

The prodigal returns. (Luke 15)

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee... And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Luke 15:11-32

When a child runs away from its home because it has a brutal parent, it is excused; but when the child leaves a tender mother and an affectionate father, what shall we say? If the sheep quits a barren field to seek after needed pasturage, who shall blame it? But if it leaves the green pastures, and forsakes the still waters to roam over the arid sand, or to go bleating in the forest among the wolves, in the midst of danger, how foolish a creature it proves itself! We have forsaken a throne for a dunghill! We have left gold for dross ... and the blossoming of the roses ... to shiver in frozen regions among the ice caves and snow of absence from the Lord's presence." **Charles Spurgeon.**

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"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings ..." Jeremiah 3:22

'The Backslider in Heart'

DIANE DEW

In the book of the prophet Hosea is described the undying love of God toward a people whose hearts have wandered far from His ways. Here are expressed the deep, inner longings and desire of his heart to woo them and win them back by His love. "I will heal their backsliding," He promises; "I will love them freely..." (Hos 14:4) The word "backslide" literally means "turn back" or "turn away" (from God, 1 Ki 11:9; from our first love, Rev 2:4; or from the gospel, Gal 1:6, 7; 3:1-5; to Satan, 1 Tim 5:15; to evil, Psa 125:5; or to the world, 2 Tim 4:10). Scripture metaphorically describes the backslidden state as: serving two masters, forsaking the Lord, going our own way, leaving our first love, forgetting God, falling away, turning aside ("like a deceitful bow," Jer 14:7), growing cold, departing from the faith, putting a hand to the plow and looking back (Lk 9:62), "salt that has lost its savour" (Mat 5:13), "a dog returning to his vomit" (Prov 26:11), a dead branch (Jn 15:6; Heb 6:8).

With the abundance of Bibles in America, a church in every neighborhood; and bookstores, tape ministries, and nationwide religious television and radio, why do they backslide? How do they fall? The backslider does not suddenly wake up one morning and go out and commit adultery. Over a period of time, he may have become lax in his thought life, or entertained fleshly desires. King David watched Bathsheba undress, and soon it was but a little step for him to give expression to the imagination of his heart.

Characteristics of the Backslidden Condition

Spiritual decay is a gradual process. If it came as a splash of cold water in the face on a sweltering day, we'd recognize it for what it is. But Satan is sly, and his tactics are subtle. Even as the onslaught of many diseases can be insidious, the wasting away that occurs in the heart of the backslider may be nearly imperceptible. It may begin with a general feeling of spiritual indifference (Amos 6:1). As we fail to focus upon spiritual things, the flesh seeks fulfillment. Initially, the prayer life may be crowded out with other interests – even innocent pastimes: sports, hobbies, television. As we fill our hearts and lives with junk food, our hunger for the Word diminishes. Church attendance usually slackens off (though some continue in a state of hypocrisy), and relationships undergo extreme stress, as the conviction of the Holy Spirit becomes increasingly uncomfortable. As we ignore God's appeals to return (2 Ki 17:15), our zeal and concern for souls subsides, due to a sense of guilt and hypocrisy. In time, the fear of God departs and a complete re-ordering of priorities in our life occurs. An overall feeling of loss and lack of purpose causes great discontentment of heart. Then one day, we realize that our abhorrence of sin is gone. It becomes easy to justify actions we never otherwise would have considered acceptable. And since our sensitivity to spiritual things is not what it used to be, we may sense very little guilt. The calloused heart becomes stone; our conscience, "seared" (1 Tim 4:2). Now, the farther we stray, the more distant the voice of God becomes, and the more difficult it seems to find our way back.

Even while struggling in a fallen state, the backslider may verbally identify himself with the Lord (Hos 8:2; Lk 6:46). The inconsistencies in his life, "like the morning dew" which comes and goes, may disturb him (Hos 6:4); but more often he will be blind to his own spiritual state (Hos 7:9; Rev 3:17, 18). An over-confidence in one's former standing with God (as opposed to confidence in God) can falsely convince an individual that God will overlook his present conduct (Hos 7:2). Some have a propensity to falter; "they keep on backsliding." They are "bent to backsliding" (Hos 11:7). Their condition appears "perpetual" (Jer 8:5; 14:7). "Their hearts are always going astray ..." (Heb 3:10) Even as individuals vary in their degrees of spirituality or commitment (Col 1:23), some are more prone to falling away, by reason of choice (personal weakness). Like a garden that must be carefully tilled and weeded (Hos 10:12; Mat 13), our spiritual lives require diligent attention (2 Tim 2:15, 21; 2 Pe 1:5-7). Neglect and laziness, as well as trampling the vines, can wreak havoc.

