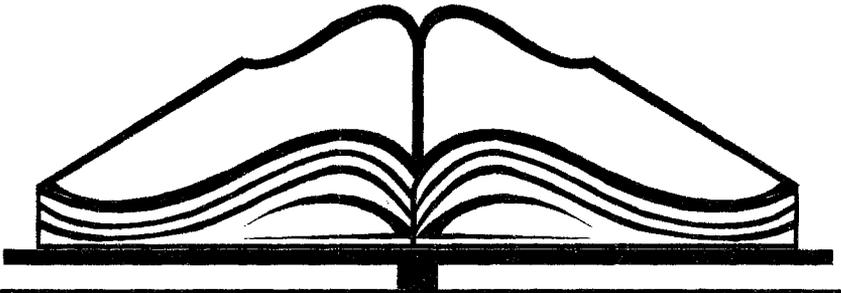


SIMPLE
TIMULATING
TUDIES
IN
BACKSLIDING



For after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.
--2 Peter 2:20

by Donald G. Hunt

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By
DONALD G. HUNT

VOICE OF EVANGELISM
Box 431
Ottumwa, Iowa 52501
U.S.A.

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Backsliding, a Question of Grave Concern

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward" (Isa. 1:2-4).

What is a backslider? Briefly, he is one who has gone backward instead of forward. Religiously, he is one who once knew the Lord, but who has now forsaken Him; he is one who has gone back into the ways of the world; he is one who has lost the zeal and interest that characterized his life immediately following his conversion.

The Hebrews were guilty of backsliding, and Paul asked them to "call to remembrance the former days" and the zeal for God and spiritual things that they possessed in those days (Heb. 10:32).

Not enough attention is given to this matter of backsliding today. Converts should be instructed concerning the sin of backsliding. Sermons should be preached that show that backsliding is incompatible with the Bible doctrines of baptism, sanctification, faith, spiritual growth, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, love for God, and obedience to His will. Pulpits should ring out with warnings about backsliding. Fervent prayers should ascend, and intense effort should be put forth to restore backsliders to the Lord. To all spiritually minded people, to gospel preachers and Bible elders, and to God Himself, backsliding is a question of grave concern.

I. The Possibility of Backsliding Makes it a Question of Grave Concern.

Some people say that a genuine Christian can never backslide. If someone appears to be a backslider, they say that he was never actually converted. Their contention is based upon a misinterpretation of certain verses in I John.

But, the Bible shows that a Christian can backslide. The devil is still on the loose. Peter writes to Christians and admonishes them to be on guard against the devil, for he is seeking their destruction (I Pet. 5:8,9). If they cannot backslide, what is the point of the warning? During their forty years in the wilderness, the children of Israel fell into the sins of idolatry, fornication, and murmuring against God. When Paul wrote to Christians and told them of the way that God punished Israel for those sins, he said, "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition (warning)" (I Cor. 10:11). "Wherefore," Paul concluded, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (v. 12). In the Hebrew letter, Paul plainly warned the brethren, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). Why would anybody say that it is impossible for Christians to backslide when the Bible speaks so clearly to the contrary?

Many examples of truly converted, born-again people who have backslidden into sin could be cited to show that backsliding is possible. I am thinking of a man in a city in Missouri where I preached during the first years of my ministry. He had been a terrible drunkard and gambler primarily because, as a traveling salesman, he was away from home so often and with the wrong crowd. But, he was converted to Christ and became a truly new creature. How he would weep as he would tell me of those days when he broke the heart of God! He was always present, prayer-meeting night and all, with his Bible and friendly handshake. But, his wife who was supposed to be a Christian, objected to his giving a tithe and an offering to the Lord's work. After a couple of years of such nagging, this man finally gave up, and the last that I heard, he was back in the

world just like he once was. Yes, people who have been converted CAN backslide. Countless existing cases prove it!

As long as it is possible to develop the deadly disease of cancer, cancer will always be the question of grave concern in the medical world that it is today. And as long as it is possible for Christians to backslide, backsliding will always be a question of grave concern in Christianity.

II. The Tendency to Backslide Makes it a Question of Grave Concern.

It is not only possible for one to backslide, but there is actually a strong tendency among people to backslide. Simon of Samaria had believed and been baptized, but almost immediately, the old "Big I" idea returned, and Peter had to command him to repent (Acts 8:13-24).

A garden that is neglected becomes weed-infested and is not productive. Lives that are neglected and are not given careful attention have the tendency to backslide. Congregations that are neglected become sin-infested and bear little fruit for God. Ever so many accept Christ in all sincerity, but if they are not given spiritual attention, most of them will turn out to be backsliders.

Do you realize that those who are praying today may be negligent in the days ahead? Do you realize that those who today are out in soul winning work, laboring to win others to Christ, may need someone to restore them to Christ in the future? Do you realize that those who today are strong in the Lord may be weak in another year? Do you realize that those who now are on fire for Christ may be smouldered down to a bare flame in another year? Well, that is altogether likely in many cases. How many times I have marveled at how fast the devil can get his job done! Let us realize that the Bible backs us up in this fact of the backsliding tendency. In Gal. 6:1, Paul said, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Yes, those who today are spiritual and who restore others to Christ may likewise be tempted themselves

and need someone to restore them to Christ in the future.

Though the Old and New Covenants may differ in nature and in requirements, yet human nature and tendencies are the same under both. Look at Israel's backsliding tendency. They had hardly been delivered from Egyptian bondage until they reverted to idolatry in worshipping the golden calf. They hadn't even reached the promised land until they committed fornication with the Moabitish women, murmured against God, and became guilty of disbelieving God. When the new generation entered Canaan, they soon forgot Jehovah because of material prosperity and idolatry.

