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THE BACKSLIDER IN HEART

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Edited and paraphrased by Keith Green

This is an edited and paraphrased version of the 21st chapter from "Revival Lectures" by Charles Grandison Finney. This message is as much for the Church today as when it was first brought forth in a series of lectures in the 1830's. We earnestly pray that you'll "read it and weep!"

I cannot conclude any teaching on revival without warning converts against backsliding. In discussing this subject, I will show: 1) What backsliding in heart is not, 2) What backsliding in heart is, 3) What are the evidences of a backslidden heart, 4) What are the consequences of backsliding in heart, and 5) How to recover from this state.

WHAT BACKSLIDING IN HEART IS NOT

It does not consist of no longer having highly excited religious feelings. No longer having these great spiritual feelings may be an *evidence* of a backslidden heart, but it is not *the cause* of such a state.

WHAT BACKSLIDING IN HEART IS

1) It consists in taking back that consecration to God and His service that constitutes true conversion.

2) It is the leaving by a Christian of his first love.

3) It consists in the Christian withdrawing himself from that state of entire and total surrender to God and coming again under the control of a self-pleasing spirit.

4) It also must be said that a person may have a backslidden heart even though he maintains an outward appearance of religion. We have all seen different men perform the same or similar outward acts from widely different (and often from opposite) motives. No doubt the most intense selfishness often takes on a religious form. And there are many considerations that might lead a backslider in heart to keep up this spiritual show, even though he has lost the power of godliness in his soul.

WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF A BACKSLIDDEN HEART

1) **A lack of spiritual enjoyment is evidence of a backslidden heart.** We always love saying and doing those things that please the one we love most. When the heart is not backslidden, real communion with God is kept up, and therefore all spiritual devotions are not only performed with pleasure, but the communion with God involved in them is a source of rich and continual blessing. If we do not *enjoy* the service of God, it is because we do not truly serve *Him*.

2) **An outward formality in religious exercises.** A stereotyped, formal way of saying and doing things that is clearly the result of habit rather than the outgushing of a true spiritual life. In prayer or fellowship, this formality will be emotionless and as cold as ice, and will reveal a total lack of sincerity in the performance of all spiritual service. Such a state would be impossible where there existed a present, living faith and a true godly zeal.

3) **An ungoverned temper.** While the heart is full of love, the temper will naturally be patient and sweet. Or if at any time it should go so far as to escape from self-control, a truly loving heart will quickly confess and break down, repenting with true humility. Whenever, therefore, there is an irritable, uncontrolled temper, you may know that there's a backslidden heart.

4) **The loss of interest in truly spiritual conversation.** "*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*" (Matt. 12:34) No conversation is so sweet to a truly loving heart as that which relates to Christ and to our living Christian experience.

5) **Searching for worldly amusements.** The most grateful amusements possible to a truly spiritual mind are those that bring the soul into the most direct communion with God. A loving heart is jealous of everything that will break up or interfere with its union with God. When the soul does not find more delight in God than in all worldly things, the heart is sadly backslidden.

6) **A lack of interest in foreign missions.** If you lose your interest in these works and for reaching those in heathen lands, and do not delight in the conversion of souls everywhere, you may know that you are backslidden in heart.

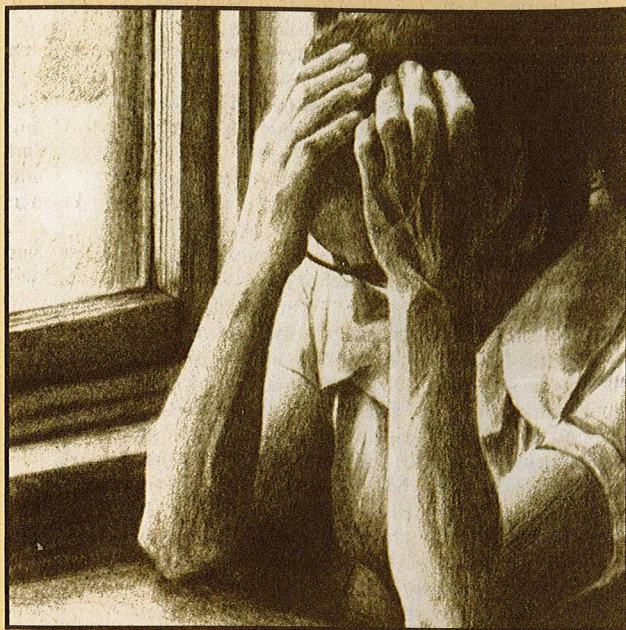
7) **The loss of interest in benevolent outreaches to the poor and needy.** Surely if you were ever converted to Christ at all, you have had an interest in all charitable, Christian enterprises that came within your knowledge. Of course, a converted soul takes the deepest interest in all outreaches to reform, help, and save mankind—in the provision of the needs for the poor and needy—and in short, in *every good word and work*. Just in the proportion that you have lost your interest in these things, you have evidence that you are backslidden in heart.