Backsliding is, as the word implies, a sliding back – not a jump off a cliff, but a coasting downhill. We cannot ascend the mount of God in neutral. Spiritual growth requires a conscious effort, or it will be only "natural" that we succumb to the ways of the flesh. The condition, however, while not sudden in onset, may escalate rapidly. All it takes is "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest..." (Prov 8:10; 24:33). "A little leaven ferments the whole lump" (Gal 5:9). "... the little foxes... spoil the vines." (Song of Sol 2:15) Satan tempted Jesus when He was physically weak (fasting), and he attacks us at our weakest times, in our weakest areas. An A-student might not be tempted to cheat, but to become proud of his achievements. The Christian might never be tempted to murder, but faces countless opportunities to hate or speak evil of his brother.

The backslidden condition may be manifested externally (in cursing, drinking, lying, etc.); but it occurs in the heart (Prov 14:14) Often concealed in secret (2 Ki 17:9), the backslider's condition may remain hidden behind a facade of religiosity. We can have all the right doctrines, and bear every appearance of honor among men – yet still be filled with lust, jealousy, bitterness, etc. The wayward heart, however, does not long tarry near the altar of God, but squirms under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and writhes in discontent. Although backsliding begins in the

heart and mind (Prov 14:14; 2 Corin 11:3; Col 2:8), however, the condition eventually becomes evident externally. Jesus said that a person's inward spiritual condition becomes obvious by the fruit he bears. Paul said it is possible to profess the truth verbally ("with their mouth") but deny the Lord in our actions (Tit1:16). If our lives fail to measure up to our profession of faith (1 Tim 5:8), our actions will declare our words obsolete (1 Corin 13). Even the term "believer," as used in the New Testament, is not a noun but a participle: "one who is believing." Christianity is not a one-time trip to the altar, but a day-by-day walk of life and faith in Jesus Christ.

Backsliders in Scripture

One need not look long in Scripture to find examples of the backslidden. Israel's repeated backslidings are well documented, as are those of many Old Testament individuals: Lot, Gen 19:1-22; Saul, 1 Sam 15:11, 26-28; Amon, 2 Ki 21:22, 23; Rehoboam, 2 Chron 12:1, 2; Asa, 2 Chron 16:7-9; Joash, 2 Chron 24:24; Amaziah, 2 Chron 25:27; etc. Scripture tells us that "when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God... And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice." (1 Ki 11:4, 9; cp. vv. 4-40; Neh 13:26)

From the life of David we learn how yielding to one sin, lust, can quickly lead to others: drunkenness, adultery, even murder (2 Sam 11:1-5, 13; 12:1-13). Severe consequences of our actions can remain, even though an offense has been forgiven. David suffered tremendous grief at the death of the son born of an ungodly union. His great anguish of heart, as one who experienced the Presence of God but abandoned His ways, is expressed in Psalms 51:1-19 and 61:10-12. While the spiritual condition of an individual within a church may reflect upon the leadership, this is not always the case. Even some disciples of Jesus (perfect teacher that he was) "went back and walked no more with Him" (Mat 26:56; John 6:66) Some fell away but returned – including Thomas, who had his moment of unbelief (John 20:27-29); and Peter, who denied the Lord in the face of persecution (Mat 26:70-74; Mk 14:72). "Satan hath desired to sift you as wheat," Jesus told Peter; "but I have prayed for you, that you do not fail." (Lk 22:31, 32)

Paul, too, expressed concern over believers in the early church, that they remain in the faith (1 Corin 5:1-13). At times, entire churches are mentioned as having backslidden: The Corinthian church (2 Corin 12:20, 21); the Galatian church (Gal 1:6; 3:1; 4:9-11; 5:6, 70); the churches of Asia (1 Tim 5:15; 2 Tim 1:15; Revel 2:4, 14, 15, 20; 3:2, 3, 15-18). The New Testament mentions many backsliders by name: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19, 20); Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1:15); Demas (2 Tim 4:10). Yet, even of those who followed, some, "having loved this present world," "turned aside" and fell away (1 Tim 1:18-20; 5:15; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:17, 18; 4:10-16).

