

Sliding Back

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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

“Backsliding” is intended for all born-again Christians who have decided to walk away from their faith in Jesus Christ; those who have inadvertently lost their way and returned to their previous life in sin; and those who know a backslidden Christian who needs help.

All Christians will fail at various times because we will never be perfect until we leave our physical body. Plus, as we grow closer to Jesus, we realize how deeply our sinful nature is embedded within our heart and soul. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we initially confront those aspects of our external behavior that are not aligned with God’s will. But as we mature, we begin to focus on our internal behavior (such as the vanity of being self-centered and the uselessness of pride); we cringe as to how we respond to various situations; and as Isaiah stated when he saw the Lord sitting on His throne (Isaiah 6) “Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips.”

- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23
- “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9

Confession of our sins means we:

- Take responsibility for what we have done.
- Come to the conclusion that what we did is wrong.
- Admit our mistakes directly to God in heartfelt prayer.
- Willfully turn away from the sin.

However, backsliding is when a born-again Christian will make a long-term decision to turn away from God; does not recognize and confess their sins; and willingly seeks to fulfill the desires of their flesh. In addition, there is a pattern and awareness of sin, but continues with no willful attempt to stop.

Here are additional characteristics about one who is backslidden:

1. Their continuation of sin is based upon some means of deceptive rationalization.
2. They live “in between.”
3. Their fleshly desires become more intense, and sin becomes more controlling.

Deceptive Rationalization

God designed us with a free will: an ability to make decisions in how we live our lives. In addition, to support our decisions, we must have some means of rational thought to justify everything we do—from buying a home, to selecting a spouse, and to whom we yield control of our life. As such, for one to backslide, they must create rationalized reasons to support their decision of turning away from God and returning to sin.

There are two primary means used by a backslider to rationalize their decision and behavior: (1) their preference for sin over God, and (2) criticism of the body of Christ (the church).

Jesus said, “**And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**” John 3:19-20

Each time a sin is committed (and without seeking forgiveness):

- The conscience becomes weaker.
- The heart hardens against guilt, remorse and godly fear.
- Negative emotions will occur more often, such as anger, sadness, and so forth.
- Caustic and negative perceptions of the world increases.
- As each of the above occurs, the downward cycle becomes stronger and compounds upon itself.

With regards to criticizing the church, it's fairly easy to find faults in any church body, because none of us are perfect. As such, criticism of the church is a common component of backslidden rationalization. Here are some examples:

Rationalization	Truth
The church is filled with hypocrites	Yes, every church has hypocrites as members. This is inevitable because the church is filled with people who have a propensity to make mistakes (like you and me). Many are actively seeking to grow in Christ and overcome their faults. This perception is akin to someone walking into a hospital and complaining... "There are sick persons in here!" However, most Christian churches will have a "core" of believers that truly seek Jesus Christ, and exemplify Him in their lives.
Churches are after money	There are some churches you should avoid; and there are some churches that have placed their faith and trust in God meeting their financial needs. However, pastors (on occasion) must still remind the faithful of God's mandate (and spiritual importance) of tithing.
Fallen church leaders	This is tragically true and it hurts all of us. However, these events reinforce the importance of relying upon and trusting in the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and not man.
Hurt by someone in the church	It is important for all Christians to rise above those things that can snare or trap us. Do not allow the sin of someone rob you of eternity in Heaven. Consider the "big picture" because holding onto the pain is not worth it. To break free, you must forgive because you are forgiven (do this for your healing). Remember the words of Jesus Christ—who was unjustly convicted for a crime He did not commit—as He hung on the cross—dying—He prayed for His executioners, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34

In Between

Because a backslidden Christian had experienced the light and truth of Jesus, they will often find an inability to intimately relate to anyone. They are unable to relate to those who are not born again because they know, understand and see the consequences sin. In addition, they are unable to share their faith because they know they would be considered a hypocrite. Besides, when one is "disconnected" from the Holy Spirit it is difficult to share spiritual truths. For those who are in darkness, attempts to expound godly wisdom and spiritual truths are most often based upon pseudo intellect and delusional falsehoods. The reason...godly wisdom and spiritual truths are revealed by the Holy Spirit...and not by man.

Conversely, a backslidden Christian will find it difficult to relate to brothers and sisters in Christ because of condemnation and guilt, and a perception that interaction can become adversarial. However, they will sometimes feel a sadness within their heart because encounters with Christians remind them of where they are and where they should be.

Stronger Desires and Controlling Sin

When a Christian decides to walk away from God and chooses to sin:

- The strength and intensity of their fleshly desires increases.
- The sin has magnified influence and control.
- Concern for consequences and collateral damage decreases.
- The sin causes more destruction and desolation than before.

