

Backsliders; Saved or Lost?

by John R. Rice

The backslider still has salvation and eternal life, despite their sins, due to God's mercy and love.

Scripture: Hosea 11:8, John 3:36, John 10:27, Romans 4:7, Romans 11:29, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Eternal Security", "Gods Mercy"

Description

John R. Rice preaches about the backslider's status as a child of God, emphasizing that despite deserving punishment for disobedience, every born-again child of God who falls into sin remains God's child. He highlights that salvation is not earned through works but is a gift of grace, citing Ephesians 2:8-9. Rice reassures that God's love for His backslidden children never fails, drawing parallels to earthly parental love and referencing Hosea 11:8-9 to illustrate God's unwavering mercy. He concludes by urging backsliders to return to God's loving embrace, emphasizing that God's forgiveness and eternal life are steadfast for those who believe in Christ.

Transcript

Everywhere people want to know whether the backslider is saved or lost. After one has sinned, is he still a child of God? When he has lost the joy of salvation, does he still have the salvation?

Well, the answer to this question is that the backslider does not deserve to be saved but deserves to go to Hell; that other people will often think that he is not saved; that he himself is likely to doubt his salvation or to believe that God has forsaken him utterly; but, thank God, the backslider still is a child of God. He is a disobedient child of God and he will be punished for it, yet every born-again child of God who falls into sin is still God's child.

It is true that the backslider does not deserve salvation. What a tragedy when a child of God brings reproach on the cause of Christ! It may be an outrageous sin such as drunkenness or adultery. Or it may be sins like the sins of those other backsliders - Noah, Lot, David. Or it may be a backsliding in the heart that does not seem so bad to outsiders but really results in damning souls that might have been won.

Who knows whether in God's sight a cold heart, that does not win souls and never has the anointing for power, may be more wicked than the man who is tempted and falls into drink or blasphemy or adultery! What could be worse than letting a soul go to Hell for millions of years because of our carelessness, our love for the things of this life? But in either case, the backslider deserves nothing good from God. That means that I ought to have gone to Hell long ago! How many times I have failed God! How many vows I

have broken! How many duties I have neglected!

But then the same thing could be said about every Christian in the world. We deserve nothing good from God. No one does. It would have served us right for Him to let us all go to Hell.

But, thanks be to God, my salvation is not depending upon my works. I did not deserve salvation when I got it, and I have never deserved it any thirty seconds since that time! Salvation is all of grace. How sweet to all of us poor sinners is Ephesians 2:8,9, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." And when we get to Heaven there will not be one living soul who can say, "I deserved this. I earned my way to Heaven." No, how our hearts will run over with gratitude and rejoicing when we say there that

Jesus paid it all,

All to Him I owe;

Sin had left a crimson stain,

He washed it white as snow.

And that is true of my life today as it was the first day I trusted Jesus as my Saviour. Oh, thank God for His mercy that never fails! He saves every sinner who trusts in Him, and He keeps every one of His erring children. He chastises them but He does not lose them.

Not only does the backslider not deserve his salvation, but others will often judge him and think he is not saved. Had I seen Noah lying drunk and naked in his tent, I might have said, "You old hypocrite! God ought to have let you die in the flood with the rest of the drunkards!" I would have thought, perhaps, that there was no difference in Noah's lying there drunk and another man whom I saw two days ago lying drunk outside a saloon in Philadelphia.

I think my indignation would have mounted high against David had I been there and had I known how he seduced Bathsheba and had her husband killed. I might well have thought, "You hypocrite, you psalm-singing sinner! You pious adulterer and murderer! You ought to be in Hell!" Had I been the judge, I probably would have sent David on to Hell.

So with Lot down in Sodom, calling those wicked, licentious wretches "brethren." So with Peter when he cursed and denied that he even knew Christ. Doubtless I would have thought he was unconverted. If God had left it to me, I might have sent these backsliders on to Hell. Certainly I would have doubted their sincerity when they told me that they loved God.

Oh, but I would not have known the agony in David's heart which later found expression in the pleading confession of the fifty-first Psalm! And I could not have known the distress of soul in Peter as, weeping bitterly, he went out into the cool morning of that spring day after he had denied the Saviour! And I could not have known that Lot "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" down in Sodom, as II Peter 2:8 says happened.

The backslider in heart still has in him the voice of God, still has dwelling in him the Spirit of God, and is still God's child. Others will criticize and judge him and think him unsaved.

Even the backslider himself may feel that he is unsaved. In the first chapter of II Peter we are urged to add certain graces so that we will not be as backsliders - barren and unfruitful. Verse 9 says: "but he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." How many Christians have forgotten that they were purged from their old sins! There are many, no doubt, who give up their hope.

I remember when I gave mine up. When I asked to join the church after my profession of faith, my father thought I was too young to be saved, so he discouraged me. Then I threw all my hope away. For three years I had no joy and no assurance of salvation.

Many a man tells me, "Well, I thought I was saved once, but I guess I was not." A letter came this week from a good woman who told me of her temper, her harsh words to her husband and children, of grudges that arose in her heart. She said: "Could I be a Christian and be like this?"

So backsliders lose the joy of salvation and lose the assurance of salvation, too. How many decide that God has forsaken them! They know that they were once saved, but now that they have fallen into sin, they do not have any joy. They feel that God does not love them any more. Only day before yesterday a sad-faced woman came to tell me how she had been so preoccupied and had so neglected prayer and the Lord's Word that she felt perhaps she had committed the unpardonable sin! In fact, of the scores of people who come to me wondering if they have committed the unpardonable sin, perhaps not one of them has, but all are backslidden Christians. If one had really committed the unpardonable sin, he would not be worried about it. He would not hear God's Spirit calling. Besides, the unpardonable sin is committed only by lost people. But backsliders often feel that God has forsaken them forever.