The Conditional Aspects of Christianity

"If you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." Colossians 1:23

Life is filled with choices. Daily, we make decisions that may draw us nearer to God, or cause us to fall away. We also have an enemy, whose purpose it is to render us ineffective for the kingdom. His desire is to discredit and disprove both the work and the word of God, by weighing down (Lk 22:31) and wearing down (Dan 12:7) the saints. Satan seeks to strip us of our spiritual strength, by tempting us to exert our efforts elsewhere. If he cannot convince us to commit an obviously outrageous offense, he will crowd our lives with other interests: "the cares of this world." It is not necessary to turn a cup upside down, to displace its contents. It can just as easily be emptied by the introduction of other matter. As we fill the cup with sand, the water will spill out. As it is in the natural, so it is in the spirit. Scripture speaks as much of backsliding as it does of getting saved – and not surprisingly. Once an individual begins on the Way, his problems do not cease. Quite the contrary. As an unbeliever, he was just where Satan wanted him. He posed no threat to his kingdom. To deceive and mislead the elect, however, Satan will work overtime. Obedience to Christ is not optional. It never has been an elective in the course of the Christian walk (Mat 19:17; Jn 8:31). While our salvation is completely unmerited, many promises of God are conditional upon our obedience to His Word: "If you..." (Deut 7:12; 11:13, 22, 27; 28:1, 2, 9, 13; 30:10; 1 Sam 1:19, 20; 12:14, 15; 2 Chron 7:17, 19; 1 Ki 9:4; Jer 22:4, 5; 1 Corin 10:12; 11:28, 31; 2 Corin 13:5; Col 1:23).

- Long life & health: Ex 15:26; 1 Ki 3:14
- God's Presence: 1 Ki 11:38
- Success: 1 Chron 22:13
- Victory over the enemy: 1 Sam 7:3
- Inner strength & satisfaction: Ex 18:23
- God's treasure: Ex 19:5

Thus, when we wander outside the boundaries of His will, we tread on territory that is dangerous – not only spiritually, but emotionally, psychologically, even physically. In the sense that there is also a loss of balance and stability, backsliding is also a "falling away." But it is always the result of personal choice: 2 Chron 24:20; 15:2-4; Isa 30:9, 15; 2 Tim 2:12. "The Lord is with you while you be with Him..."

The Causes of Backsliding

"Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord? Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you..." Jeremiah 2:17, 19

The causes of backsliding are many and varied. Some are hidden; others are obvious. But the usual tendency is to emphasize the externals: pornography, illicit sexual relationships, drunkenness, etc. The lack of positive, spiritual input (prayer and Bible study), however, has just as detrimental an effect upon the soul as the introduction of evil influences. Starvation can be as deadly as the ingestion of any lethal substance. Jesus condemned the Pharisees not for what they did, but for what they failed to do: "...you neglect the weightier matters of the law," such as mercy, He said. He also told his disciples that they would be judged not just according to their relationship with him, but also by their neglect of "the least of these" (Mat 25:35-45). Not everything "lawful" is "expedient" or beneficial, Paul writes. Reading romance novels, for example, might not in itself cause one to go out and sin. (It could). But neglecting the Word of God certainly will. The "lust of the flesh," the "deceitfulness of riches," "the love of the world" – all these can entrap us and cause our downfall. But the pride of life, and hatred toward a brother, eat away from within and are just as destructive. (See sidebar.)

Consequences of Backsliding

"Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord..." Jeremiah 2:17, 19

Backsliding often carries its own punishment (Prov 14:14; Jer 2:17, 19; Rom 13:4). And its effects often extend far beyond the experience of the offender alone. Causing a brother to stumble is a serious offense. We will be held accountable not only for our own relationship with God, but for our conduct before men as well. Our life is "an open book," Paul writes, "known and read of all men." People who do not hear what we say cannot help but observe the way we live. "Your actions speak so loudly," the saying goes, "that I can't hear a word you're saying." Therefore, we are to "love not in word, but in deed..." (1 Jn 3:18). Anyone who has experienced the Presence of God will never find lasting satisfaction outside of His will. This accounts for the inner frustration and bitterness of soul accompanying the abandonment of one's soul to the unruly state of life without God.

