

RETURN FROM BACKSLIDING

TEXT: HOSEA 14:1-9

Introduction:

1. A number of years ago, evangelist Vance Havner said, "Most church members live so far below the standard, you would have to backslide to be in fellowship with them."
2. If that seems harsh, consider what our Lord said about the church in Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15, 16).
3. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "If you backslide in secret before God, you will soon err in public before men."
4. Spurgeon also said, "Nine times out of ten, declension from God begins in the neglect of private prayer."
5. Prayerlessness is definitely a sign of a backslidden condition.
6. Our Lord said in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" He was talking about prayerlessness.
7. I want to preach this morning on the danger of backsliding, and how to return from backsliding.
8. The prophet Hosea refers to backsliding several times (cf. 4:16; 11:7; 14:4).
9. It is Hosea 14:4 that I would like to focus on this morning -- "I will heal their backsliding," and I have entitled my message: "Return From Backsliding" (cf. 14:1).

I. GOD RECEIVES THE BACKSLIDER (14:2)

II. GOD REVIVES THE BACKSLIDER (14:7)

III. GOD RESTORES THE BACKSLIDER (14:8, 9).

I. GOD RECEIVES THE BACKSLIDER (14:1, 2)

1. Israel had "fallen" (literally, "stumbled") by their iniquity (14:1). Because of their sin, they would soon go into captivity.
2. Their only hope was for them to "return unto the LORD" (14:1; cf. 12:6), i.e. to repent. This is the only remedy for backsliding -- genuine repentance.
3. The LORD is taking the initiative. He is telling them what words to say. He will graciously accept these words because they are directed from Him (14:2).

4. God is revealing to us His standard for repentance: True repentance produces an abhorrence of sin – "Take away all iniquity" (14:2). Where sin was once tolerated, and even enjoyed, it is now hated – "take away all iniquity."
5. A.C. Dixon said, "In repentance you think of the sin you hate; in faith you think of the Christ you love."
6. Indifference and unconcern is replaced by a stirring of the conscience. The soul will not be satisfied until the iniquity has been taken away.
7. Sin becomes hateful the moment one gets into the presence of God. Job said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6).
8. Now the need of God's grace is felt and the repentant sinner cries out: "Receive us graciously" (Hosea 14:2).
9. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Father not only received his wayward son, he received him graciously (Luke 15:11-32).
10. Evangelist D. L. Moody often told the story related to him about a prodigal son in London, England.
11. "There is a story told of Mr. William Dawson, which I would like to relate. While preaching in London, one night at the close of his sermon, he said that there was not one in all London whom Christ could not save. In the morning a young lady called upon him and said: 'Mr. Dawson, in your sermon last night you said that 'there was no man in all London whom Christ could not save.' I find a young man in my district who says he cannot be saved, and who will not listen to me. Won't you go and see him? I am sure you can do more with him than I can.' Mr. Dawson readily assented, and went with the young lady to the East End—up one of those narrow streets there, and at the top of a rickety staircase found a garret, in which a man was stretched upon straw. He bent over him and said, 'Friend.' 'Friend!' said the young man, turning upon him, 'you must take me for some other person. I have no friends.' 'Ah,' replied the Christian, 'you are mistaken. Christ is the sinner's friend.' The man thought this too good; 'Why,' said he, 'my whole family have cast me off; every friend I had has left me, and no one cares for me.' Mr. Dawson spoke to him kindly, and quoted promise after promise—told him what Christ had suffered to give him eternal life. At first his efforts were fruitless, but finally the light of the gospel began to break in on the young man, and the first sign was his heart went out to those he had injured. And, my friends, this is one of the first indications of the acceptance of Christ

- with the sinner. He said: 'I could die in peace now if my father would but forgive me.' 'Well,' replied the man of God, 'I will go and see your father and ask him for his forgiveness.' 'No, no,' was the sad answer of the young man, 'you cannot go near him. My father has disinherited me; he has taken my name from the family records; he has forbidden the mention of my name in his house by any of the family or servants in his presence, and you needn't go.'"
12. "However, Mr. Dawson obtained the address, and went away to the West End of London; ascended the steps of a beautiful villa, and rang the bell. A servant in livery came to the door and conducted him to the drawing-room. There was everything in that house for comfort and luxury that money could purchase. He could not help contrasting the scene of poverty in that garret with the scene of luxuriant elegance everywhere around him. Presently a proud, haughty-looking merchant came in, and as he stepped forward to shake hands with Mr. Dawson that gentleman said: 'I believe you have a son named Joseph?' and the merchant threw back his hand and drew himself up. 'If you come to speak of him—that reprobate—I want you to go away. I have no son of that name. I disown him. If he has been talking to you he has been only deceiving you.' 'Well,' replied Mr. Dawson, 'he is your boy now, but he won't be long.' The father stood for a minute looking at the Christian, and then asked: 'Is Joseph sick?' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'he is at the point of death. I only came to ask your forgiveness for him, that he may die in peace. I don't ask any favor; when he dies we will bury him.'"
13. "The father put his hands to his face and great tears rolled down his cheeks, as he said, 'Can you take me to him?' In a very short time he was in that narrow street where his son was dying, and as he mounted the filthy stairs it hardly seemed possible that the boy could be in such a place. When he entered the garret he could hardly recognize his son, and when he bent over him the boy opened his eyes and said: 'O, father, can you—will you forgive me?' and the father answered: 'O Joseph, I would have forgiven you long ago if you had wanted me to.' That haughty man laid his boy's head on his bosom and the son told him what Christ had done for him; how He had forgiven his sins, brought peace to his soul; how that Son of God had found him in that poor garret, and had done all for him. The father wanted the servant to take him home. 'No, father,' said the boy, 'I have but a short time to live, and I would rather die here.' He lingered a few hours, and passed from that garret in the East End to the everlasting hills."