Any evangelist who is constantly in revival and evangelistic meetings will tell you how his heart has been broken time after time upon returning to places where he has conducted good meetings to find that the elders and members have let new converts drift back into the world and have let the congregations get into terrible messes once more. I am thinking of a rural congregation where I have conducted two such meetings. It is in the north country where the winters are severe, and the entire community had nothing but dirt roads in those days. Most of the families lived considerable distances from the church building. During the severe winter months, the roads would get blocked with snow, and no services would be conducted for several Sundays. Then, the weather would break up, but the attendance would be small. It was there that I conducted my very first revival meeting. It was in the summer time, and we had a good meeting. The people took hold of the work in an encouraging way. It looked like great days were ahead. But, winter came, and things closed down for a short while. The brethren contacted me the next spring to see if I could come and get them back on their feet. The meeting that summer started small, but the crowds came, and something like twenty-five were baptized. I taught those folks the best that I could. I told them that they couldn't allow a single Sunday during the winter to go by without having services. They determined and promised to keep the work going in a fine way. I felt confident that it would be different than it had been before. But, right there in the very beginning of my ministry, I learned the lesson that every servant of the Lord needs to learn; this is, that there is a strong

tendency in people to backslide. It was not possible for me to stay on with the work there following the meeting, which I would like to have done. But, I am sorry to say that little by little, bad things began to happen there, and within three years from that time, the entire congregation disbanded, and at this writing, there is not a religious service of any kind in that community where once they gathered a hundred strong.

Yes, brethren, the tendency is to backslide. We must watch our own lives. We must watch the lives of new converts. We must not neglect congregations.

III. The Prevalency of Backsliding Makes it a Question of Deep Concern.

Go into the average community and ask for the “membership list” of the congregations, and you will find that more have backslidden and are now inactive than have stayed true to God as they all started out to do. Check the church records where you attend and get the names of those who have been added to the congregation during the last five years. Then, see how many of them are now unfaithful. If your investigation reveals what such an investigation would reveal in the average congregation, I say that you cannot help but see that backsliding is a very prevalent sin today.

Because of backsliding, congregations are not ready in the early part of a special meeting to launch out to win souls to Christ. In every meeting, it seems that there must be considerable time spent trying to get the congregation back into line with God and to get the members warmed up for God before there can be many lost sinners brought to Christ. Oh, I say, and I say it truthfully, backsliding is a present-day menace to Christianity!

When church people move into another community, many of them do not look up the church. They will change their mailing address, get a job, look up the grocery store, and send their children to school, but they will neglect their church life. They try to excuse themselves by saying that everybody is strange, or they don't know where to go, or it wouldn't seem like “church” because it wouldn't

be the old home church. So, they just drift downstream spiritually and soon forget God altogether.

I well remember the first teacher that I had at church when I was just a little fellow. (My parents always took the whole family to the church services; I started my church attendance when I was three weeks old and have never been absent since, except for the few Sundays of sickness scattered throughout the years.) I suppose that I was about four years old when I can remember this teacher teaching us stories about Jesus, David, Daniel, and others. But, when I had grown to high school age, this woman chaperoned the Friday night young people's dance in town. The preacher who preached to the congregation when I was in high school got mixed up with one of the women in the very next congregation where he preached and had to leave town in a hurry. The day that I was baptized, there were eleven others baptized also. But, the only two persons of the eleven who today even as much as attend church services have fallen for the feminine fad of smoking.

Oh, I know that backsliding is prevalent today! It is affecting preachers, elders, deacons, newly converted people, and longtime members of the church. This makes it a matter of grave concern.

God has always been gravely concerned over backsliding. When Israel backslid, He sent the prophets to plead with them to return to God. Simon of Samaria had no sooner sinned than Peter dealt with the backslidden condition of his heart. When Peter himself sinned down at Antioch, Paul dealt with him immediately. Brethren, God is vitally concerned about this matter of backsliding, and if Christ dwells in our hearts, and if we think as God thinks, we too will be gravely concerned about this great question.

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words tell what a backslider is.
2. Give two Biblical reasons for believing a Christian can backslide.
3. How do some people reason who deny the possibility of a

Christian's backsliding?

4. What convert in New Testament times soon backslid?
5. Tell of Israel's backsliding experiences even before they entered Canaan.

The Backslider is the Loser

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:38,39).

The backslider is a heavy loser. He may try to "put on" as if everything were rosy with him. But, the truth of the matter is, he is a loser from every standpoint. We are going to consider exactly what a backslider loses. If you know that you are a backslider, won't you consider each point that is made? You will see what you are missing each day, and you will see what eternity holds for you.

I. A Backslider Loses the Favor of God, the Fellowship of God, and the Special Blessings of God.

God has never been pleased with a disobedient person. God says, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," or "my soul shall not be pleased with him." God will not fellowship a sinning person. "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is AGAINST them that do evil" (I Pet. 3:12). As light has no fellowship with darkness, so God has no fellowship with men who sin. A holy God cannot fellowship an unholy person. Therefore, a backslider loses that close, warm fellowship with the heavenly Father. Though

he may kneel to pray, God's face is against him, and He will not hear. He no longer knows the joy of walking with the Lord and doing His will. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing, following his baptism (Acts 8:39), but if he ever backslid, he lost that joy. All of the special providential blessings that God promises to His people have completely vanished from the backslider, for God will not grant special blessings to the wicked. God promises to add all good and necessary things to those who seek the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness first (Matt. 6:33).

Notice the backslider, and you will see that his countenance shows him to be a backslider. I remember a Christian young lady, who let the devil slip up upon her and get her entangled in a courtship with a man who didn't even believe in God. I wrote her prior to their marriage, showing her that God forbid her to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever and warning her of the dismal life that she was walking into. But, she married the man anyway, although not taking any personal offence toward me for my letter. Two years later, while in the city where she lived, I called on her. After learning from her that she did not attend church services and after seeing spiritual neglect written all over her life, as she rocked on her knee a little son who looked exactly like his atheist father, I said, "Tell me, have you ever regretted at any time that you married against the teaching of God's Word?" Then, with tears welling up in her eyes, she said, "Donald, I have regretted it many a time." As I looked at her in her grief, I could see that she realized that she had lost the favor of God, the fellowship of God, and the special blessings of God. What a loss for a heart to suffer.