Recovery: A Process

"I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely..." Hosea 14:4-7

The road back to God is never long. As the father of the prodigal "ran to meet him," God always meets us at least half-way. Deciding to return, however, has often proven most difficult. While falling asleep is a gradual process, waking must be sudden – usually by an alarm, or a shaking. Recovering from a spiritually backslidden condition is no different. Depending on the degree of our fallen state, God often must use extreme measures to bring us back. He strives with the backslidden (2 Ki 17:15), and lovingly will use anything * sickness, misery, grief to get us to return. (Psa 107)

Scripture likens the backslidden condition to a disease (Isa 1:5, 6), for which God has a cure (Jer 3:22; Hos 14:4-7). As with most natural diseases, certain symptoms are typical of the condition: a spiritual lethargy, a calloused attitude toward sin, worldliness, a spiritual love grown cold, lack of prayer or decreased hunger for the Word, and a general feeling of apathy toward lost souls. A dominant characteristic of the backslidden condition is stubbornness (2 Ki 17:14, 40). Falling away is essentially a heart condition. Though its manifestations may be primarily external, the root of the problem lies much deeper. And, even as many health problems can be caused by neglect as well as abuse, the Christian who neglects the Bread of Life can hardly expect to grow in the nature and admonition of the Lord." Scripture cites several safeguards or preventative measures against backsliding. (See accompanying outline.). Responsibility Toward the Backslidden "But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears..." Jeremiah 13:17

Although the spiritual welfare of God's flock is primarily the responsibility of the shepherd, or pastor, every believer ought to have a burden for the backslidden. We are our "brother's keeper" (Gen 4:9) and should "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2). Besides exhorting one another daily (Heb 10:25), we ought to pray regularly for our brother (Psa 80:3; 85:4; Lam 5:21). "Behold, Satan hath desired to have you ... but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," Jesus told Peter (Lk 22:31-32). However, prayer cannot replace the loving confrontation. "The truth shall set you free," Jesus said. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness..." (Gal 6:1) "If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister" (1 Tim 4:6) – even if the words are rejected (Ezek 3:19, 21; Hos 8:1). A reward awaits those who retrieve a fallen soul: "...he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jas 5:20). In attempting to bring back a fallen brother, however, we must make sure we ourselves are strong enough in the faith to stand secure: "...lest you also be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Those who have forsaken the Lord tend to bring others down (Prov 28:10; Mat 18:6; 1 Corin 15:33). Therefore, we are specifically exhorted to avoid those who have completely hardened their hearts through sin (Prov 28:14; Isaiah 26:3, 4; 1 Corin 5:9-11; Col 1:21-23; Jude 22-23) – although our attitude toward them should remain one of mercy: "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thes 3:6, 15).

The Call to Return; the Promise of Forgiveness

"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings..." Jeremiah 3:22

God promises to receive those who return with repentant hearts (Deut 4:29; 1 Chron 28:9; 2 Chron 7:14; 15:2; Jer 31:20; 36:3). His patience toward those who "keep on backsliding," however, is limited (Jer 15:6; Prov 24:16; Hos 11:7). Their backsliding is "perpetual... they refuse to return" (Jer 8:5-7). Some are reprobate: beyond any place of repentance (Isa 1:5-6; Jer 6:30; 15:1; Ezek 22:18; Heb 10:26-29, 38, 39; 1 Corin 5:10-13; Heb 6:6; Revel 2:4, 5, 21-23; 3:2, 3). But if they are rejected of God, it is because they have rejected Him. His desire is always for their return (2 Chron 30:6; Isa 31:6; Jer 3:4-22; Hos 6:1; 14:4-7). Must believers repent? The primary difference between the righteous and the wicked is that "the just man," though he may "fall seven times," gets up again (Prov 24:16). He doesn't remain in his sin. Moses fell. David fell. Peter fell. The churches in Revelation fell and were exhorted to repent (Revel 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). Scripture – written to believers – repeatedly warns against falling away (Psalms 85:8; 1 Corin 10:12): "Watch..." "Be sober." "Take heed..." "Beware..." "Hold fast..."

What does God require of the backslider who desires to return? "...only acknowledge thine iniquity" (Jer 3:13, 14; 12:13), and change your ways (Job 22:23; Psa 51:3-4; Isa 1:16-20). Complete restoration is possible. God is merciful and ever ready to forgive (Neh 9:17; Isa 54:6; Jer 3:12-14; Ezek 34:23; Mic 7:18; 1 John 1:9). He may withdraw His Presence, to stir our hearts to return; but he never abandons His own. He still calls the backslidden his "children" (Jer 3:14), his people" (Psa 106:40; Ezek 37:23b). The initiative, however, is ours: "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you" (Mal 3:7; Jer 3:12-14). "Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord..." (Hos 10:12, cp. 2 Chron 30:9 and Jer 4:1). "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory..." (Jude 1:24-25)

A Bible Study Outline

"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings..." Jeremiah 3:22

I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD.