8) **The loss of interest in those newly converted.** There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents, and is there not joy among the saints on earth over those that come to Christ and are His newly born babes in the Kingdom? Show me a professing Christian who does not have a passionate interest in converts to Christ, and I will show you a backslider in heart and a hypocrite—he professes religion, but has none.

9) **A fault-finding, critical spirit.** The disposition to fasten blame, showing a lack of confidence in the good intentions and motives of others. It is a spirit of distrust of Christian character and what they say. It is a state of mind that reveals itself in harsh words and harsh judgements of individuals. This state is entirely incompatible with a true loving heart, and whenever a judgmental spirit is manifested by a professing Christian, you may know that there is a backslidden heart.

10) **A self-indulgent spirit.** By self-indulgence, I mean the inclination to gratify the appetites, passions, and to fulfill "*the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*" (Eph. 2:3) The appetite for food is frequently, and perhaps more frequently than any other, the occasion for backsliding. Few Christians, I fear, sense any danger in this area. God's injunction is, "*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" (1 Cor. 10:31) Christians forget this and eat and drink to please themselves. More persons are ensnared by their tables than the Church is aware of. A great many people who avoid alcoholic drinks altogether will indulge in food that both in quantity and quality prove they follow no other law than that of their appetite. This indulging in gluttony threatens to ruin both body and soul together. Show me a gluttonous Christian, and I will show you a backslider.

11) **Absence from scheduled prayer meetings for slight reasons is a sure indication of a backslidden heart.** No meeting is



more important to a Christian than the prayer meeting, and while they have any heart to pray, they will not be absent unless prevented by something urgent that God has impressed them to do. If a call from a friend at the hour of meeting can prevent their attendance, it is strong evidence that they do not really *want* to go. That same person visiting at such a time would not prevent them from attending a wedding, a party, a picnic, or some other enjoyable event. The fact is, it is hypocrisy for them to pretend that they really want to go while they can be kept away by small excuses.

12) The same is true of the neglect of family prayer for slight reasons. While the heart is engaged in true religion, Christians will not readily omit a daily time of prayer and Bible reading with their family. And whenever they are ready to find an excuse to avoid these family devotions, it is a sure evidence that they're backslidden in heart.

13) When secret, private prayer is regarded more as a duty than as a privilege. It has always appeared to me most ridiculous to hear Christians speak of prayer as a duty. It is an infinite privilege to be allowed to come to God and ask for the supply of all our needs. But to pray because *we must* rather than because *we may* is a sad, sad thing, and a certain indication of a backslidden heart.

14) A lack of the spirit of prayer. While the love of Christ remains fresh in the soul, the indwelling Spirit of God will reveal Himself as the Spirit of grace and supplication (prayer). He will instill strong desire in the soul for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of saints. He will often make intercession for them with great longings, strong crying and tears, and with groanings

that cannot be uttered in words. (*Rom. 8:26-27*) If that Spirit of prayer departs, it is a sure indication of a backslidden heart. For while the first love of a Christian continues, he is sure to be drawn by the Holy Spirit to wrestle much in prayer.

15) A backslidden heart often reveals itself by the manner in which people pray. For example, praying as if in a state of condemnation, very much like an unconverted sinner, is an evidence of a backslidden heart. His confessions and self-accusations in prayer show to others what perhaps he does not well understand himself. Instead of being filled with faith and love, he is more or less convicted of sin and is conscious deep within that he is not in a state of acceptance by God.

It is often very striking and even shocking to attend a backsliders' prayer meeting, and I'm very sorry to say that many prayer meetings of the Church are little else. Their prayers are timid and hesitating, and reveal the fact that they have little or no faith. They will go round and round, one after the other, in reality praying for their own conversion. They could not make it any more obvious that they are backsliders in heart.

16) The loss of interest in the question of holiness. If you are a Christian, you have felt that sin was an abomination to your soul. You have had inexpressible longings to be rid of it forever, and everything that could throw light upon that question of agonizing importance was most desperately crucial to you. If this question has been dismissed and is no longer of any interest to you, it is because you are backslidden in heart.

17) A lack of interest in God's Word. Perhaps nothing more conclusively proves that a Christian has a backslidden heart than his losing his interest in the Bible. While the heart is full of love, no book in the world is so precious; but when that love is gone, the Bible becomes not only uninteresting, but often repulsive. There is no faith to accept its promises, but conviction enough left to dread its threatenings.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BACKSLIDING IN HEART

"The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways."
—Prov. 14:14

1) The backslider in heart will be filled with his own mistakes. He is not walking with God. He is not led by the Spirit, but is walking in spiritual darkness. In this state he is sure to fall into many terrible mistakes: mistakes in business, mistakes in relationships, mistakes in using his time, his tongue, his money. Indeed *all* will go wrong with him as long as he remains in a backslidden state.

2) **He shall be filled with his own feelings.** Instead of that sweet peace and rest in the Holy Spirit that he once had, he will find himself in a state of unrest, dissatisfied with himself and everyone else. It is sometimes very trying to live with a backslider. They are often touchy, faultfinding, and irritating in all their ways. They have forsaken God, and in their feelings there is more of hell than of heaven.