II. A Backslider Loses the Fellowship of His Brethren in Christ.

While some who are backsliders in heart still keep on attending church services, yet the usual thing for a backslider to do is just quit the church altogether. He turns his back upon the worshipful gathering of the saints. He is not there to sing the praises of God with his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is absent when the

brethren bow together in prayer before the heavenly Father. He is not there to study God's Word with other children of God. He is not invited home with a good Christian family for Sunday dinner, for he is keeping company with an altogether different crowd. How heavy his heart must feel at times when he hears the church bell ringing and recalls the sweet times of the past when he was in the fellowship of the church! In the place of the Christian fellowship that he once enjoyed, if he has any fellowship at all now, it is with the world and the worldly crowd. What a terrible and unsatisfying fellowship sin offers him in place of the wholesome fellowship that he has lost through backsliding!

III. A Backslider Loses His Name, His Respect, and His Influence for Christ.

Just let a Christian become entangled in sin, and he will become the talk of the town. People call him a hypocrite, and people have little respect for him. The influence that he once had for Christ is now completely shattered. If he tries to correct anybody's sin, he is always told to go home and clean his own house before he tries to clean anybody else's. His very life is a disgrace to Christ, for it holds Christ up to open shame and ridicule.

I am thinking of a woman who had a bad case of pride. She thought that she was just a little bit better than anybody else, although she was always putting on "affected" humility. For the most part, people had little confidence in her Christianity. Although she talked to people about their souls, people laughed to her back at her invitations. They said that she ought to go home and patch up the hard feelings with her relatives and with her neighbors with whom she was not on speaking terms. Oh, how despicable a backslider is in the eyes of men!

IV. A Backslider Loses His Salvation if He Dies in that Condition.

Those who advocate the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" teach that though backsliding is a sin, yet it is not soul-damning. Their reasoning is that if he was once saved, he can never be lost, no matter what he does. But, that is not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible teaches that if a man dies as a backslider, he is as lost as a sinner who has never accepted Christ.

Heb. 10:39 says that those who draw back, draw back unto perdition. That word "perdition" means "perishing". Thus, those who draw back perish. "Perish" is the word used in John 3:16 to distinguish the lost from those who have eternal life. Though Simon of Samaria had believed and been baptized, when pride overtook him and caused him to sin by offering Peter money for the power to bestow the Holy Spirit upon others, Peter said to him, "Thy money PERISH WITH THEE. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter" (Acts 8:20,21). Notice that Simon was in a perishing condition. Jesus pictured Himself as the vine and His disciples as the branches. Jesus said, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). A disciple either abides in Christ, or he does not abide in Christ. If he abides in Christ, he will bear fruit, but if he does not abide in Christ, he will be cut off and burned. Read the whole passage, John 15:1-6, and you will surely see that a disciple who is not faithful to Christ does not have salvation. According to Peter, if one has come to know Christ and has been delivered from his sins, but returns to them, his latter end is worse than his original state (II Pet. 2:20). Isn't a man lost before he accepts Christ? Well, the backslider is in a worse condition than an alien sinner—Peter says so. Both are lost, but the backslider is in an even worse condition, for an alien sinner is more likely to accept Christ than a backslider is to return to Christ. God sees a backslider as repulsive as a sow that was washed that goes back to her wallowing in the mire and as a dog that returns to eat his vomit (II Pet. 2:20-22).

Brother, listen! If you go back into sin and die out of

fellowship with God, it matters not if you have been baptized; it matters not how faithful a Christian you were at one time; it matters not how many souls you have won to Christ or how many sermons you have preached. If you die in your sins as a backslider, then, my brother, according to the Word of God, you are headed as straight for hell as any Christ-rejecting sinner now living. What a loss a backslider receives when he loses his eternal soul!

As we consider the backslider's losses, we see that he actually loses everything good in this life, he loses Christ in the hour of death, and he will lost heaven in eternity. What tremendous losses to suffer and how foolish to suffer them when we know that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (I Tim. 4:8).

QUESTIONS

1. Prove that a backslider loses his salvation.
2. Comment upon what else he loses from God.
3. What are some of the blessings of Christian fellowship that he loses?
4. What about a backslider's reputation and influence in the community?
5. What else does a backslider lose?
6. What do you think about the wisdom of backsliding?

Indications of a Backslidden Heart

“Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21).

The trouble with backsliders, like all other sinners, is their hearts. Jesus said that “out of the heart” come forth all kinds of evil (Matt. 15:19), and James tells us that a man is “drawn away of his own lust and enticed” (Jas. 1:14). In other words, as a man thinketh “in his heart”, so does his life follow (Prov. 23:7). Therefore, men backslide in their lives because they are backsliders in their hearts. Prov. 14:14 shows that men backslide in their hearts first, then follow with their lives: “The backslider IN HEART shall be filled with his own ways.” When Simon of Samaria sinned after his conversion, our text points out where the difficulty was—Peter said, “Thy HEART is not right in the sight of God.” As v. 22 shows, it was the “thought of his heart” that was wrong and that needed God’s forgiveness.

As long as men can be hypocritical (purposely concealing their hearts by pious outward conduct), there will always be more actual backsliders than we count. Of course, looking upon the outward appearances, we can observe backslidden lives, but God, who is able to look upon the heart, is able to detect the backslidden hearts of many others who have fooled us with their pious, religious fronts. This was evident in the case of the Pharisees. Of them, Jesus said, “Even so ye also OUTWARDLY appear righteous UNTO MEN, but WITHIN ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:28). Therefore, let us realize that there are far more backsliders in the eyes of God than we realize. It is altogether possible that some of you now reading these lines are righteous outwardly as far as men are concerned, but you may be backsliders in your hearts before the ALL-SEEING and NEVER-DECEIVED eye of God!

I am convinced that many people who are backslidden in their hearts try to hang onto Christ and Christianity outwardly. I mean that

they are not right with God, but they continue to attend church services, to give, to study, and to pray. They attend, but there is little heart-hunger. They give, but merely because they are supposed to. They study the lesson for next Sunday, but they do not feast upon the Word of God. They pray, but their prayers are from their lips and not their hearts.

I am thinking of a lady in an Iowa congregation who bore some of these very indications of a backslidden heart. She was always present; she had her Bible with her; she prayed at the prayer service as usual—her life outwardly did not reveal the fact of backsliding to the average person in the church. But, I came to fear that something was wrong on the inside, on which God alone could look. Something was at work unbeknown to the average person. Her heart was becoming backslidden. In time, her backslidden condition was apparent to all. Hanging on outwardly while the inside is cold and dead is just a slow way to a backslidden life. God saw what was happening all the time.