In Scripture, the term "backslide" is used to describe the stubbornness of Israel: as back-sliding children (Jer 3:22), a backsliding daughter (Jer 31:22), and as a backsliding heifer (Hos 4:16).

The word "backslide" literally means "turn back" or "turn away."

- A. Turning from God. 1 Ki 11:9
- B. Turning from our first love. Revel 2:4
- C. Turning from the gospel. Gal 1:6, 7; 3:1-5
- D. Turning to Satan. 1 Tim 5:15
- E. Turning to evil. Psa 125:5
- F. Turning to the world. 2 Tim 4:10
- G. Turning aside, off-course, "like a deceitful bow." Jer 14:7

II. RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE BACKSLIDDEN.

Although the spiritual welfare of God's flock is primarily the responsibility of the shepherd, or pastor, every believer ought to have a burden for the backslidden.

- A. We are our "brother's keeper." Gen 4:9
- B. We should "bear one another's burdens." Gal 6:2
- C. Paul says we are to exhort one another daily. Heb 10:25
- D. We should pray regularly for our brother. Psa 80:3; 85:4; ; Jer 13:17; Lam 5:2; Lk 22:31-32
- E. We are to confront and correct each other in love (even if our words are rejected: Ezek 3:19, 21; Hos 8:1). Jn 8:32; Gal 6:1; 1 Tim

4:6; Heb 3:12, 13

F. A reward awaits those who retrieve a fallen soul. Jas 5:20 "...he which convert- eth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins."

1. In attempting to bring back a fallen brother, however, we must make sure we ourselves are strong enough in the faith to stand secure: "... lest you also be tempted." Gal 6:1
2. Those who have forsaken the Lord tend to bring others down. Prov 28:10; Mat 18:6; 1 Corin 15:33
3. Therefore, we are specifically exhorted to avoid those who have completely hardened their hearts through sin. Prov 28:14; Isa 26:3, 4; 1 Corin 5:9-11; Col 1:21-23; Jude 22, 23
4. Our attitude toward them, however, should remain one of mercy: 2 Thes 3:6, 15 "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

III. THE CAUSES OF BACKSLIDING.

A. BAD RELATIONSHIPS.

Hos 4:17

1. Marriage to the ungodly. Josh 23:12, 13; 1 Ki 11:4; Neh 13:26; 2 Corin 6:14
2. Bad friendships. 1 Corin 15:33; 1 Pet 4:2-4;
3. Lack of fellowship; isolation. Heb 3:12, 13; 10:25
4. Sexual defraudation in marriage. 1 Corin 7:5
5. Divisions, arguments. Mat 18:35; 1 Tim 6:20, 21; 2 Corin 12:20, 21
6. Jealousy, envy, hatred. Mat 5:23, 24; Gal 5:15; Heb 2:15
7. Adultery. Prov 29:3; Jas 4:4

B. SPIRITUAL LACK.

1. Heresy, philosophy. Acts 20:30; 2 Corin 11:4; Gal 1:6-9; 3:1; 4:9-11; 5:7-10; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 6:10; 2 Tim 4:3-5; 1 Jn 1:19; Jude 4
2. Inadequate teaching; poor foundation. Hos 4:6; 1 Corin 3:1-3; Mk 4:17; Heb 5:11-14
3. Poor (or no) leadership -- or an over-dependence upon it. Ex 32:1-6; Jdg 2:19; Isa 9:16; Jer 5:5, 23; 10:20, 21; 50:6; Nah 3:18; Zech 13:7; Eze 34:1-21; Jn 10:12, 13
4. Neglect of prayer life. Zeph 1:6; Mk 14:37-41; ; Lk 18:1; Jas 4:2
5. Spiritual apathy. Prov 6:10; 24:33; 10:5; 19:15; 20:13; Isa 51:17; 56:10; Amos 6:1; Zeph 1:12; Mk 13:36; Heb 4:7; Rev 3:16; 16:15
6. Spiritual blindness. 2 Pet 1:9; Rev 3:17
7. Deliberate disobedience. Mat 7:26, 27; 1 Jn 2:4; Heb 10:26, 27; 2 Pet 2:20, 21
8. Unbelief. Psa 106:24; Jas 1:6-8

C. COMPROMISE WITH THE WORLD. Prov 26:11; 2 Ki 17:15; Amos 3:3; Mat 5:13; Luke 8:14; 9:62 ; Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 1:18-20; 2 Tim 4:10; Tit 2:12; Jas 1:27; 4:4; 1 Pet 4:2-4; 2 Pet 2:20-22 ; 1 Jn 2:15-17; Rev 3:4

