

Questions from section on the church (prompted by ch.26:13 in the confession..)

Misc. spiritual problems that may tend to lead to, or are an indication of, a backslidden state.

- We don't believe in the doctrine of the carnal Christian...// But some may ask if we believe in backsliding.

- What is a backslidden state? – A backslidden state is a state of spiritual declension. It is a moving backwards in the Christian faith. It is a period of spiritual bondage in which the believer is temporarily overcome, and is not displaying the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

- Is it inevitable (because of remaining corruption) that we backslide? - NO

A description of a backslidden Christian under Ch.17 “Perseverance of the Saints” Par.3

- Notice the phrase “the neglect of the means of their preservation”..

Later - 1 Peter 5:8 – Eph. 6:13 “that you may be able to stand”

1 Cor.9:27 – Paul's practice

- Some indications of a backslidden state. (Three stages, three headings)

I. Early warnings

1. Neglect of simple and basic duties

- Neglect of private devotions (Bible study, prayer, confession of sin & mortification of sin.)
- Church services get dull, often neglected.
- Christian fellowship grows cold.
- Evangelism is of little concern. (witnessing)

2. Engagement in too much worldly endeavor (Priorities of life get rearranged)

- Recreation or work more important than ministry.
- Too busy for fellowship, church (sometimes),

II. Mature certainties of backsliding

1. Finding fault (often) with the church & fellow Christians.

2. Offended easily. – Focusing on faults of others. Refusing to see the good

3. Not following the Biblical method of healing relationships. (often going through a truncated version of them to satisfy their consciences that they have.) – honesty issues
 4. No joy in Christian fellowship. Withdrawing from fellow Christians. Often preferring the fellowship of unbelievers.
 5. Often will not listen to correction. Usually finding fault with the ones attempting to correct them. (even their spiritual leaders)
 6. Wiser than their spiritual leaders. Quote from Owen "*Hereon dependeth the equity of the obedience of the people unto their rulers; for wisdom for rule is peculiarly granted unto them, and their duty it is to seek after it in a peculiar manner. Wherefore those who, on every occasion are ready to advance their own wisdom and understanding in the affairs and proceedings of the church against the wisdom of the officers of it are proud and disorderly*"
- Qualify above. – My favorite quote from Owen long before I was an elder. There are faults to be found. – Spiritual leaders should be approachable concerning criticism and ideas. – The above statement perfectly fits some people I have known that have proven by their actions to be in an advanced state of backsliding.
 - One of the characteristics of a backslider is that they often turn from the very ones that are responsible to help them out of that backslidden state. They will embrace the counsel of almost anyone but them.

III. Possible and frequent consequences or full fruit of backsliding

1. Cause division in the church. (if permitted) – Can be subtle – Will seek to win support for their views.
 2. Will often cut themselves off from former Christian friends.
 3. Fellowship will only be with those that are not aware of their backslidden state. (see above) & therefore they have no fear of being confronted concerning their sins. **Note: When you are tempted to criticize those that try to correct you, beware. Ask yourself “Am I being a scoffer?” Is there any truth to what he or she is saying? If you will only allow sinless people to correct you, you will never be corrected.**
 4. Beliefs that were once important to them are cast off.
- The ultimate danger – Apostasy
 - Apostasy and backsliding cannot be distinguished easily...
 - The only sure way is when they return

- Apostasy is warned against in the Scriptures often as a very real danger for all professing Christians. **1 Cor.9:24-27, Heb.3:12** “Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. **1 John 2:18-19** Note “that it might be made manifest that none of them were of us.” Even John the Apostle could not tell the difference until they had “gone out from us”. **2 Peter 2:20-22**

“The means of their preservation” – What are the means whereby we may escape the allurements of apostasy? 1st of all, dread backsliding...

Don't underestimate the enemy. 1 Peter 5:8 (watchfulness) – roaring lion – Eph.6:13 (prepared for battle) “that you may be able to stand in the evil day” – 1 Cor.9:27 (disciplined)

- The means

1. Basics – Bible study, prayer

2. Mortification of sin. 1Cor.9:27 (putting it to death)

- Being watchful for it
- Confessing it promptly and completely (remind them of confession of root sins)
- Forsaking it and cutting off occasions for it. Rom 13:14 “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” (NKJ) or “to gratify its desires” (ESV)

“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”(NIV)

The put off part in that verse is putting off the gratification of sinful desire. – But You need the put on part as well. “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” What does that mean?

It means put on the graces of Christ in the place of the practice of sin. That is the fruit of the Spirit. The best way to avoid backsliding is to keep pursuing growth in grace. – **Backsliding is a plant that grows in a stagnant pool. We must be pursuing growth in grace at all times.** Gal. 5:16 “Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

3. Humbling ourselves – as opposed to exalting ourselves. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6.- 1 Pet.5:5 - & what do we need more to keep from backsliding than grace?

- Think Biblical thoughts about ourselves and our status.
 - Submit to humbling circumstances instead of resisting them
 - Take the lowest station when we have the opportunity to do so
 - Put others first. Phil. 2:3-4 – Cultivate the grace of the mind of Christ as it also says to do in Phil. 2
 - Rebuke yourself when you have self exalting thoughts about your character or your accomplishments.
 - Be gracious and appreciative when you receive compliments, but don't believe them.
4. Submit to God's discipline (with a right attitude) Heb.12:5 "do not despise the chastening of the Lord" - I have known some of you to despise it. I have myself. – Don't despise it. Submit to it. Learn from it. Ask God to teach you quickly so He can remove His rod from you sooner.

Prov 15:31

31 The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise.

(NKJ)

Prov 15:31

31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise."

(ESV)

God's rebukes are the most life giving of them all.

5. Choose to exercise love instead of criticize and find fault. 1 Cor.13:5 "love thinks no evil." – Some people go through much trouble in **life because they choose to interpret every action others do in as negative of a light as they can.** This is from the evil one and will lead you into bitterness and trouble.
6. Hear the rebuke, criticism and advice of God's people, no matter how humble. – **Heb.3:12-13 read.** "Exhort one another daily" – this is a means of our preservation "lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin".
- We have seen those who will not receive the exhortation of the brethren..
 - A backslider often will not listen to this exhortation from the brethren. He wants only confirmation that he's ok. If you don't give him that, he'll usually turn away.
7. Deal with offense Scripturally at all times. – getting back to the confession, ch.26:par.13 – Perform your duties to your brethren whether you feel like it or not.

If you'll follow these simple guidelines, you will probably not backslide noticeably. – If you backslide, you will probably not follow these guidelines and you'll have some excuse why you don't need to. Your situation is special, so you are exempted.

■ Dealing with a backslider: (next time)

2 Tim.2:24-26 expound

Gal. 6:1-3 expound