Since the devil is on our trail, and since we have seen that the tendency is to backslide, it behooves all of us to know what some of the indications of a backslidden heart are, else backsliding will overtake us, and all that is written in the Bible against backsliding will apply to us. We are listing certain signs that should alarm us if we detect them in our hearts, for they are indications of a backslidden heart. Search your own heart carefully with EACH one to see if you may be guilty of a backslidden heart.

1. When we become content with our spiritual growth as it is.
2. When we lose our hunger and thirst for the things of God.
3. When we think that the Bible is dry.
4. When we get our eyes fixed upon money and the things that money will buy.
5. When it takes much preaching and urging to get us to do something for Jesus.
6. When we are ashamed of Jesus in the presence of sinners.
7. When we pray without being greatly burdened about our petitions.
8. When we worry instead of committing our way unto the Lord in

prayerful trust.

9. When we grow weary in well doing.
10. When we preach or teach without seeking God's help.
11. When we are not desperately concerned over the unsaved condition of our neighbors and friends and are not trying to win them to Jesus.
12. When we do not have a vision of what we can do for Jesus.
13. When we do not show the spiritual concern over our own soul's condition that others are showing in it.
14. When we do not care to be with spiritual people and talk about spiritual things.
15. When we are tempted to short-change God in our giving, our prayer time, and our service
16. When we are afraid that gospel preaching is going to "drive people away".
17. When we do not like preaching that unsettles us by convicting our consciences.
18. When the most pleasing part of the church service is the closing song and dismissal.
19. When we can sing gospel songs without thinking about the message of the songs.
20. When we can partake of the Lord's supper without thinking of the sufferings of Jesus.
21. When we want the church to be more social and less spiritual in its program.
22. When we have a hard time keeping our minds on what we are reading in the Bible or on what we are hearing in the sermon.
23. When somebody becomes distasteful in our eyes because of his or her spirituality.
24. When we do not fear our temptations.
25. When we see "little" sins cropping out without being alarmed.
26. When we hate to see the revival meeting begin just at the time that we had planned to do something else.
27. When we do not yearn for heaven nor hope for the second coming of Christ.
28. When we can find an excuse for not doing what we should do.

29. When it is easier to see the shortcomings in others than in ourselves.

30. Maybe that very thought that is in your heart right NOW.

If you are a backslider in heart, face the fact and do something about it. By all means, do not try to cover up your backslidden heart except in the blood of Jesus that is able to wash away all sins. Won't you "keep your heart with all diligence", realizing that "out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23)?

QUESTIONS

1. Men recognize backsliders by their lives; God recognized them first by their _____.
2. List as many of the 30 indications of a backslidden heart as you can.
3. Which ones have you noticed in people the most?
4. What are some other indications that you might personally add?
5. What Bible character was told that his backslidden heart was not right before God?

What Causes People to Backslide?

“Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12).

Only those who have been actually converted can backslide. Realizing that many now looked upon as members of the church have never been Scripturally converted, many today looked upon as “backsliders” and “inactive church members” are not actually backsliders at all. They have never known the Lord in the first place.

In this lesson, we are searching for the chief causes of backsliding.

I. The Devil Attacks People in Their Main Weakness.

The devil always attacks a person where he is the most likely to give in. When Jesus was deathly hungry from His forty-day fast, the devil tempted Him to turn the stones into bread (Matt. 4:2,3). Of course, Jesus did not fall before His temptations. Simon of Samaria had always been looked up to as some great one by the townspeople of Samaria. Therefore, the devil’s first attack against Simon after his conversion was concerning the matter of pride. The devil put it into Simon’s heart to offer Peter money for the power of bestowing the Holy Spirit upon others like the apostles were able to do (Acts 8:9-21).

Those who have been heavy drinkers will be tempted with drink. Those who have loved to dance will be tempted with worldly music. Those who have had hot heads and quick tempers will be tempted with impatience. Those who have been adulterous will be tempted with lust. Cunningly, the devil strikes where people are the weakest; thus, he is able to regain many to his dominion.

II. Evil Companions Cause Many to Backslide.

I Cor. 15:33 declares that evil companions corrupt good morals. This very truth is exemplified on every hand. Solomon, who had started so wonderfully, was led away from God by his evil wives (I Kings 11:1-4). God expects Christian people to find their association among His people. But, when His people begin to seek their fellowship among worldly people, it isn't long until they begin to drift from God.

A young man several years older than I, was a very outstanding Christian young person in my hometown. He usually led the song services on Sunday morning and was often called upon for prayer. Though keen in his school studies and athletics, he was always of a clean, wholesome make-up. The crucial time in his life came when he graduated from high school. Like others, he left home and went to the city to work. There, he fell in with his father (the boy stayed with his grandparents during his school days). His father was a gambler on the horse races. How my heart was hurt when I learned that after awhile, this young man had lost his touch with God and was playing the races like his gambling father! Oh, if people hope to stay true to God, they must be very careful about their associates!

III. The Pleasure of Sin Causes Many to Lose Their Love for God and Their Longing for Heaven.

Temptation bears down upon a new convert. He resists as long as it seems that he can. Finally, he weakens and gives in. This taste of the world brings back his former craving, longing, and desire for the old life. Because of this, John was very strict in his warning to Christians that they love not the world, for he knew that if they did, the love of God would be driven out of their hearts (I John 2:15). Sometimes, people become fun-crazy. To them, life is one endless round of fun and hilarity. Then, the prayer meeting and Bible study become very disinteresting. Soon, it is easy for them to miss church services, and ultimately, they quit altogether.

A young lady had returned home from her first year of special

Bible training. Her home congregation was engaged in a revival meeting. At the end of the first week of the meeting, an ex-boy friend with whom she had gone before her conversion began to come around once more, even presenting her with a quite expensive bracelet. By the middle of the second week of the meeting, she was skipping the revival services and going to the nightly softball games with him. The entreaties of the church people, who had even helped finance her while in school, were unheeded. Soon, she began attending the theater. Finally, she married this non-Christian and gave birth to a baby not very long after her marriage. The thrill of sinful pleasure drowned every spiritual force in her life.

