

Why People Backslide; the Old Adamic Nature

by John R. Rice

John R. Rice explores the reasons behind Christian backsliding, emphasizing the struggle with the old Adamic nature and the importance of confession and reliance on God's grace for victory over sin.

Scripture: Hosea 4:16, Hosea 6:1, Hosea 11:7, Romans 7:14, Romans 8:19

Topics: "Carnal Nature", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

John R. Rice shares a personal testimony of struggling with backsliding, making promises to God but repeatedly failing, until he learned the reality of having an old carnal nature alongside a new nature in Christ. He emphasizes that the tendency to sin is inherent in every believer since Adam's fall, and the constant battle between the flesh and the spirit is a common experience. Rice highlights the importance of daily confession, dependence on God's mercy for forgiveness, and the need for self-judgment to overcome the carnal nature and avoid backsliding.

Transcript

I remember when I first became conscious of my backsliding. I had been saved at about nine years of age. I had trusted Christ to forgive me, and I am sure He did. Three years later I joined the church, was baptized, and had received full assurance that my sins were forgiven. But my mother was dead, and my boyhood companions in the wild west Texas cow town were rough and wicked. One day it dawned on me that I had drifted far from God in my heart, I had grieved Him in my life. I had gotten to the place where prayer was not a joy and the Bible was not sweet.

I was attending special services in a little Presbyterian church. Many young people found Christ, and many Christians had their joy restored. I alone seemed left without a blessing. How sweet was the singing! What a light on the faces of the happy people! And one night as they sang,

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,

Hear my humble cry;

While on others Thou art calling,

Do not pass me by.

I cried out, "Lord. is everybody going to get a blessing but me? Do not pass me by!"

And, thank God, all the joy came back and peace flooded my soul! I knew that my failures and my sins had been forgiven. It was as definite as if my Father had taken me in His arms and kissed away my tears and told me so!

As I walked home across the prairie that night and looked up at the stars, I made a vow to God, "O God. I will never fail You again! I will never forget my prayer time. I will never give way to temptation and sin!" You may well smile; I think perhaps a loving and kindly God smiled at my great promises that night. How well He knew my sinful nature, my frailty and sin!

It was not more than two weeks before I had sinned in a way that shocked me terribly, though I do not now remember the details. I found my joy gone. And when I went to God in prayer to confess my sins, again I made great promises, "God, I failed You this time, but if You will give me one more chance, I will not fail You again. I promise You I will be more faithful. I will be true this time, if You will only try me once more!" How little I knew that God wanted trust instead of promises, that He wanted me to depend upon Him instead of on myself. But He again gave me sweet peace.

But the tragic story was repeated, until in despair I felt I had lied to God, had failed Him, and that He must be so disappointed in me that He would never trust me again, and would never give me back the joy of His presence.

At long last I learned that I have an evil nature as well as a new nature which is from God. Like every child of God, I am two persons in one. I am the old man I was before I was saved, with a human body and human frailty and a human tendency toward sin; I am also a new creature in Christ who loves the Lord and hates sin. And I learned that God knows all about me, and that what He wants me to do is to regularly confess my sins and earnestly turn from them, depending on His never-failing mercy to forgive and cleanse, as He promised to do.

So the reason that people backslide is this old carnal nature that every saint of God has. The best people that ever lived have had a constant tendency toward sin ever since Adam (and with him the whole race) fell.

It is easier to do wrong than it is to do right. It is easier to tell a lie than it is to tell the truth. Honest, good people have to continually watch themselves so they will be accurate and truthful in their speech and to avoid deceit. It is easier to loaf than it is to work. The best Christians in the world have to watch themselves and set themselves to work diligently, to do their duty. It is easier to get angry than it is to be even-tempered, forgiving and sweet. Even Christians sometimes have to "count ten" before they speak. And how often we have to confess that we have sinned with a sharp tongue or a critical spirit.

The book of Hosea is a book on backsliding. There the prophet often speaks of Israel as if the nation were an individual who had gone away from God. And in Hosea 4:16 he says, "Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer." In Hosea 6:1 he says, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." And then Hosea 11:7 says, "And my people are bent to backsliding from me."

BENT TO BACKSLIDING! God's people are bent to backsliding from Him. Oh, how true that is of every one of us!

That blessed old song, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," has the revealing heart-cry of every Christian that ever found himself a backslider. It says,

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;

Prone to leave the God I love"!

The modernists do not like that, so have changed it in some song books, but it is still true that all of the people of God are prone to wander. We are prone to leave the God we love. We are "bent to backsliding," as God's Word puts it.

An old proverb says, "As the twig is bent, the tree is inclined." And all of us were bent when we were twigs. We were bent before we were born! We were bent away from God by nature when Adam fell. And not until Christians get a resurrected body, with no more disease, no more gray hairs, no more weakness. will we have our old carnal natures perfectly redeemed and the curse entirely removed.

Holiness people sometimes claim that the carnal nature has been eradicated in them, that the fire of God has burned it all out. Yet. strangely enough, they too backslide.

At Des Moines, Iowa, a sad-faced man attended my services who told me he had been a Holiness preacher but was at the time living in the grossest sin and did not even claim to be a Christian. The facts belied his doctrine. The carnal nature had not been taken away.

Thank God, we can have day-by-day victory over the carnal nature by judging self, by confessing our sins, and by having daily cleansing; but we still have the carnal nature; and that is why people backslide.

The struggle all real Christians have today, Paul had too. We read in Romans 7:14-25:

"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

As a Christian, Paul did things he did not want to do and ought not to have done. With his mind he served the law of God, but with his flesh the law of sin. Even in the last verse quoted above where Paul could thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord for the possibility of deliverance, he followed that statement by this: "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Paul did not condone his sin, and neither should we. Paul knew that he could have daily victory over it, and so can we. But we must not deny the presence of this old sinful nature. We need constantly to be on our guard, and we need to be continually confessing and forsaking our sin to have daily cleansing and to keep on walking in the light.

And Christians who understand this truth can understand the further truth in the eighth chapter, where Paul looked forward so grandly to the glory that should be revealed, for "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." And then he tells how the creature shall one day be delivered from this bondage of corruption into glorious liberty, and that the whole creation groans together, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption, of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23).

Christian, do you find yourself "bent to backsliding"? Then you are like Paul and like every other born-again child of God. But, thank God, there is victory for you through Christ, as I will show you soon.

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