

Backsliding and The Christian

Explore Your Faith Teaching Series - Explo-21 [©]

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OUTLINE

Introduction:

The Bible gives us plenty of encouragement; but its wisdom includes solemn warnings too. This is so that we do not become complacent and so that we are always on guard against the schemes of the enemy.

This study on **backsliding** comes under the banner of 'Christian living'.

It is not the loss of salvation but the loss of peace, and the assurance of God's presence that are at stake here.

The study explores the meaning, the process, and the effects of backsliding.

It includes examples from both the Old and New Testaments.

This study is concerned with helping us to be aware that though God keeps us by his grace and strength (2 Tim. 1:12), if we choose to deliberately refuse this grace and assistance, we can fall away. It comes under what may appropriately be called 'Christian living' (i.e. *how we should live*).

All Christians need to know and understand these solemn warnings, not just for their own strengthening, but also that they might be able to give **godly advice** to others. Renewing the mind involves re-thinking some of the things we will be looking at in this study.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

"Wherefore let him that thinks he stand, take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

What is backsliding?

Backsliding generally is about growing cold and losing interest in the Lord, the Bible, Church attendance and witnessing, and turning back towards the world.

Turning away from God-1 Kings 11:9 (Solomon makes the Lord angry).

Growing cold, leaving your first love ((Rev. 2:4 - the church at Ephesus).

Turning away from the simplicity of the gospel to live under the law again (Gal. 5:4).

Refusing to deal with the prompting of the Holy Spirit in relation to your sanctification.

How does it happen?

Important to remember:

Firstly, that it is a *gradual process*. It is not easily discernible. That's why we need to be watchful!

Secondly, it is *progressive*. *There are downward (degrading steps) that lead to eventual falling away.*

Psalm 1 gives us an indication of how this progression takes place (walk, stand, and sit). Think about this!

The story of Lot illustrates this downward descent Genesis 13: 10 ff)

He coveted (v 10)- "beheld all the plain"

He made a wrong choice (what looked good)

He compromised (pitched his tent next to Sodom -thought he would not be affected)

He fell captive (if one life near sin one will be captured- note it follows 'compromise')

He became carnal "sat in the gate", (Gen. 19:1) (*Remember Psalm 1?*) - He became a member, one of them. He had gained worldly influence but lost his spiritual influence. Thought like them.

He succumbed to sin (Gen. 19:8) He was willing to give his two daughters into sin. Important to see how this downfall led to his daughters' downfall (see Also Rom. 14:7). Later in Gen. 19: 33-38, we find some other repercussions.

Important to understand that in all of this Lot was still reckoned "a righteous man", one whom God vindicated by saving him from the destruction of Gomorrah. (See 2 Pe. 2: 6-8) Nevertheless, his actions did not protect his family; even though he hated the wickedness around him and knew the dangers his family were in, he did not attempt to take them away from that influence.

In the Old Testament, we see God's crediting someone with "righteousness" was because they believed God. We see that was true of Noah for example (Heb. 11:7) and Abraham: despite Abraham's many faults, he was still reckoned 'righteous' because of his faith.

Under the New Covenant, righteousness is credited to us based on belief in Christ.

What was true for Lot is also true for every one of us. That's why the Bible warns us continually 'to be alert'- or suffer the consequences!

Some examples of backsliding

Solomon's love of women (Nehemiah 13:26) caused him to worship other Gods.

Achan's love of gold and silver (Joshua 7 1:24) led to his destruction.

Saul's disobedience led to his losing the throne (1 Sam. 15:11).

The nation of Israel constantly went after false Gods (idolatry) and suffered the consequences of their sin.

Judas Iscariot, though he walked with Jesus, was drawn away by his love of money, and lost (John 13:29).

Demas' love of the world caused him to desert his mission with Paul (2 Tim. 4:10).

Peter denied Jesus because of fear (Matt. 26:70-74), but was brought back.

Results of backsliding

There will be a loss of power, a loss of peace, a loss of joy, and the assurance of God's presence.

(Continual murmuring and grumbling are good indications of the clouding that begins to enter the life of one who is in the process of backsliding).

Note: this is not to be confused with temporary trials, difficulties hardships etc., that assail each of us from time to time, but rather something that grows in ascendancy in our lives).

Backsliding leads to the loss of rewards and the person "will suffer loss" (1 Cor. 3:15).

What is the antidote?

Put in place some simple spiritual disciplines to develop and strengthen us:

1. **Have a regular quiet time.** If a couple, pray together. Seek God's face; all other things will be given us because of seeking Him.

2. **Submit to have others pray for you** and to uphold you in prayer. Pride is present when we do not allow this.

3. **Read the Bible.** This means all of God's counsel, not just the parts you like! 2 Tim. 2:15 say "show yourself approved". This is not an option; it is a strong recommendation that carries consequences. To not read the word of God (when you claim to be a Christian) amounts to disobedience.

4. **Listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.** We are exhorted "to grieve not the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 4:30). Hardness of heart develops by not listening to God's correction.

5. **Confess Christ.** See Matthew 10:33 (see how important this is!) Confessing Christ is an antidote to loneliness and depression (see Rom 10:11)

6. **Do not forsake the company of other Christians** (Hebrews 10:25). This is vital! We cannot have fellowship with God in isolation from other fellow Christians.

7. **Never forget that God is a forgiving god!** If we have strayed he welcomes us back when we return. In fact he continually invites us to return (Jer. 3:22) and pardons us when we do (Hosea. 14:4).

8. Finally, **BE STRONG IN THE LORD.** Simply, this means experiencing the joy of his salvation. **The joy of the lord is our strength.**

Conclusion