IV. Earthly Interests Cause Many to Forget God.

When a man gets interested in earthly gain rather than heavenly treasure, it is just a matter of time until he has drifted far from God. I am thinking of a man who was once faithful to Christ to the extent that he truly bore many persecutions because of the gospel. But, he bought into a post-war business that paid great dividends, and his mind was on money from sun-up until sun-down. He would not leave his store on a Saturday night to attend some special gospel services. He began to have trouble with people over money matters. Little by little, he lost interest in the church, he found fault with Bible preaching and Bible preachers, and, finally, he quit because the members were dealing with him as a backslider.

Jesus said that the deceitfulness of riches would choke the Word of God out of a man's heart (Matt. 13:22), and Paul said that those who were greedy for money would err from the faith (I Tim. 6:10). Some people act the same way about their homes and cars. They get interested in buying or building a new home. For months, they are so busy getting the house built or reworked that they give God no time. They get a new car, and all that they can think about is cars, automobile gadgets, going places, and seeing things. The cares of life, according to Jesus, will also crowd God's Word out (Matt. 13:22).

V. Many Backslide Because of Being Persecuted.

Standing for Jesus is bound to bring persecutions. "All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). The old crowd will think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot that you used to, and they will speak evil of you (I Pet. 4:3,4). They will laugh and make fun of you in an attempt to cause you to backslide. Then, the church of the Lord has always been persecuted because of the preaching of God's Word. Jesus recognized that some would wilt out because of being persecuted because of the Word of God (Matt. 13:20,21). Thus, some depart from Christ because of what it costs.

IV. Many Lose Interest in Spiritual Things Because of a Lack of Vitalized Christianity.

If there is no spiritual atmosphere in a congregation, there will be little spiritual growth. If there is not a live evangelistic program, those who were once won to the Lord will soon be lost to the Cause. Then, people who do not abound in prayer, who do not bring their tithes and offerings to God, and who do not study the Bible make very poor brothers for a new babe in Christ. But, isn't this the kind of "brothers" that the average new convert finds in the average congregation? If the preaching is dry and impractical, not really heart-searching, soul-convicting, life-challenging, then backsliding will mount higher and higher. Devitalized "Christianity" today does not develop, challenge, nor utilize those who have accepted Christ; hence, backsliding abounds on every hand.

VII. Many Backslides Because They Become Discouraged.

Some get discouraged over the bad examples of others who are supposed to be Christians. Some get discouraged because the church is small, and they can't get any outsiders interested. Some get discouraged over trouble that arises in the congregation. Some get

discouraged because they can't see any spiritual growth in their own lives. Then, others become weary in well doing and quit.

Really, there is no end to enumerating the things that cause people to backslide. However, those that we have listed rank high among the many weapons that the devil uses to get men, women, and young people to backslide.

QUESTIONS

1. Where does the devil usually attack one?
2. What Bible character was led away from God because of his wives?
3. What will the pleasure of sin replace in a backslider's heart?
4. What did the Parable of the Sower say would choke out God's Word.
5. How can the condition of a congregation cause one to backslide?

How to Prevent Backsliding

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

It will not do much good just to weep over the trend toward backsliding and the doom of backsliders. We must do our utmost to prevent others from backsliding who are now living for Christ.

Thank God for having a plan for the prevention of backsliding. God has given us His plan for marriage and the home, and if we heed it, we can have happy, successful homes. He has also given us a plan for the church, and if we heed that plan, we shall find

that backsliding will not be the great problem that it is today. Christ not only said for us to win men to Christ, but the last part of His great commission commands us to develop and use those lives to His glory (Matt. 28:19,20). Here are some of the things involved in preventing backsliding.

I. The Church Members Must Remove all Occasions of Stumbling From Their Lives.

We who already know Christ must set the proper example before new converts. They are new babes and are not seasoned to severe spiritual shocks. They expect to find perfection in the church. We must do our best to live in such a way that our lives will not be stumbling blocks to them. Rom. 14:21 says that "it is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Only a clean congregation can stem the tide of backsliding.

II. Brethren Must be Brotherly, Helpful, and Encouraging Toward One Another.

Brethren should be true brothers in Christ. They should love one another (Heb. 13:1). They should rejoice with one another, and they should weep with one another (Rom. 12:15). They should gladly help one another and bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Paul says that they should be considerate one of another and should provoke one another to greater love and good works (Heb. 10:24). As brethren, they should "exhort one another daily lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Oh, if the brethren were only brotherly! If Christians really cared as they should! But, no, they plod along and let souls go to hell through drifting until they become so hardened that nobody can do anything with their hearts. No sane man ever tried to grow out a bunch of baby chick by putting them into the refrigerator, and neither will new converts grow up to be strong, spiritual Christians in cold, unfriendly, unbrotherly congregations.

III. The Church Must be Spiritual Minded and Spiritually Engaged.

Sin is catching, but so is spirituality when men are disposed to become spiritual. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are bound to thrive when with those of like ideals. Praying together greatly strengthens brethren in Christ. Considering God's Word together is a great spiritual privilege. Then, let the church discard all the nonsense and tomfoolery and become absorbed in serving Jesus and winning lost souls, and backsliding will be reduced greatly. Let the church be Christ-centered, and the devil will have a hard time getting a foot-hold.

IV. The Church Must Have Proper Teaching and Preaching.

Such teaching and preaching from God's Word are designed to prevent backsliding. God's Word is spiritual food that sustains life and promotes growth. Proper preaching will encourage when encouragement is needed, will rebuke when rebuke is needed, will instruct when instruction is needed, will comfort when comfort is needed, and will challenge when challenge is needed. Therefore, every congregation should seek to have much Bible teaching and preaching.

May God help us of His church to keep men from falling. To restore the fallen is fine, but to prevent them from falling in the first place is better.

