

Finding Your Way Back To Faith - Overcoming Spiritual Backsliding and Returning to God

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[0:00] Tonight we're looking at the subject of backsliding, backsliding, the backslider and finding! finding your way back to God. Backsliding, the Bible talks about it and it can happen to the best of us, to every one of us.

The strong warnings through the word about the subject, this important spiritual topic of backsliding. We're going to go to Proverbs 14, verse 14 and it reads, The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Notice where is backsliding? The backsliding happens in the heart, doesn't it? It starts in the heart. And firstly we're going to consider backsliding, what the Bible tells us about it.

Think of some examples that we could understand of backsliding and how we can be guarded against it. How we can understand it and how we can take action not to backslide.

Firstly, when we consider backsliding it's important to understand salvation. What is salvation? It's a gift. It's God's gift to us, eternal life. When a person is saved, he's saved forever.

[1:14] There's the truth of eternal security. That once we have trusted Christ, we've trusted him for time and for eternity. We're saved and it's by trusting in Christ's blood.

It's not about our personal merit, about what we do. And then as saved people, this side of heaven, that we're going to have some struggles. There's going to be some troubles.

And yet backsliders are still saved. They're disobedient, out of fellowship with God, yet they are saved people. And it can happen to a saved person that they backslide.

So it's something we ought to guard against as God's people. And it's also important to understand with our makeup that as a Christian, we've got two internal natures.

So we've got the new indestructible spiritual nature that loves God. But we're still battling with the old man, the old nature, the old carnal, fleshly nature, prone to wandering and resisting God.

[2:22] And so Romans 7 talks about this struggle. The good that I would, I don't. And the wrong that I ought not do, I do. And so there's this fight going on between the old and the new man.

The spiritual man and the carnal man. And this is a struggle that happens for every one of us until glory. It will be our lot. What is backsliding?

What is it? A backslider is someone, you could say, who turns away from God and chooses their own path instead of the Lord's. And what happens is that he gets filled with his own ways.

As the first text talked about, that a backslider is filled with his own ways. And the truth is, we reap what we sow. Galatians 6 verse 7.

In contrast, a righteous man finds satisfaction in God's ways. And that's his focus. So what happens when someone backslides? Backsliding is kind of moving backwards.

[3:23] It's not necessarily returning to a life of sin, but it's moving backwards in our spiritual journey. And it's any movement that's not forward in faith. It's a backsliding.

It's moving backwards. And you think about it, backsliding in heart. It's about our heart, isn't it? It's that cooling off of our devotion, of our affection for God.

It's a loss of that first love for our Lord. It's a self-pleasing spirit. So instead of pleasing our Lord, we're pleasing ourself. It's withdrawing from that devotion to the Lord.

And there's many warnings about backsliding. We need to watch out and take heed about backsliding. And the truth is that backsliding is a common thing. It happens to many, many Christians.

They think that they will never backslide. But it is one of the most common things. It's a common experience in the Christian walk. You know, the Christian walk, sometimes there's ups and downs, isn't there?

[4:22] Peaks and troughs. And sometimes we meander and get off track. Backsliding is really when a believer drifts away from the close relationship to the Lord.

And any one of us can do that. We can backslide. We can go back to the old ways. Go back to the old sinful patterns. And compromise our biblical convictions. We can kind of excuse this or that where we're slacking, where we're not spiritually on fire like we ought to be.

And we just settle for lukewarm and indifference. And we neglect the spiritual disciplines that we ought to have, such as prayer and Bible study. Let's look at some case studies, if you like, about backsliding.

And what a backslider looks like. The pictures of backsliders. And one of them, you could say it's like a case study. An example is the church at Ephesus. There's a whole church that was backsliding.

We see that in Revelation 2. And it tells of this one, this church, Ephesus. They started out pretty good. They started out with this great devotion.

[5:30] But then it says they left their first love. Revelation 2.5 picks it up. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works. Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

So there's a warning here to the church that God will remove the candlestick. So the light that they had, God will snuff it out. And that church will be extinguished.

And the Lord rebukes here this backsliding church. He instructs them to remember their spiritual condition. To repent. To return to their former devotion.

They'd lost their passion for Christ. And God calls on them to remember, repent, and return. Remember, it talks about a calling back to mind.

