

we may more easily understand the condition, or state, and more readily identify its inherent dangers.

Who Is A Backslider?

To satisfactorily answer this question, we must look at the Hebrew terms which describe this condition. The word underlying the translation “backslider” in Prov. 14:14 is שׁוּב, which means “to turn back,” and describes movement away from, in the sense of proving recreant (unfaithful to one’s duty) to God. Passages that illustrate this meaning include the following:

Psalms 80:17-18: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we GO BACK from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.”

Psalms 44:18: “Our heart is not TURNED BACK, neither have our steps declined from thy way.”

Zephaniah 1:6: “And them that are TURNED BACK from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.”

Psalms 78:57: “But TURNED BACK, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow” (emphasis mine in all texts).

Additionally, a second class of passages employs forms of the verbal root שׁוּב, which means “to turn back,” or “to return” in expressing the idea of a backslidden condition. The following are examples:

Jeremiah 3:14: “Turn, O BACKSLIDING children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion,”

Hosea 11:7: “And my people are bent to BACKSLIDING from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him” (cf. also Jer. 3:6, 8, 11, 14, 22; 8:5; 31:22; 49:4; Hosea 11:7; 14:4).

It is interesting to note that שׁוּב is likewise the Hebrew word for “repent,” thereby implying that backsliding is simply repentance-in-reverse. The person who repents turns from past sin *to* God, whereas the backslider turns *from* God to sin. Backsliding therefore presupposes an original repentance that has been reversed by an act of the person’s will.

There is a third Hebrew verb translated “backsliding,” and it is שׁוּבָה (Hosea 4:16). This verb means “refractory, stubborn, rebellious,” and serves to identify the root cause for all backsliding—a self-willed, revolting heart. The stubborn intention to have one’s *own* way rather than *God’s* way, is a sure indication that backsliding has begun. Although the New Testament does not utilize the word “backslide,” in English, it does use language that conveys the equivalent idea. For example, James 5:19,20 describes the condition of an erring brother: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth

the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” James obviously envisioned the possibility of a brother (Christian), due to wayward thinking relative to doctrine or morals, turning back (backsliding) from the path of Christian truth and rectitude. The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) also illustrates the glorious return of one who has temporarily strayed from the Lord.

So, in answering the question of “Who is a backslider?”, we must conclude, upon examination of the Biblical terminology, that a backslider is one who has temporarily turned back from God, and who is currently in a movement away from Him. Sadly, such a definition will constitute a strong indictment of many within the churches who content themselves with a state of perpetual backsliding (Jer. 8:5) by saying “Lord, Lord,” while they conveniently ignore the thing that He says in His Word (Luke 6:46). All backsliders, including such prodigal pew-sitters, should acquaint themselves with the dire dangers of their present condition, before it is too late.

Backslider Beware

The manifold and extreme dangers of the backslidden are often omitted by preachers, and ignored by those that

do hear of them; but they are nonetheless real. It is hoped that a serious, though not exhaustive, survey of these perils will awaken some poor sinner and backslidden child of God so as to strike alarm in his soul and turn him from His wayward course. These dangers are subtle and sundry, and include the following considerations—

It Begins As A Heart-Leaning

Proverbs 14:14: “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.”

Acts 7:39: “To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.”

Heart-movement away from God can steal upon one as a subtle foe. By the force of suggestion, the sway of emotional inducements, the despair of disappointment, through the lure of some secret lust, by the influence of unworthy example—these are but some among many ways Satan employs to turn the heart of the child of God worldward. When these diabolical influences are not resisted and are allowed to overtake the heart, the man becomes a “backslider in heart” though he may seem religious and even be an active member of some Christian assembly. When Satan has thus stolen a Christian’s heart-affections, and heart-leanings toward the

world replace his once fervent first-love (Rev. 2:4), a spiritual decline has set in and it is but a matter of time before he begins to drift slowly but surely, almost imperceptibly and by degrees, from the truth of God's Word and a life of holiness into the open practice of worldliness. Indeed, multitudes within the churches are "backslidden in heart" with little, if any, life in their orthodoxy, spirit in their service, or deep-seated desire in their daily round of devotion. They may, as the prophet envisions, draw nigh to God with their mouths, and honor Him quite openly with their lips, while their heart, that intellectual, sensible, and moral core of man's being, remains far from Him (Isa. 29:13; Jer. 12:1,2; Eze. 33:31). The only remedy for such heart-wandering, is to daily keep one's heart with all diligence (Prov.4:23), hiding God's Word deep within (Ps. 119:11), and exercising it unto godliness with Scriptural thinking (1 Tim. 4:7; Phil. 4:8).

You Will Taste of Bitter Fruit

Proverbs 1:31: "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices [מִדְּבָרָם - 'device, plan, counsel']"

Sometimes arrogant backsliders, in moments of self-congratulation, confidently conclude that they have been able to circumvent the laws of God's moral universe—to sin with impunity and to outwit the All-wise

God Who holds their very breath. He may say, *"I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity,"* or perhaps *"God hath forgotten, He hideth His face; He will never see it,"* or even *"Thou wilt not require it,"* (Ps. 10:6,11,13); but such vain notions will never alter the fact that God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7), and that eventually the sinner will be filled to the point of loathing, with his own ways. The Divine recompense may come in the form of a deadly accident, a divorce, financial set-backs, the exposure of a sordid lifestyle; but it *will* come, probably in this life, but most certainly in the life to come, for God says *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord"* (Rom. 12:19).

The Force Of Evil Habit Is Not Easily Broken

Hosea 11:7: "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him."

Hosea 5:4: "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD."

Christians who drift from the Lord and are drawn away after the spirit of the world, often vainly reassure themselves that they will not veer too far from the strait and narrow, and after all, they can always break-off their temporary infatuation with the world if things get too serious. Such reasoning is the logic of self-deception, and overlooks the fact that backsliders give

place to strong demonic spirits which invade their personality and begin to take them into an ever-worsening downward spiral. The habits they learn in a lifestyle alienated from God tend to be tenacious and eventually become part of their settled character. They usually die in such a state and go to torment—sow a thought, reap a deed; sow a deed, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny!

You Are But One Step From Final Apostasy

2 Peter 2:21: "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

Proverbs 29:1: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

There exists but a faint line between backsliding and final apostasy, when a persistent backslider has done despite to the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), and can no longer be renewed again unto repentance (Heb. 6:4-6). Such a one can never find a place of repentance, though he seek it carefully with tears (Heb. 12:17). The very thought of such an awful state—doomed to die without hope, and without God, ought to move every backslider to grasp for dear life the invitation of a merciful God: *"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings"* (Jer. 3:22a). Even so, come ye to God!

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BACKSLIDER BEWARE!!

The Inherent Dangers Of A Backsliding Bent

Proverbs 14:14: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself."

Jeremiah 8:5: "Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return."

Hosea 11:7: "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him."

Few churchgoing people are unfamiliar with the terms "backsliding," or "backslider." In addition, a sizable number of people on the street, if engaged in spiritual conversation, will divulge that in the past, they made a commitment to Jesus Christ and walked with Him for a season, but have since wandered out of the way, and are "backslidden." But the concept embodied in these familiar terms is often rather indistinct and ill-defined, even in the minds of those who use them with confidence. Therefore, a need exists amongst God-fearers of a clear definition of "backslider," that