



Cause of Backsliding

There is such a thing as going back in religion, after making a good profession. Men may run well for a season, like the Galatians, and then turn aside after false teachers. Men may profess loudly, while their feelings are warm, as Peter did; and then, in the hour of trial, deny their Lord. Men may lose their first love, as the Ephesians did. Men may cool down in their zeal to do well, like Mark, the companion of Paul. Men may follow an apostle for a season, and then, like Demas, go back to the world. All these things men may do.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose this is the worst. A stranded ship, a broken wing, a garden overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins — all these are sad sights; but a backslider is a sadder sight still.

That true grace shall never be extinguished, a true union with Christ never broken off, I feel no doubt. But I do believe that a man may fall away so far that he will lose sight of his own grace, and despair of his own salvation. And if this is not hell, it is certainly the next thing to it! A wounded conscience, a mind sick of itself, a memory full of self reproach, and a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows, a spirit broken with a load of inward accusations, all this is a taste of hell. It is hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty: *'The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways'* (Prov. 14:14).

Now, what is the cause of most backsliding? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is the neglect of private prayer. Of course the secret history of falls will not be known until the last day. I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinion is, I repeat distinctly, that backsliding generally first begins with the neglect of prayer.

Bibles read without prayer, sermons heard without prayer, marriages contracted without prayer, journeys undertaken without prayer, residences chosen without prayer, friendships formed without prayer, the daily act of prayer itself hurried over or gone through without heart, these are the kinds of downward steps whereby many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches a point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall.

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