only say, that for myself, I should as soon expect the favour of God in bell, as on earth, while I was doing or allowing anything for which my conscience condemned me.' The arrow went home. He said, 'I see, I see; I shall have to come out at all costs.' I said, 'I believe you will;' and then I tried to show him how much richer he would be with an approving conscience and the smile of God, even in poverty, if the Lord should so will, than with wealth and affluence in his present wretched state of mind. I afterwards learnt who he was, and was most thankful to find that he had followed the light, and given up the ungodly alliance. Now, I say, this young man might have wept himself into the grave, and never have regained his peace, unless he had RENOUNCED HIS SIN. It was utterly useless telling him to exercise faith for deliverance. It was as impossible for him to believe as it was for him to fly, while he was maintaining this controversy with his conscience and with the Spirit. He must FIRST put away the evil, and then it was easy to believe.

Another case illustrative of what I have been saying occurred in connection with my labours in the North of England. The gentleman in whose house I was staying said to me, one morning, on our return from the chapel, 'Do you know what I have done? I have 'thrown my pipe and cigars and tobacco-box on to the 'dunghill and I have made up my mind to smoke no I more.' He then said that he had waged a controversy with his conscience and with the Spirit of God for fifteen years about this paltry gratification, living in a state of perpetual condemnation, and sacrificing the power and usefulness which he had once realised for the sake of this idol. Immediately on putting away the indulgence, peace was restored to his soul, and he began to labour for the Lord as in days gone by.

I could give numbers of similar illustrations; but these will suffice to show you that it matters not whether the controverted practice involves the loss of hundreds of pounds, or only of a pipe of tobacco. It is not the greatness or smallness of the matter in itself, but the principle of obedience which is involved in the controversy. While there is a vestige of insubordination to the requirements of conscience and of God, there can be no peace. On this point thousands of professing Christians mistake. They allow themselves in things which they feel to be unlawful, and then strive and pray to obtain a sense of acceptance through Christ. They want the Spirit to witness with their spirits that their ways please God, while they know that their ways are such as CANNOT please Him: therefore, they want the Spirit to witness to a lie, which is impossible.

No! my backsliding friend, there is but one way back to peace and joy and usefulness, and that is your Lord's own way--repentance, which always implies forsaking sin, putting away the evil. Christ Jesus is too much in love with His Father's will to dwell with those who will not obey it; the unalterable condition of His presence and His smile is doing the will of His Father. The "sons of God are led by the Spirit of God;" and if you refuse to be thus led, you cannot have the spirit of adoption. Do you see this? Do you feel it? If so, will you put away those sins and iniquities which have separated you from your God? Will you let your idols go, and now for ever renounce all that is contrary to His holy will? If you will, you will find it easy to take the next step in your Lord's way of restoration; nay, you will come with gladness to do "your first works."

3. I think the Lord has enabled me to show you that restoration to first love is impossible without the renunciation of evil; so I think, by the aid of the Blessed Spirit, I shall be able to show that it is equally impossible without consecration to known duty. I have known backsliders in heart who have "remembered" till their hearts have been well-nigh broken, and who, I believe, have honestly put away the occasions of their backsliding, who have nevertheless shrunk from embracing the cross in the form of some suffering or duty to which the Spirit has called them, and thus have found it impossible to exercise

the faith necessary to their healing.

I once knew a widow lady, who, though she tried every method, and that for a long time, to regain her peace, could not, because she refused to conduct family prayers, to which duty the Spirit of God urged her. I have known others who have felt that they ought to confess their backsliding state, and they have tried anything and everything else in vain, but immediately on confessing have obtained a sense of acceptance. I have known some who have felt it a duty to be baptised, but refused because of the cross, but they got no peace till they yielded. I know a lady who maintained a controversy with the Spirit for four years, about giving up her husband to a work to which she believed God had called him, but which involved much sacrifice and trial. Many a time she said, with anguish of spirit, "Anything but this Lord!" but this was the very thing which the Lord required; and not until, like Abraham, she gave up the best beloved of her soul to the will of God, did she recover her peace and joy. I am acquainted with a minister, who, after trying for a long time to lead a deeply convicted sinner into faith, paused, and said, 'Excuse me, madam, but I think there is something that you are not willing to give up, or to do.' After a few minutes' silence, she burst out weeping afresh, and, after a terrible struggle, said, 'Oh, I cannot forgive the murderer of my husband.' Surely if any compromise in the conditions of salvation were possible in any case, it was in this. But no; the Spirit of God had already shown that lady what hindered her reception of Christ, and instead of urging her to believe, that minister, as a wise co-worker with the Spirit, told her that difficult as the duty might appear, she must embrace it and forgive the man who had so deeply injured her. She made the effort; that is, her will submitted and immediately the Spirit helped her infirmities, and enabled her fully and freely to forgive. Almost at the same moment she was enabled to believe unto salvation.

I might give you numbers of similar cases which have come under my own observation, but I trust these will be sufficient to show what I mean by consecration as a condition of faith. I think I may say, without exaggeration, that I have conversed with hundreds of backsliders of different degrees, and I never knew one restored to first love who refused compliance with known duty. "To him who knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" and in wilful sin there is no salvation. Do you see this, my dear friends, you who are mourning an absent God? Are you willing to consecrate yourselves this day unto the Lord? Do you honestly renounce those things through which you have lost your peace, and brought leanness into your souls? Do you embrace the will, the whole will of God, as your rule of life? Will you bring into His store-house the tithes of a wholehearted service, and a cheerful obedience? In short, will you give Him that which, He claims, yourself and your all? If so, His word to you is, "I will heal your backslidings, I will love you freely; for mine anger is turned away from you;" "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord."

Satan tempts you to shrink from a full consecration for fear you should not be able to live up to it; but if you will comply with the conditions, God will fulfil this promise. If you will only yield yourself up without reserve, He will work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Hear your Lord's Word; "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." Surely, with the Father and Son, you will be able to do and suffer all things. The reason for your past failures has been the WANT of God. When God comes to dwell in you, when He betroths you to Him in faithfulness for ever, you will fail no more; His strength will be made perfect in your weakness; you will be able to do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth you.

I doubt not some of you are saying, 'How shall I realise the fulfilment of these blessed promises?' I answer, by simple faith. Just as you trusted at first for justification, and rested not on your feelings, but on his PROMISES, so now you must cast yourself on His blessed assurances of healing and of strength. Having the testimony of your own spirit that you comply with the conditions, in putting away the evil and embracing the will of God, you have nothing to do but to throw yourself on His bosom, and rest in His love. The mercy-seat is sprinkled with the blood of an all-sufficient atonement, so that He can receive and pardon even backsliders, if they will only believe. He says, "Return unto Me and I will heal your backslidings." NOW you DO return, will you not believe that He heals you? He says He will; dare you make Him a liar? You have no alternative. If you come, He either does, or does not receive you. He says He does. O believe Him, and He will betroth you unto Him in faithfulness for ever.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/catherine-booth/heart-backsliding/>

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