Jesus revealed, **"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."** Matthew 12:43-45

“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” 2 Peter 2:20-22

Time to Get Real

Consider your life. Contemplate the degree of your joy, happiness and peace. Evaluate the hardness of your heart. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you making the right choices?
- Are you fully aware of—and do you fear—the eternal consequences of your decisions?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 9:10

Jesus warned, “**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**” Matthew 10:28

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” Romans 2:5-11

Your Heavenly Father Loves You...Regardless

There is another perception that occurs when one lives in darkness: they will incorrectly view God as the great dictator—the one who sets all these rules to stop us from doing things we want to do. They fail to realize every commandment from God is for our benefit and wellbeing. Like a father who lovingly instructs their child not to do certain things, God’s instructions are intended to direct us away from those things that will harm us—and has provided us with a means to recover when we fail to listen and obey.

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:9-10

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Luke 11:9-13

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your spiritual eyes and reveal:

- Whether or not your relationship with God is active and alive, or distant and dead.
- The worsening condition of the world.

Although a Christian may turn away from God, God will not turn away from the one who walks away, and will patiently wait for repentance.

- “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Hebrews 13:5
- “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

Global Decline

Many persons are aware of the last days; see and have a conceptual understanding of end time “signs;” and are experiencing various degrees of a deep gut-wrenching fear due to pending unknowns. Unfortunately, due to our human nature it is much easier to live in denial (i.e. “sleepwalking”) than to take a good hard look at what’s going on in the world and prepare our heart for the One who will come in the twinkling of an eye. As such, every one of us need to prepare our hearts and watch for the return of Jesus Christ.

“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” Luke 12:43-48

Two things will become more evident as the world continues to decline into the last days: the darkness of Satan will become more prevalent, and the light of God’s truth will become brighter. As such, whatever means of demonic deception and lies that are used to justify sin will be revealed by God as He increasingly pours out His spirit for all to see during the last days—for no one will be able to stand before Him and say “I never knew the truth.” There will be no excuses or pointing of blame to someone else because all will be held personally accountable at the final judgment. Names of those who are in the Book of Life will be forgiven, names that are not will experience a second and eternal death.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

Jesus promised, “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3:5

Return Home

A backslidden Christian will return home when they determine:

- They're fed up with their sin and have had enough.
- The spiritual and eternal rewards of living for Christ far exceed the fleeting benefits of living a deceptional lie.
- The desire in their heart for God exceeds the demands of the flesh.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son provides us with insight into the spiritual consequences of being backslidden—and especially the heart of God who patiently waits for us to return.

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.”

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still 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 to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here 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.’ And they began to be merry.” Luke 15:11-24

The Parable of the Prodigal Son exemplifies God's grace, His love for us, and the "pathway home." The lost son had to experience failure and starvation before he came to his senses, evaluated his life and returned home. The following Parable of the Lost Sheep reveals the heart of God—and how far He will go—to find us when we are lost.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” Luke 15:4-7

Do you know His voice?

Jesus declared, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” John 10:27-29

Do you believe Jesus died for your sins?

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Ephesians 1:7

Do you love Me?

Peter claimed to be the most loyal of the disciples. However, three times Peter denied knowing Jesus on the night of His arrest and crucifixion. After Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to the disciples, Jesus asked Peter three times, **“Do you love me?” (John 21:15-19)**

Put yourself into this heart-wrenching moment. All that Jesus did, all of the miracles and all of the teaching—including the direct relationship Peter had with the Son of God—was discarded by Peter when he found himself in a threatening situation, and denied he knew Jesus. Imagine the consequential devastation, pain, guilt and remorse in Peter’s heart after he slithered away from his accusers. He knew what he had done, and it was unforgivable in his mind.

Three times Jesus asked Peter “Do you love me?” (once for each time Peter denied Jesus) reveals God cares more about the attitude of our heart than our sin. Each time Peter responded with yes, he loved Him—each time Jesus responded by telling Peter to take care of His flock.

So...Do you love Him?

It’s Time to Come Home

If you are backslidden, you know deep within your heart and soul NOW IS THE TIME TO COME HOME! Because as each day passes, it will become more difficult to let go of that which is dragging you down.

Is the Holy Spirit speaking to you right now? Do you feel the loving tug in your heart to turn away from your sin and towards the one who gave His life for you...so that you could be forgiven...and live with Him for eternity? Are you ready to let go of that which is causing spiritual death and reach out to the only one who can give you spiritual life?

Even though you may feel distant, He is closer than you know. Even though you may not forgive yourself, He already has. Our limited minds cannot comprehend the love God has for each of us...as He draws us toward Himself.

“Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:21-26

Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, I ask you to forgive me for my sin. Thank you, Jesus, for dying for me, and for suffering what I should receive for what I have done. Holy Spirit, I need your help and guidance, and I ask you to indwell within me...because I cannot do this without you...nor do I ever want to do anything without you being in control of my life. Open my eyes and my mind to your truth as you pour into me your spirit. Use me as a means to glorify Jesus, because He alone is worthy. Thank you, God, for loving me, and for being patient, and never letting me go. Amen.

May God richly bless you with victory, joy, peace, spiritual strength and wisdom as your Savior, Jesus Christ, becomes Lord over every aspect of your life.

All for His Glory,
Harold D. Thomas