1. Competing interests: compromise. 2 Ki 17:33, 41 ; Psa 106:34, 35; Jer 2:31, 32; Hos 2:13; 7:8; 8:14; 10:2; Mat 6:24; Mk 4:19; 1 Corin 10:23 ; 1 Tim 6:10; Jas 4:8; Revel 3:15, 16
2. Ingratitude; independence from God. Deut 8:10-14; Psa 107; Amos 6:4-6; Jonah; Jer 2:31, 32; Hos 13:6
3. Spiritual adultery; idolatry. Hos 2:13

D. ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS. Mk 7:21

1. Seeking the praises of men. Jn 5:44; Gal 1:10
2. Pride. Prov 16:18; Jer 8:12; Hos 13:6; Jn 5:44; Lk 18:11, 12; Acts 12:21-23; 1 Corin 10:12; Jas 4:6; 1 Jn 2:16
3. Rebellion; hardened heart. 1 Sam 15:11, 23; Neh 9:17, 26; Psa 106:43; 107; Isa 1:19, 20; 65:2, 3; Jer 2:27-32; 5:6; Jn 6:66; Heb ; Jas 4:8
4. Stubbornness. Jdg 2:19; 1 Sam 12:25; 2 Ki 17:14, 40; Jer 5:3; Jer 44:15-17; Hos 11:7; Zech 7:11-13; Jer 8:4-7
5. Self-will. Isa 58:13; Jdg 2:19; Prov 14:14; Mat 6:24
6. Over-confidence; self-deceit. Mat 26:33; Gal 5:4; Rev 3:17
7. Lack of endurance; fear of persecution. Psa 106:13, 14; Mat 13:21; 26:56, 69-75; 1 Corin 10:6;
8. Fleshly lusts. 2 Sam 11:13; 12:1-13; Rom 7:4, 5; Eph 2:3; 2 Pet 1:4; Jas 4:1-3; Pet 2:11 "war against the soul" ; Gal 5:16
9. Despair; guilt. 1 Tim 1:19, 20
10. Murmuring. Ex 17:3

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF BACKSLIDING

A. Spiritual ineffectiveness and decay. Rom 8:13; 2 Pet 2:20-22

1. Slackness of service. Heb 6:10-12
2. Faulty testimony. 2 Sam 12:14 "... by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme..."
3. Insensitivity to the Word.; Ezek 33:30-32; Hos 8:12
4. Bad example to others. 2 Sam 12:14; Prov 28:10 "Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit..." ; Rom 14:13; 1 Corin 8:11; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 2:17, 18; Gal 6:1
5. Loss of joy. Psa 51:12; Jdg 2:15; 10:9; Mk 14:72
6. No fear of God. Jer 2:19

B. A breach in one's personal relationship with the Lord.

1. Loss of sensing His Presence. Num 14:43 "... because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you"; Ki 17:18; Isa 59:2; Hos 5:15 "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early."
2. Seared conscience. 1 Tim 4:2 "... their conscience seared with a hot iron."
3. Lack of appreciation for God's grace.; 2 Pet 1:9
4. Divine displeasure. Psa 78:57, 59

5. The wrath of God. Ex 20:5; 34:14; Josh 23:16; 22:18; Jdg 2:14, 20; 2 Ki 17:11, 17, 18; Psa 78:57-59; 106:40; Zech 7:12
6. Grieving the Holy Spirit. Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30; Jas 4:5

C. Unanswered prayer. Jas 4:1-3; Isa 59:2

1. Defeat.

Num 14:43 "... because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you." Jdg 2:14, 21-23 "And the anger of the Lord was hot ... so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies" 2 Chron 24:24 "For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord..." 2 Chron 25:27; Psa 106:41-43

2. Danger. Josh 24:20 "If ye forsake the Lord ... he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good"; Deut 4:25, 26; 8:19; Prov 1:32 "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."; Jer 5:6

3. Disease. Deut 28:58-61; Exo 8:2, 21; 9:2; 10:4

4. Death or shortened life. Deut 30:17-19; 2 Sam 12:14 "... because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die"; 1 Corin 11:30 "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

5. A sense of disorientation and lostness. Mat 5:13; Neh 1:8; Isa 59:2-11; Jer 2:19 "...thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord..."