A Fence or an Ambulance

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
But over its terrible edge there had slipped,
A duke and full many a peasant.
So the people said something would have to be done,
But their project did not at all tally;

Some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff,"
Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
For it spread throughout the neighboring city;
A fence may be useful or not, it is true,
But each heart became brimful of pity
For those who had slipped over that dangerous cliff;
And the dwellers in highway and alley
Gave pounds or pence, not to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is all right if you're careful," they said,
"And if folks even slip and are dropping,
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much
As the shock down below when they're stopping."
So day after day as these mishaps occurred,
Quick forth would these rescuers rally
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff
With their ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked, "It's a marvel to me
That people give far more attention
To repairing results than to stopping the cause
When they'd much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he,
"Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally,
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense
With the ambulance down in the valley."

Better guide well the young than reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is calling:
"To rescue the fallen is good, but 'tis best
To prevent other people from falling."
Better close up the source of temptation and crime
Than deliver from dungeon and galley;

Better put a strong fence 'round the top of the cliff
Than an ambulance down in the valley.

—Selected

QUESTIONS

1. What does the Bible say about stumbling blocks?
2. How can exhortation keep one from backsliding?
3. Comment upon how proper teaching and preaching can prevent backsliding.
4. Give the gist of the closing poem on "A Fence or an Ambulance".

Bringing Backsliders Back

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Knowing that a backslider is in a lost condition, it should be one of our chief desires to see him brought back to the heavenly Father. We are not to count him as an enemy, but we are to consider him as a brother who needs help (II Thess. 3:15). Inasmuch as he is our brother, it should be normal for us to be concerned about his spiritual welfare. Though the world may laugh at him for his failure, yet we can never feel that way about it. We must look at the situation the way that God looks at it, and we know that God doesn't laugh. When the Bible says that God isn't willing that any should perish (II Pet. 3:9), this surely means that God isn't willing for the backslider to perish either. God expects us to do our utmost to bring backsliders back to the fold. The following material sets forth how to bring backsliders back to God.

I. We Should Pray for Backsliders.

Jesus, the night of His betrayal, called Peter to Him and said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren: (Luke 22:31,32). The Savior set us a wonderful example of the deep concern that we should have for one on the verge of wavering. Jesus prayer for Peter, and we should pray that God will deal with their hearts by bringing chastening circumstances to bear down upon them so that they will feel their lost condition and will see their need of returning to God. In fact, if we love backsliders as we should, we cannot refrain from praying for them, for we would desire to see them back in the strait and narrow way that leads to live.

II. We Should do Anything That We can to Restore Them to God.

Gal. 6:1 says that the spiritual are to restore those who are overtaken in sin. In the latter portion of that verse, Paul reminds us that we should not overestimate our own strength by forgetting that someday we may need someone to help recover us out of the snare of the devil. If we are the brethren that we should be, there may be many ways in which we can help a backslider come back to God. If our lives are pure and devout, he will find no occasion of stumbling in us. If he knows that we are humble and not Pharisaic in approaching him, he will likely listen. If he knows that we love him sincerely, he will be made to consider his need of Christ. There may be many worthwhile things that we can talk over with him to help him out of his difficulties. It was with this thought in mind that James wrote, "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" (Jas. 5:19,20). But, before you go to some backslider, be sure to seek God's help and be sure to do your best not to make mistakes that will drive him farther and farther away.

This word of warning is needful, for it is possible to do more harm than good in going to a backslider. Some dear souls will never be restored simply because somebody went to them in the wrong way and in the wrong spirit. Learn HOW to restore fallen brothers and sisters to Jesus.

III. The Right Kind of Preaching Will Bring Backsliders Back.

When Israel drifted into sin, God sent the prophets. They were men with a message from God to a backslidden people, and they delivered it in desperation. They boldly denounced Israel's sins, actually pointing out particular sins. They showed them that their present calamities were the result of their sin. They called upon them to repent in view of coming doom. They also promised wonderful things to them if they would repent. We see that Jesus sent the same kind of message to the backslidden congregations in Asia. See Rev. 2 and 3. Christ pointed out the congregations sins, called upon them to repent, warned them if they didn't repent, and promised them mercy if they would repent and be overcomers. This is the type of message that it takes to bring backsliders back. We must preach against sin until sinning men are convicted. We must show them God's wrath against all sin. We must call upon them to repent while they still have the opportunity. And we must preach the wonderful mercy of God offered to all who will return to Him. Such preaching will get mighty results. What a mistake many congregations make in wanting preaching that is not stirring! They deliberately cast their votes against bringing backsliders back to God.

Prayer, personal attention, and proper preaching will restore the backsliders if they are to be restored. I know that these will work. I have seen many backsliders return to Christ in answer to prayer. I have seen men brought to repentance through personal counseling and personal help. I have seen many return to God under the power of convicting preaching. Let us, then, give ourselves to much prayer for every backslider whom we know; let us do what we can to restore our fallen brothers and sisters; let us provide the type of

preaching that will call backsliders to repentance. This is God's way of bringing backsliders back.

QUESTIONS

1. Why should we want to retrieve backsliders?
2. Can prayer actually affect a backslider's case?
3. Explain Gal. 6:1.
4. What should our going to them do?
5. How can proper preaching restore backsliders?

What a Backslider Must do to be Saved

“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

As we have already seen, the Bible shows that a backslider is a lost man. If he dies in that condition, he will go to hell. What must he do to be saved? Must he go back and be baptized all over again, or just what does God require of him? When we speak about saving the backslider, we must help him in two ways: (1) we must show him how he can get forgiveness and get back to fellowship with God again, and (2) we must show him how he can keep from backsliding again after he has gotten back into divine fellowship. If a backslider would realize this two-fold salvation, he must do the following things.

I. He Must Repent of His Sins.

When Simon of Samaria sinned by offering money for the power to impart the Holy Spirit, Peter immediately said, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness..." (Acts 8:22). This is the very first thing that a backslider must do. He cannot be saved unless he repents. We notice that Jesus' message to the backslidden congregation of Asia was always one of repentance. See Rev. 2 and 3.

God's message through the prophets to backslidden Israel was always one of repentance. So, if you are a backslider, you must repent, or you will never be saved.

II. He Must Confess His Sins.

He must confess his sins to God if he expects to be forgiven. I 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." God forgives no sin that is not acknowledged to Him. This divine requirement breaks down human pride because it demands a complete surrender of the backslider and a humiliation before God against whom the backslider has sinned. If one's sin has been of a public nature so that it has brought public reproach upon Christ and the church, it should be publicly confessed as well. Justice demands this.