Bringing things to mind. To reflect upon. Remember where you were. And then repent. It's a changing of one's mind. Of direction. And then to return to the first works.

[6:34] Those initial deeds of faith, of service, of devotion. Commitment to pray, to fellowship, to study, to obedience. So even the church here, the whole church, our Lord rebukes them and urges them to turn back.

And brothers and sisters, there's this danger of drifting. A danger of drifting. It's like you're lying there in a canoe. You picture this drifting boat on this lake.

And a backslider is like this. They're drifting. There's no purpose. There's no direction. There's no aim there. They're indifferent.

Spiritually, they're just drifting along. Like a boat. Drifting from its moorings when the ropes aren't secured. Our spiritual lives can drift. They can slip.

We can, when we neglect our relationship with our Lord. And we can drift away from faith. It can be gradual and unconscious. We're not even aware of it. That it's even happening.

[7:35] And yet it leads to spiritual destruction. Imagine if there's a waterfall there. And that boat just drifts down until it reaches the white waters.

And drifting can lead to spiritual destruction. Think of it. The signs of drifting. Maybe a loss of appetite. To study the word. A loss of desire to pray. To fellowship with other believers.

To share the gospel. These are signs of drifting, aren't they? And 1 Timothy 1.19 talks about a shipwrecked faith. God help us that we won't make that mistake.

So how can we guard against backsliding? If you think of this analogy of drifting. You could think how, as Peter puts it, to add to your faith.

Show diligence to add to your faith. You know, don't get stagnant. Don't get in that state of drifting. Maybe if you're in that situation of drifting, of being on the water, you've got to watch out for the undercurrents.

[8:33] Be vigilant against the temptations that will pull you into sin. Be conscious of going against the tide. Don't just go with the flow. Of course, that's the way the world is, isn't it?

Go with the flow. Do what everyone else does. But we should resist those kind of sinful temptations. Those kind of things that pressure that will draw us away from God's will. And into false doctrine or false practice. And then another truth about stopping from drifting is to have that anchor that is Christ. That stability, that strength that will ground ourselves in Christ, our Lord.

In His truth. In a love for our Lord. And remain steadfast in that. So just to guard against that kind of picture of that drifting. Backsliding. It's turning your back on God.

Another case study you could look at is Jonah, for example. And I love just that short book of Jonah. There's so much in there. But just touching on some of the key verses.

[9:36] Jonah 1 verse 3. Of course, our Lord sent the word to Jonah to go and declare the message to Nineveh. Verse 3. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish.

God said go that way. Jonah went the other way. He went to Tarshish. He rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord. And he went down, it says, down to Joppa. And he found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare thereof. And he went down into it to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Jonah is another powerful case.

Another powerful case study of a backslider. And the consequences of running away from God. He's running from God. He's in disobedience. And we can all have that same mistake.

And notice it says, he paid the fare thereof. So not only did he go down to the harbour to where the ship was. And he went there and he paid it his fee.

[10:37] He paid his fare. It was a very costly ticket. A very costly ticket. And then it reads on verse 4. So the other sailors, the pagan sailors, they were just throwing everything overboard to lighten the ship.

And it says, they wanted to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship. And he lay and he was fast asleep.

Can you imagine it? Can you picture it? Can you hear him snoring? Jonah, he buys a ticket to go the opposite way to God's way. Backsliding is costly.

He paid the fare. You will pay the price. Backsliding. Backsliding. Jonah then it says, he goes downward. Down to Joppa. Down into the ship.

Down into the hold of the ship. And where the cargo was. And here he is. He finds a nice snug place to lie. He's comfy and cosy. And he falls fast asleep.

[11:59] He wraps himself in a blanket. And he falls asleep. Now what happens next up is God sends this violent storm. And ends up that this pagan captain comes over to Jonah.

And you can imagine him shaking him awake and commanding the preacher to get on his face to seek God and pray. Backsliding. It's important that we get to grips with this spiritual problem of backsliding.

Backsliding. The sense of backsliding in the Hebrew is apparently a habitual drifting. A habitual drifting away from God. It becomes a pattern where we just slide and slide again.

And it's time and time again we see backsliding. And it's a recurring pattern with the nation of Israel too. Through Israel's history. It happens. And especially in times of prosperity and blessing.