6. Effect on family. 2 Sam 12:9-12; 2 Ki 17:41

7. Forfeiture of God's blessings. Mal 2:2; Deut 11:28; 28:15; 1 Corin 3:15; 2 Corin 5:10

8. Unworthiness. Lk 9:62

D. Loss of position.

1. Loss of fellowship. 1 Jn 1:7

2. Removal from a position of usefulness. 1 Corin 5:5; 11:30; 1 Sam 15:11, 26-2

V. RECOVERING FROM A BACKSLIDDEN CONDITION.

A. The reaching out and exhortation of others is essential. Ezek 3:19, 21; Jn 8:32; 1 Tim 4:6; Gal 6:1; Heb 10:25; Jas 5:19, 20

B. The efforts of others to assist are not always welcomed, however. Jer 15:15-17; 32:2, 3; 37:15-21; 38:6; Amos 7:12-15; Gal 4:16

C. The importance of prayer, fasting, and Bible reading.

2 Chron 7:14; Neh 8:8, 9; 9:2, 3; Jonah 2:1; 3:5, 8-10; Mat 26:41 (Mk 14:38); Lk 22:31, 32

D. The chastening of the Lord (difficul- ties) in causing us to be willing to return.

Psa 107:6, 12, 13, 19, 27, 28; etc.; 119:67

Jer 2:19-27 "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee..."

Hos 2:6; 5:15; 6:1; 1 Corin 11:32; Heb 12:6

E. The importance of humility. Prov 3:34; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5; Lk 15:17

F. Acknowledgment of guilt and weakness. Isa 59:12-14; Jer 14:7; Jn 9:41

G. Repentance (change) and confession. Isa 58:9, 10; Jer 7:5-7; Hos 14:1-3; Eph 4:22; Col 3:8, 9

H. Remember the former days. Isa 63:11-14; Rev 2:5; 3:3

I. Dependence upon the Lord. Jn 14:5; Phil 4:13

J. Resistance of worldly influences. Rom 12:2; Jn 19; 17:14, 16; 1 Corin 5:10; Eph 5:15; Phil 2:15; Col 2:20; Jas 4:7

VI. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST BACK- SLIDNG.

A. Prayer. Mk 14:38; Lk 22:46; 1 Corin 10:12; Eph 6:18; 1 Pet 5:8, 9; Jude 20, 21

B. The Word of God. Mat 8:24, 25; Lk 4:4, 8; Eph 6:17

C. The prayers of others. Luke 22:31

D. Diligence to spiritual things. Heb 6:11; 2 Pe 1:5-7, 10

E. Walking in the Spirit. Gal 5:16; Lk 4:1-14

F. Abstinence. 1 Pe 2:11; Jas 1:27

G. Godly living. Rom 6:19-22; 2 Pe 1:7, 8

H. Self-examination (good, to a degree). Deut 4:9; 2 Corin 13:5

I. Submission to the discipline of the Lord. Heb 12:8

J. Good preaching. 1 Corin 15:2

K. Exhortation of other believers. Heb 10:25; 1 Tim 4:6

VII. THE CALL TO RETURN. Jer 3:22 "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings..."

A. God loves the backslider and promises to receive those who return with repentant hearts. His desire is always for restoration. Deut 4:29; 1 Chron 28:9; 2 Chron 7:14; 15:2; Neh 9:17; Isa 31:6; Jer 3:4-22, esp. 12-14; 31:20; 36:3; Hos 6:1; 4:4 "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely ..." Mic 7:18; 1 Jn 1:9

B. God strives with the backslider (2 Ki 17:15), and he often must use extreme measures-- to bring us back. He lovingly will use anything-- sickness, misery, grief--to get us to return. Psalm 107

C. His patience toward those who "keep on backsliding," however, is limited. God grows weary with sin. Prov 24:16; Jer 15:6, 7; Hos 11:7 "And my people are bent to backsliding from me ... How shall I give thee up ...? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? ... mine heart is turned within me..."

Heb 3:10 "Their hearts are always going astray ..."

Jer 8:5-12 "slidden back by a perpetual backsliding"

Jer 14:7- 12; 15:6, 7 "Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward...; I am weary with repenting... since they return not from their ways."