14. There can be no restoration without repentance. There can be no restoration until sin is dealt with. As long as sin is trifled with, and as long as sin remains unjudged, there can be no restoration.
15. A few years ago, a high school student down in Kentucky shot down and killed some of his fellow students at a school prayer meeting. A few days later, some of the students at the school put up a big banner saying, "We forgive you." This offended many people because the killer did not repent of his crime.
16. The students who put up that big banner were in no place to forgive. The murderer did not shoot them.
17. Some misguided people used our Lord's words from the cross ("Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" -- Luke 23:34) as an example of forgiveness but our Lord could ask God to forgive them because they crucified Him.
18. When full confession of sin is made, and all iniquity is sincerely turned from, then God can forgive immediately. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

II. GOD REVIVES THE BACKSLIDER (14:5-7).

1. Backsliding is a spiritual disease, and the only remedy is repentance (Hosea 14:4; cf. 11:7).
2. Hosea 11:7 says, "And my people are bent to backsliding from me."
3. The LORD promised to "heal their backsliding." He also promised to love them freely. His anger would be turned away because they repented of their sin (14:4).
4. Repentance must precede revival. We see this all throughout the Bible. The LORD sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance. Jonah preached, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).
5. The people of Nineveh repented, and God gave them a great revival.
6. There is a tract in our tract rack written by evangelist R.A. Torrey.
7. "I can give you a prescription that will bring a revival to any church or community or any city on earth. The prescription is as follows:
First, let a few Christians (they need not be many) get thoroughly right with God themselves. This is the prime essential. If this is not done, the rest that I am to say will come to nothing.
Second, let them bind themselves together to pray for a revival until God opens the heavens and comes down.
Third, let them put themselves at the disposal of God for Him to use

as He sees fit in winning others to Christ.

That is all! This is sure to bring a revival to any church or community I have given this prescription around the world. It has been taken by many churches and many communities, and in no instance has it ever failed; and it cannot fail!"

8. In his message, "We Can Have Revival Now," evangelist John R. Rice gave four reasons why we can have revival now:
 - God's Inexhaustible Grace and His Boundless Love for Sinners Make Revival Always Possible.
 - The All-Powerful Word of God Makes Revival Possible Now.
 - The Miracle-Working Holy Spirit to Empower Christians and Convict and Regenerate Sinners Makes Revivals Always Possible.
 - The Resource of Persistent, Heart-Broken, Prevailing, Believing Prayer Makes Revival Always Possible.
9. Let us pray and ask God for genuine heaven-sent revival!
10. Not something that is worked up, but something that God sends down.
11. Like the dew of heaven (Hosea 14:5).
12. God says, "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (14:5). Think about that!
13. Dew is refreshing. The dew falls silently, and this is the way the Holy Spirit quietly works in our hearts.
14. Spurgeon said, "You will notice, first of all, that grace, like the dew, often comes down imperceptibly into man's heart."
15. The dew touches every inch of ground. When God sends revival, everyone is aware of the presence of God.
16. One preacher said, "the dew is penetrative, leaving no stem or leaf unvisited" (S. Franklin Logsdon, *Hosea, People Who Forgot God*).
17. When believers are revived they grow strong in the Lord. Like deep-rooted trees, they grow stronger day by day (14:5, 6, 8).
18. There are three references to Lebanon in Hosea 14:5-7. Lebanon was known for their beautiful cedar trees.
19. The Shulamite says her shepherd's "countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars" (Song of Solomon 5:15).
20. "They shall revive as the corn" (14:7). We can reprove and exhort the backslider, but it is God who revives the backslider.
21. We can encourage and admonish the backslider, but it is God who revives the backslider.
22. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:6).

23. "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).

III. GOD RESTORES THE BACKSLIDER (14:8, 9).

1. Before there can be restoration, there must first be repentance. We see here in Hosea 14:8 that Ephraim (Israel) renounced their idolatry.
2. Most Americans do not bow down and worship statues of stone or wood, but nevertheless America has become an idolatrous country.
3. Philippians 3:19 describes modern-day America. "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."
4. Colossians 3:5 says covetousness is idolatry.
5. Hosea 14:8 says, "From me is thy fruit found." Our fruitfulness is based upon our dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 15:4-8).
6. The fruit on the branch is directly traceable to the root. When Christians backslide, their connection to Christ is cut off and no fruit is produced.
7. The Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all fruitfulness (John 15:4, 5).
8. Many Christians and many churches are barren and dry because they are not depending upon Christ.
9. Like backslidden Israel, they are trusting in themselves and their own efforts (Hosea 14:3).
10. The wise understand these things (14:9). Prudence (14:9) refers to the effective use of wisdom. Right thinking will lead to right actions.
11. "For the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (14:9b). "The way of the transgressors is hard" (Pro.13:15).

CONCLUSION:

1. Hosea asks: "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?" (14:9).
2. What "things" are we to understand?
3. That God will receive the backslider!
4. That God will revive the backslider!
5. That God wants to restore the backslider!
6. And refresh the backslider.
7. And renew the backslider.

8. The backslider can be fruitful again if he repents and gets right with God. Peter is a good example of a backslider who was wondrously restored.
9. From this morning's devotions: "Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18:3, 4).
10. "As Jeremiah looked on, he saw that the vessel was ruined in the process of working it on the wheels. But it was not cast away as though it had become utterly useless. The potter crushed the clay, softened it again with running water, and refashioned it. This was a vivid illustration of what God can do with broken lives, or with nations that have turned away from allegiance to Him" (HA Ironside, *The Daily Sacrifice*, May 1).