Jas. 5:16 shows that there are times when men should confess their sins to others, and when is it more appropriate than when we have publicly reproached the name of Christ and the church? Also, one who publicly acknowledges his backsliding is far more apt to stand by his decision to live for Christ than one who tries to smuggle his way back into the fold. It helps a man to go on public record in such a situation. Then, if a man openly comes clean for God, the brethren can trust him and give him responsibility, but if he tries to sneak his way back, they have a right to wonder just what sin may allure him next. Of course, if one publicly returns to the Lord, the brethren can thus pray for the man and fellowship him as a brother in fellowship with God, whereas if he doesn't make some kind of a

public indication, he will be robbed of such special blessings. So, if you are a backslider, acknowledge your sin to God; then, let the brethren know that you have repented of your backsliding.

III. He Must Pray for Forgiveness.

Not only was Simon told to repent of his sin, but he was also told to pray for forgiveness for it (Acts 8:22). When a person who once knew the Lord determines to get right with God, it is not necessary for him to be baptized again in order to be forgiven. He must come to God in prayer and ask His forgiveness for those sins. Like the publican, he must cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). When God sees a backslider thus humbled before Him and knows that he is sorry for his sins and is determined to give his life to God, He forgives those sins that have been committed. So, if you are a backslider, having repented of your sins, confess them to God, and ask His forgiveness for them.

IV. He Must Avoid that Which Caused Him to Backslide Before.

The preceding things will restore him to his salvation. The next three things will keep him in Christ and keep him from going astray again. These next three are so important! Time and time again, I have seen individuals return to God in bitter tears, but before I knew it, they were right back at their same old sins. What was the matter? They had not avoided that which had caused them to backslide the first time, and it got a hold of them again. Whenever a backslider responds to the invitation, I make it a point to talk with him or her privately afterwards that I might help that person stay right this time. I have found that such personal counselings with people returning to the Lord have proven great blessings to them, and I feel obligated to give them this special attention and help.

Suppose that a man has had a particular weakness for drink. I strictly charge him to stay away from drink, especially the smell of it, and to stay away from the drinking crowd also. They will cause

him to backslide again. In other words, whatever has caused a person to go astray once may cause him to go astray again unless he carefully guards against it.

V. He Must Consecrate Himself to the Lord and His Word.

Every Christian is to be consecrated to the Lord as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Our whole body, soul, and spirit, according to Paul, are to be sanctified unto the Lord ((I Thess. 5:23). Thus, one becomes deeply rooted and grounded in Christ. As a living branch abiding in Christ (the vine), he has life through the vine (John 15:4,5). The spiritual power to remain faithful comes only to those who truly live for Christ in prayer, searching the Scriptures, regular attendance at gospel services, financial stewardship, personal work in soul winning, and in building Christlike character. Only he who does these things can be assured of not being barren and unfruitful. He that doeth these things will not fall. Study II Pet. 1:5-11.

VI. He Must Determine that He will Never Leave the Lord Again.

There is great moral power in a definite decision. When a person comes back to God, he must have no other intention than to stay true to God until the day of his death. If he doubts whether he will "hold out" or not, I can assure you that he will certainly fall. When people say, "Oh, I'm afraid that I am going to backslide," you can just be sure that they are going to backslide. I have never seen it fail yet. We are told to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and MAKE NOT PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). In other words, when one returns to God, he must not plan to go out and sin again. Several times during Jesus' earthly ministry, He told individuals, "Go thy way and sin no more." The forgiven backslider must hear and heed these commanding words of Jesus, "Go thy way and sin no more!"

QUESTIONS

1. Prove that a backslider must repent.
2. Show that he must confess his sin.
3. When should he confess his sin publicly?
4. Prove that he must ask God for forgiveness.
5. What must he be careful to avoid in the future?
6. What determination must he have?
7. Why must he consecrate himself to the work of Christ?

“O Prodigal, Return!”

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye unto him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:6,7).

Dear friend, are you a backslider in God’s sight? Have you failed to grow in the Christian life? Do you do less for Christ now than you used to do? Are you back drinking at some fountain of sin? Do you have a backslidden heart? Oh, if so, the wrath of God is upon you, and you had better come back to God while you still have earthly life and opportunity! As you read these final lines, won’t you consider them as for eternity?

I. See Yourself as You Truly Are!

Surely, if you see yourself as God’s Word pictures you, you cannot keep from being moved over the seriousness of your condition. Here is how God’s Word pictures you.

As a sinning child of God, you are a rebel against God, for sin is the transgression of God’s law (I John 3:4). Therefore, being a

sinner makes you a rebel.

The church is the army of the Lord. But, as a backslider, you are a deserter of that divine army. The church is in conflict with the world. But, since you now love the world, God beholds you as a traitor to Him.

Since you are not your own, but you belong to Christ who purchased you on Calvary (I Cor. 6:19,20), you are a thief in God's sight. You have taken that which is not your own (your life) and have used it as you pleased instead of as God pleased.

You have proven unfaithful to your holy wedlock by loving the world instead of God. Jas. 4:4 says that you are thus guilty of adultery and are, consequently, an enemy of God.

As a stubborn, wayward son, you have brought grief to the heart of a loving Father in heaven.

You are pictured as the fruitless branch. As far as God is concerned, your life is empty and wasted.

Your going back into sin is so repulsive that God pictures you as a sow that was once washed that returns to her wallowing in the mire and as a dog that returns to his awful vomit (II Pet. 2:22).

Peter says that you are blind (II Pet. 1:9). You cannot see that you were once purged from your sins. You cannot see Christ as the pure and spotless one that He is. You cannot see your responsibilities to Him. You cannot see the life that you ought to be living. You cannot see the souls all about you who are perishing because you are a shirker. You cannot see the judgment of God that is coming. You cannot see the wonderful glories of heaven. You cannot see the awful terrors of hell. Surely, you cannot see yourself as God sees you, or you would do something about it.