Thanks be to God, that is not true! God never forsakes one of His own, even though we sin grievously and even though He may punish us severely. The backslider is still God's child and is still saved.

I have six daughters. Though they are precious children whom I love dearly, they are not little angels who can do no wrong. Sometimes they have been so bad that I felt I must punish them severely. I have had to lay on the whip or a heavy leather belt while they cried and begged for another chance. It was not easy at all. But you may be sure that when the whipping was over, they were still my children. They never lost their place at the table, nor their bed in the home, nor the love of a father's heart when they did wrong. I punished my children when they needed it, but they are still my children.

And is God a poorer Father than I? Do you think God's love for His children is weaker than a father's love for his children? Would God forsake one of His own quicker than a human parent would? How strange to ask such a question! It answers itself! God punishes His backslidden children and grieves over them but He never forsakes a one of them.

In Hosea, the book about backsliding Israel, is a precious word. Chapter 11, verse 7, says:

"And my people are bent to backsliding from me."

But now let us read the next two verses, Hosea 11:8,9:

"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city."

Do you see the yearning heart of God after Ephraim and Israel? How would He be content to deal with them as with the wicked in Admah and Zeboim, the towns destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah? In the midst of His chastising, God's heart was turned back toward Israel and He was repenting from even the punishment. And so God says: "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man."

God's love does not fail, as a man's love fails. A mother may forsake her sucking child, but God will not forsake one of His own! A father might drive his wayward son from the door, but never will God drive one of His own away, for He is God and not man. Men may criticize the backslider and judge him and say he is not saved, but God is not a man. His mercy is beyond human mercy, His love is greater than any human love.

How sweet is the promise of the Lord to David and his seed in Psalm 89:30-34:

"If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments: Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

If David and his descendants, the kings of Judah, should break God's statutes and keep not His commandments, then God promised to visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes; but God would never utterly take His loving kindness from these, and God's faithfulness would not fail, and God would never break His covenant nor change the thing He promised! That is the way God deals with men.

In my boyhood I remember hearing a cowboy preacher on that great text, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). And that saintly but unlettered preacher went on to recount that in all his dealings with God, he (the preacher) had never needed to repent of anything God had done for him. He had never been sorry of any gift God had given him. I thought it was a great sermon, and it was. But when I commented on it to my father, he showed me that that man of God had missed the meaning entirely!

God does not mean that we shall never repent of His gifts and His callings. Rather, He promises that He will never repent, will never change, will never turn from one of His gifts and one of His callings. Oh, we who have been called of God to be saints, we who are His born-again children, we who have the promise of everlasting life and a home in Heaven, may be sure that God will never repent in this matter. He will not change His calling nor take back His gift, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

The sins of the backslider are all laid on Jesus, are already blotted out, are already forgiven. When Jesus died, He died for all my sins. When I trusted Him, I trusted Him for forgiveness for all of them - the sins of the future as well as those of the past. And so David cries exultantly, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:7,8). The backslider is a blessed man "unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6).

Jesus promised, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The backslider deserves to be cast out, but he does not get what he deserves, God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. God keeps His covenant and fulfills all His guarantees.

God promised to all who believe in Christ "everlasting life" and "eternal life." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Notice the "hath" which means "has." One who trusted Christ already has everlasting life. And Jesus said in John 6:47. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." And John 5:24 says that one who has trusted in Him has everlasting life and shall not ever come into condemnation but is already passed out of death into life. Everlasting life is for the backslider, and all of us who have put our trust in Christ are at times backsliders, but we still have what God Himself gave us out of His own abundance, everlasting life.

The Holy Spirit lives in the body of every Christian. When the Christian sins, that unease, that unrest, that conviction which he has, is wrought in him by the blessed Holy Spirit who still goes with the backslider and never leaves him. The backslider is one of God's sheep, and Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice. and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27,28).

Bless God for that promise! The word man in this verse is in italics in your Bible which means it was not in the original. Actually that verse says: "Neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." No man nor devil, not even self, can pluck a child of God, one of God's sheep, from His hand, for He has already given him eternal life and such shall never perish, He says!

O backslider, remember that you have a place still in the Father's house! Arise from the hog pen of sin! Come back home for the Father's kiss of forgiveness and the ring of assurance of sonship and the fatted calf of rejoicing! God loves you still! You are His own, dear to His heart, bought with the blood of His Son. He will not let you go!

Years ago I read in a Chicago paper in the personals column a classified ad that stirred my heart, and I have never forgotten it. It ran about like this:

"Emma, please come home. Mother is sick and is calling for you. All if forgiven. Dad."

I do not know what poor girl had broken the hearts of her father and mother, had gone down in sin with her wild companions so that she felt a stranger at home and thought that they no longer loved her. But whoever she was and wherever she was, they loved her still. The sick mother's heart could not be comforted without her daughter. So the father paid for the ad in a million copies of a newspaper, longing for Emma to see it and to know that she was still loved and was forgiven, and that they wanted her to come home.

O backslider, I broadcast this plea from the Father's house, that you are to come on Home! God loves you still. His heart yearns over you, and He will never let you go! Oh, come on back from your wandering and make God's heart glad today!

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