1. Some have a propensity to backsliding. Jer 8:5-7

2. Some become reprobate--beyond any place of repentance. Isa 1:5-6; Jer 6:30; 15:1; Ezek 22:18; Heb 6:6; 10:26-29, 38, 39; 1 Corin

5:10-13; Rev 2:4, 5, 21-23; 3:2, 3

3. If they are rejected of God, however, it is because they have rejected Him. His desire is always for our return. 2 Chron 30:6; Isa 31:6; Jer 3:4-22; Hos 6:1; 14:4-7

D. Backsliding displeases God and provokes him to anger. 2 Ki 17:11, 17, 18; Psa 78:56-59; 106:40; Zech 7:12

E. His eagerness for our return is pictured in the story of the prodigal, how the father "ran" to meet him. Lk 15:20

VIII. METAPHORIC DESCRIPTIONS OF BACKSLIDING IN SCRIPTURE

A. Trying to serve two masters. Mat 6:24

B. Forsaking the Lord. 1 Chron 28:9; Jer 15:6, 7

C. Going our own way. Jer 8:6

D. Leaving our first love; unfaithfulness. Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23; Hos 2 and 3; Rev 2:4

E. Forgetting God. Jer 18:15; etc.

F. Falling away (apostasia, Greek). 2 Thes 2:3, etc.; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:17, 18; 4:10-16

G. Turning aside, "like a deceitful bow." Jer 14:7

H. Growing cold. Mat 24:12; Rev 3:16

I. Departing from the faith. 1 Tim 4:1

J. Putting a hand to the plow and looking back. Lk 9:62

K. "Salt that has lost its savour." Mat 5:13

L. "A dog returning to his vomit." Prov 26:11

M. A dead branch. Jn 15:6; Heb 6:8

N. A disease (for which God has a cure). Isa 1:5, 6; Jer 3:22; Hos 14:4-7

IX. WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF THE BACKSLIDER WHO DESIRES TO RETURN?

A. "... only acknowledge thine iniquity."; Jer 3:13, 14; 12:13

B. Change your ways. Job 22:23; Psa 51:3-4; Isa 1:16-20

X. BACKSLIDERS IN SCRIPTURE.

A. Solomon. 1 Ki 11:4, 9; cp. vv. 4-40; Neh 13:26

B. David. 2 Sam 11:13; 12:1-13

C. Saul. 1 Sam 15:11, 26-28

D. Amon. 2 Ki 21:22, 23

E. Rehoboam. 2 Chron 12:1, 2

F. Asa. 2 Chron 16:7-9

G. Joash. 2 Chron 24:24

H. Amaziah. 2 Chron 25:27

I. The Syrians. Isa 17:10, 11

J. Jonah. Jonah 1:3

K. The children of Israel. Ex 32:8; Neh 9:26; Jer 3:11; Hos 4:16

L. Jesus' disciples. Mat 26:56 "... Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled." Jn 6:66 "... went back and walked no more with Him"

a. Peter. Mat 26:70-75; Mk 14:72; Luke 22:31, 32

b. Thomas. Jn 20:27-29

M. The early church. 1 Tim 1:18-20; 5:15; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:17, 18; 4:10-16

a. The Corinthian church. 1 Corin 5:1-8; 2 Corin 12:20, 21

b. The Galatian church. Gal 1:6; 3:1; 4:9-11; 5:6, 7

c. Hymenaeus and Alexander. 1 Tim 1:19, 20

d. Phygellus and Hermogenes. 2 Tim 1:15

e. Dema. 2 Tim 4:10

f. The churches of Asia. 1 Tim 5:15; Rev 2:4, 14, 15, 20; 3:2, 3, 5-18

XI MUST BELIEVERS REPENT?

A. The primary difference between the righteous and the wicked is that "the just man" gets up when he falls.; Prov 24:16

B. The churches in Revelation fell and were exhorted to repent. Revel 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19

C. Scripture--written to believers --repeatedly warns against falling away: "Hold fast." "Watch ..." "Be sober." "Take heed ..." "Beware..." Psa 85:8; Mat 24:42; 25:5, 10; 24:44; Mk 13:33-37; Lk 12:40; 21:34; 21:36; 1 Corin 10:12; Phil 4:5; Heb 10:25; Jas 5:8, 9; 1 Thes 5:4, 6; 1 Pet 4:7; 2 Pet 3:11, 14; Rev 2:25; 3:11; 16:15

D. God may withdraw his presence to get us to return to him, but he never abandons his own.

1. He still calls the backslidden his "children." Jer 3:14 "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you..."

2. He still calls them "his people." Psa 106:40; Ezek 37:23b

E. The initiative to return, however, is ours.

Mal 3:7 "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you"

Jer 3:12-14, 22 "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings"

Hos 6:1 "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"

Hos 10:12 "Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord..."

2 Chron 30:9 "... the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him"

Jer 4:1 "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me ..."