It can happen for us, can't it? When maybe times get good. And we get careless. We get a bit carefree. Times of blessing. When we're a bit carefree. And maybe God isn't in the picture like he ought to be.

[13:02] What does a backslider look like? For example, consider the profile, if you like, of a backslider. What does he or she look like? It's someone they once walked closely with God.

They were close. But now there's a distance. They've experienced God's favour. His blessing. But they've grown cold. Insensitive to God. They no longer seek after God.

Maybe like they were at one time. Now it's like God isn't featuring. They don't go to prayer. To the word. They've changed their conduct. Their conversation.

Something's changed in them. They've lost something. That's what's happened. Lost something. Something is gone. That they once had. That testimony. Now damaged.

They've lost that witness. That character of witness to others. They once walked closely with God. But now. They're a spiritual nobody.

[14:01] It's like happened to Jonah. Jonah. And how sad it is to see. Someone. They once had that credibility. With unbelievers. But now they've blown it. They've done something.

And. Or they've made some. Change of direction. And really. They're no witness at all. And look at Jonah. Fast asleep. Fast asleep. You know the devil.

Wants you to. Fall fast asleep. He wants to sing you a lullaby. He wants to rock you to sleep. Rock your cradle. Satan wants you to be asleep.

Of course. Spiritually asleep. Look at Jonah. Can you hear him snoozing? Fast asleep. Really. He was spiritually asleep. And we can get spiritually asleep. Where we're so.

Distant from God. That. He's not even in our consciousness. And we read on verse six. It tells us about the ship master. The captain. He comes to Jonah.

[14:57] And he says to him. What meanest thou? O sleeper. Arise. Call upon thy God. It so be that God will think upon us. That we perish not. All the other sailors are crying out.

To this God. To that God. And here's Jonah. He's confessed himself. A preacher. A prophet. A follower of God. But yet. He's spiritually nowhere.

And notice what happened with Jonah. With really the disciplinary process. That happened. Two things. There was kind of. These two phases. If you like. There was the storm phase.

Verse four. God sent a great wind. The storm comes. Notice the storm. It came to Jonah. This crisis came. Can't come to that. With the backslider.

A crisis happens. And we realize. Hey. I've forgotten God. I've got far from God. And the crisis comes. And we actually realize. Hey. God's got my attention again.

[15:53] There was this crisis phase. And God sends a crisis. To get Jonah's attention. And brother. Sister. There's no escaping. From God's pursuit. After you. There's no way to shield yourself.

From God's corrective hand. Mr. or Mrs. Backslider. Here tonight. God is on your trail. And God will rock your boat. To get your attention.

He will chase you down. Jonah thought. He could get away. From the presence of the Lord. But we cannot. We cannot get away. From the presence of the Lord. Because he's everywhere present.

And God. Might use the storm phase. If you like. And then secondly. In God's discipline. We see. You could call it. The pit phase. So Jonah ended up.

Even in the whale's belly. He went down into the deep. And then into the belly. Of the great fish. So God sent a great storm. And then he sent a great fish. We see the storm.

[16:49] We see. The depths. Of the ocean. Even. In the belly of a fish. And verse 17. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish. To swallow. Up. Jonah.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish. Three days. And three nights. Jonah the backslider. God uses this. Amazing. Uh. Stunning way.

Of getting his attention. And of capturing him. And sending him back. To where he. Meant to go. And here he is. Jonah. At the lowest point. You could imagine. In the depths.

Down inside a fish. Friends. Backsliding brings despair. And darkness. Imagine how dark it would have been. In the belly of the fish. There's no way. Of having a light. It would have been groping around.

With the innards of the fish. And the seaweed. And all the muck. That would have been. In the belly. Of the fish. In the darkness of it. Maybe covered in seaweed. Wrapped around him.

[17:45] And you can imagine. What it would have been like. What it would have smelt like. What it would have felt like. The Jonah the backslider. What a picture it is. And. Now backsliding. Brings this darkness.

This despair. It takes you down. Down. Down. As Jonah found. And he went to this place. Of backsliding. So when we're backsliding. We can either surrender. To despair.

And give up. And perish. Or we can cry out to God. Whether you're going through the storm. Brother sister. Whether you're going through the pit. Whether you're really down in the pits.