3) **The backslider in heart will be filled with his own words.** While in this state, he *will* not and *can* not control his tongue. It will prove itself to be an unruly member full of deadly poison. (James 3:8) By his words he will entangle himself in many difficulties and problems from which he can never free himself until he comes back to God.

4) **The backslider in heart will be full of his own cares.** He has turned back to selfishness. He counts himself and his possessions as his very own and tries to manage everything for himself in his own wisdom *and for his own sake*. Consequently, his cares will be multiplied and come upon him like a deluge.

5) **The backslider in heart will be filled with his own lustings.** His appetites and passions which had been kept under control have now resumed their full course, and having been kept down so long, they will seem to avenge themselves by becoming more demanding and unruly than ever. These animal appetites and passions will burst forth to the astonishment of the backslider, and he will probably find himself more under their control and enslaved by them than he ever was before.

6) **The backslider in heart will be full of his own troubles.** Instead of keeping out of temptation, he will run right into it. He will bring upon himself multitudes of trials. He is not at peace with God, with himself, the Church, *nor with the world*. But while he complains of being so tried by everything around him, he is constantly making things worse!

7) **The backslider in heart will be filled with his own anxieties.** He will be worried about himself—about his business, his reputation, *about everything*! He has taken all these things out of the hands of God. Hence, having faith in God no longer, and being unable to control events, he has to be filled with worry about the future. These anxieties are the inevitable result of his madness and folly in forsaking God.

8) **The backslider in heart will be filled with his own prejudices.** His willingness to know and do the truth is gone. He will very naturally oppose any principle or truth that comes down hard on a selfish spirit. He will endeavor to justify himself. He will not want to read or hear anything which would rebuke his backslidden state, and will become deeply prejudiced against anyone who shall reprove

him or correct him. Considering that person as an enemy, he will hedge himself in and shut his eyes against the light, standing on the defensive and criticizing everything that might expose him.

9) **The backslider in heart will be full of his own delusions.** Having an evil eye, his whole body will become full of darkness. (Matt. 6:23) He will almost certainly fall into self-deception in regard to principles and doctrines. Wandering on in darkness as he does, he will very likely swallow the grossest delusions. Cults of every type and deceptions of every shade may be very likely to gain possession of him. Who has not observed this of many backsliders in heart?

10) **The backslider in heart must be full of his own losses.** He regards his possessions as his own, his time as his own, his influence as his own, his reputation as his own. The loss of any of these he accounts as *his own loss*. Having forsaken God, and being unable to control the events by which these things are maintained, he will find himself suffering losses on every side. He loses his peace. He loses his property. He loses much of his time. He loses his reputation. He loses his Christian witness, and if he continues . . . *he loses his soul*.

11) **The backslider in heart is full of his own self-condemnation.** Having once enjoyed the love of God, and then forsaking Him, he feels condemned for everything. If he attempts religious duty, he knows there is no heart in it, and hence condemns himself. If he neglects religious duty, he of course condemns himself. If he reads his Bible, it condemns him. If he does not read it, he feels condemned. If he goes to church meetings, the meetings condemn him. If he stays away, he feels condemned also. If he prays in secret, with his family, or at a meeting, he knows he is not sincere and is condemned. If he neglects or refuses to pray, he also feels condemned. *Everything condemns him!* His conscience is up in arms against him and the storms of condemnation follow him wherever he goes.

HOW TO RECOVER FROM A STATE OF BACKSLIDING

1) Remember from where you have fallen. Face the question at once and deliberately contrast your present state with that in which you once walked with God.

2) Take a good, honest look at your true position. Don't put off any longer dealing with the conflict between God and your soul and the differences between God and you.

3) Repent at once and do your first works over again. (Rev. 2:5)

4) Do not attempt to get back by merely changing what you do on the outside. Begin with your heart and

immediately get right with God. Give yourself no rest until the question of your acceptance before Him is completely settled.

5) Do not act like a mere convicted sinner and think that you must "reform and make yourself better" before you can then come to Christ. But understand distinctly that *coming to Christ, alone*, can make you better! However much distress you may feel, know for certain that until you repent and accept His will *unconditionally*, you are no better and are constantly growing worse. Until you throw yourself upon His sovereign mercy, and thus return to God, He will accept nothing from you or from your hands.

6) Do not imagine yourself to be in a justified state, for you know in your heart that you are not. Your conscience condemns you, and you know that God ought to condemn you. *For if He justified you in your present state, your conscience could not justify Him*. Come then to Christ at once, like the guilty sinner that you are. Own up and take all the shame and responsibility upon yourself, and believe that in spite of all your wanderings from God, He loves you still. He has loved you with an everlasting love, and with lovingkindness is even now drawing you back to Himself.

If this article has spoken to you and you would like some help in cleansing your heart fully before the Lord, we have available another article written by Mr. Finney called, "Breaking Up The Fallow Ground." It is a complete exercise and outline for repentance. It has helped thousands to find the true peace that God promises to everyone who comes to Him with a heart that desires to be clean in His sight. We will send it to you for the asking. Ask for tract LD#1.

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