II. Let Us Reason Together!

What do you find wrong with God and Christ that you do not love them enough to live for them? Once you professed to love them. If you really loved them once, why don't you love them now? What have they done that has caused you to turn away from them? In what way have they changed so that you can no longer love them? What

new things have you learned about them that cause you to part from them?

What is wrong with the Bible that you no longer heed it? What is wrong with its commandments and standard of life? Why do you not revere it now? Why do you not heed its warnings? Why are you not living according to it?

What is wrong with the Christian life? Is it the wrong life to live? Did you make a mistake by starting out to live it? Did you fail to find the Christian life as Christ had promised it to you? Is the life of sin to be chosen instead of the Christian life? Is that your honest decision?

What is wrong with Christianity (Bible Christianity)? Is it false? Is it valueless? Is it something to be opposed, or should it be supported by men's lives? Why are you not backing it as you should?

What is wrong with heaven for an eternal abode? If you were ready for heaven, don't you believe that you could truthfully sing, "When we all get to heaven, What a day of rejoicing that will be!"? Have you actually given up the hope of going to heaven?

On the other hand, look at your life now. What is right about it? What is beautiful about it? Would you want everybody in the world to use your life as a model or standard? Would you advise others to do what you do, to say what you say, and to think what you think? Would you want people to follow you in life, to follow you to death, and to follow you to the place in eternity that your present life is leading? Would you say that you have found the real peace, joy and satisfaction that your soul longed for? Would you say that your future is bright and promising?

In the honest consideration of your own heart, surely you cannot justly accuse God, Christ, the Bible, the church, the Christian life, and heaven. And, if you will be fair and honest, you cannot keep from seeing that sin is wrong, that death as a backslider is awful, and that hell is fearful. Why do you turn away from Christ? Why do you waste your life? Why do you choose the life of sin? Why do you accept the death of a sinner?

III. Your Only Wise Conclusions!

In view of preceding thoughts, common sense forces you to two definite conclusions.

Don't continue a backslider. There is not one legitimate reason why you should be a backslider any longer. All the odds are against you. Everything that is holy and good and wonderful, you are losing and sacrificing to the wind. In return for such losses, you have the mere fancy of a wild life of sin, the momentary pleasure that sin gives, and the empty shell of what might have been a wonderful life. Sit down with pencil and paper, and enumerate the reasons why people should backslide instead of staying true to God. List the blessings that you have found in backsliding that you didn't have when you were living for Jesus. In other words, write a letter that you might send to a Christian, giving your recommendations for living the life of a backslider. You will, then, see that the recommendations that you would not give to another you are following in your own life! Oh, cease being a backslider!

Don't die a backslider. If you do, only a hell, a terrible, Godforsaken, mercy-minus, and endless hell awaits you. Rev. 14:11 says that in hell, there will be no rest either day or night. Haven't you gone through nights when you could not rest! The only thing that you looked forward to was the breaking of day when you could stir around in hope of relief. But, in hell, there will be no rest either night or day. Surely, you do not want to die a backslider and spend all eternity in hell. But, you will if you don't come back to God.

A Letter that Would Break my Heart

There is a letter that would break my heart, were I to receive it. Suppose that I turned out to be a spiritual wretch, would leave the Lord entirely, and would fall into the depths of sin and shame. Suppose that one day when I went to the post office, I found a letter from my parents. Not having heard from home for sometime, I hastily opened it to see what the news was. But, as I began to read, my heart grew heavy, a lump came up into my throat, and my head began to

hurt, for the letter read as follows:

Dear son Donald:

We are writing you a letter that is hard for us to write. But, we ask you to read it carefully and understandingly.

Before you were born, how we longed for your arrival! How we planned for happy times in the future! How we dreamed about what you would become! When you were born, you were fair, and you looked much like your parents. How we loved and cared for you! We worked hard to provide for you, to feed you, clothe you, and give you a good home! When you were sick, we walked the floor with you and spent sleepless nights. We did our best to teach you the right way. We always took you to church, and we always tried to set the proper example before you. We spanked you when a child, even though it almost broke our hearts to do so. We sent you to school and gave you a good education. We sacrificed that you might be prepared to go out and face life as a man.

But, son, it just seems that you don't care for us anymore. It seems that you have completely disregarded everything that we taught you and tried to bring you up to observe. In spite of all that we have done for you, you have just wasted your life and made a terrible mess of it. People know about your life, and how it breaks our hearts as we hear them talking so about you, our very son! You have disappointed every fond hope that we had for you, you have brought shame to the family, and we sit here at home in our declining years with grey hairs, dimmed eyes, and **BROKEN HEARTS**. Oh, son, how can you treat your dear old father and mother in such a way? Son, won't you straighten up and come home? We still love you.

Dad and Mother.

As I looked at the letter, its shaky handwriting and a precious tear drop that had blurred the ink of a couple of words, my own tears began to pour down my cheeks as I saw how wicked I was.

Friend, I can think of nothing that would break my heart more than to receive such a letter from my father and mother. But, I not only have an earthly father and mother—I also have a heavenly Father,

and so do you if you have become a child of God. If you have now become backslidden and prodigal, God is sending a letter to your heart through this booklet, telling you that after He has loved you, planned for you, brought you into the family, provided for you, made every possible sacrifice for your welfare, taught you the right way, disciplined you when necessary, and done many other wonderful things, you have disregarded Him, you have trampled His will underfoot, you have gone back upon everything that He taught you, you have made a terrible mess out of your life, you have caused His church to be criticized and reproached, and you have broken His heart!

Oh, prodigal son, won't you see what you have done? Won't you hear the loving entreaties of the Father calling to you? Won't you see that there is bread and to spare at your Father's table while you famish in despair as you are? Won't you return to the heavenly Father who anxiously and hopefully waits. Won't you conscientiously say this very day:

I've wondered far away from God;
Now I'm coming home.
The paths of sin too long I've trod
Lord, I'm coming home.
Coming home, coming home,
Nevermore to roam.
Open wide Thine arms of love;
Lord, I'm coming home!

QUESTIONS

1. What are some Bible pictures of the backslider?
2. Which picture would touch you the most if you were backslidden?
3. What was some of the material presented under, "Let Us Reason Together?"
4. What are two wise conclusions for a backslider to come to?