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Backsliding and Restoration

I want to speak on the subject of backsliding and we will weave in a number of Bible characters who were verily guilty.

This subject is a very important one, so may God give wisdom and guidance in dealing with it. The Word of God has much to say regarding it and, sad to say, God's people down through the ages have been very guilty in experiencing it. In the measure our heart has departed from entire occupation with Christ, that is the degree of our backsliding. If our affections have strayed from Christ, our eye wandered from beholding Him, we have backslidden; our eye is not single, and darkness enters. If such is the condition of any real child of God who reads this message, may the following remarks be used in your restoration to happy fellowship with God. To again enjoy a single eye with a body full of light, and henceforth to walk in the light as He is in the light and have fellowship one with another. What makes this possible is the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, which cleanseth us from all sin. I John 1:7.

Many people who claim to be backsliders are sadly deceived. They have never yet slid forward. They may have backslidden from a profession, but this is entirely different from backsliding from Christ. Multitudes have gone to the mourner's bench, shaken the preacher's hand, joined the church, made promises and vows, and because they have not lived up to these things they think they have backslidden. The truth of the matter is, they were never really born again. A person who can go on for years in the condition described, and furthermore

enjoy the world and its pleasures, happy in the company of the unconverted, such an one has never tasted of the love of God, for the Scriptures declare that “if any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.” Let me say this: a person who has really been saved, born again, regenerated by the Spirit, is spoiled for this world and is the most miserable creature on earth when away from God.

Another point about backsliding is: it takes place by degrees. It is like the freezing of ice on a pond; an almost unperceived process. It resembles those habits sometimes acquired which are too insignificant to be noticed until they become too strong to be broken.

Let us notice some Bible characters who were guilty of backsliding. The first one we will mention is Lot. In Genesis 13:10 we see his first step when he beheld the well-watered plains of Jordan. Instead of letting God choose for him, he chose for himself. He had an eye on earthly possessions and wealth, and, like Eve, who saw the tree to be pleasant to the eyes, yielded, and thus departure from God resulted. Lot’s second step was when he pitched his tent toward Sodom. Verse 12. When he got up in the morning and all during the day he was looking in the direction of Sodom. His first look led to practically a constant gaze, which paved the way for the third step, which is given us in Genesis 19:1. He sat in the gate of Sodom. He was a ruler in a wicked city which was under judgment. The result was that he lost all, for the judgment of God fell upon those cities, and Lot escaped with only his life. Beware, young Christian, of that first sin. If it is condoned, it will make the next one easier, and thus step by step you will get away from God, which means losing your joy as well as your influence

and testimony for God. Beware of certain phases of this pleasure-seeking world, the underhanded business world, and the inconsistent religious world. If you have your eye on these instead of Christ, you are on the landslide to a wrecked life.

David fell before the flesh, (as we will see later on). Peter fell before the devil. Both of these were restored, but Lot fell before the world and passed into eternity under a cloud. May the language of your heart be:

“Take the world, but give me Jesus

Let me see His constant smile;

Then throughout my pilgrim journey

Light will cheer me all the while.”

Let us also notice Samson for another case of backsliding. He was to be a Nazarite from his birth, a person set apart for God. In using the word Nazarite I have no reference to a denomination but according to Scripture a Nazarite was a person set apart for God. No razor was to come upon his head. He was to have long hair. This Implies subjection. You will remember that in I Corinthians 11 a woman is to have long hair, which denotes her subjection to the man. We also read that it is a shame for a man to have long hair-it was a reproach unto him. A Nazarite was to abstain from wine or strong drink. In other words, he was to practice self-denial. Now, all this was true of Samson for a while. It should be true of every child of God today. We are set apart for God’s glory, and we should set ourselves apart from all that is displeasing to Him and contrary to His Word. Then we should be subject to Christ as our Lord, obeying Him in all things. We should also deny ourselves

anything that is detrimental to our pleasing God, or hinders our joy and progress in the things of God. Happy is the man who denies himself even legitimate things that he might be more pleasing to God and efficient in service. If you choose this path you will be reproached for it. The world will laugh and point the finger of scorn. Professed Christians will call you narrowminded and fanatical, too extreme, but never mind being reproached for Christ's sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and persecute you." This is true Nazariteship. Real joy and peace, tokens of the presence of God, is the happy portion of such an one. Sad to say, Samson lost this, and so may you, young Christian, unless you are careful. How did he backslide? Let us notice this sad decline. In Judges 14:1 we read about Samson going down to Timnath and there beholding a woman who was a Philistine. For a Jew to marry one of another nation was contrary to the Word of God, and when practiced resulted in weakness and departure from God. Let us give a word of warning on this point. Many young men and women who were going on well for God have made shipwreck of their lives by keeping company with and marrying unsaved partners. God's Word is clear and plain on this subject. Read II Corinthians 6. If you are saved, then seek a saved partner, and if at all possible one who will be a great help to you spiritually. Far better to remain single than marry an unconverted partner, for such a step would ruin your life as a Christian and invite sorrow, grief and even the chastening hand of God. It is another situation when one gets saved after he is married. God's Word is plain on this point as well. The saved party is to live a godly, consistent life before the

unsaved partner and pray unceasingly for him or her. Read I Corinthians 7 for help on this. Many sad cases of backsliding can be traced to an unequal yoke.

Another mistake Samson made was to enter the vineyards of Timnath. This Is where wine was made, and as we have already noticed, a Nazarite was forbidden to touch wine. Samson willingly walked right into temptation. Young Christian, beware of this. Keep a good distance from any party or place where there is a possibility of your being tempted to sin or enticed to do so. If you find yourself in an atmosphere Injurious to your fellowship with God, "Arise and depart, it is not your rest, It Is polluted, it will destroy you even with a sore destruction." Micah 2:10. Suffer nothing to destroy your communion with God and testimony before men. You will notice what followed with regard to Samson. He lost his hair. And where did he lose it? In the lap of Delilah. He came under her Influence, and what a sad consequence! Samson lost his hair, and In losing that he lost his Nazariteship, his strength, and then his eyes. What a sad picture is presented here! Let us apply it. Delilah Is a picture of the world, and many a Christian has come under the Influence of the world and has settled in its lap. Instead of Delilah being subject to Samson, he was subject to her. We as Christians should subject the world to us, and not be subject to it. If you come under the influence of the world you will lose your separation to God, and In losing this you will lose your strength as a Christian; your joy will have fled, your communion Interrupted, your testimony ruined. The Church as a whole is being shorn of her strength by being In the lap of the world. May you as an Individual be spared from such a catastrophe! Samson's eyes were

gouged out-he lived the rest of his life In darkness. How many Christians today have lost sight of God's plan for themselves, lost sight of spiritual values-no vision In life.

In concluding let us notice that Samson's hair began to grow, and when it did his strength returned. Although his hair was shorn the roots remained. In this is a precious thought. If a person is really born again, the root of the matter is In him and he will never be anything else but a child of God. This will survive the hours, days, months, and years of backsliding and finally grow so as to be seen by others. The soil for the divine roots to grow in is repentance, contrition, confession, faith, the Word of God, and prayer. Out of this will grow peace, joy, fellowship, and happy service. In other words, complete restoration.

BACKSLIDING

In our last message on backsliding our closing remarks were concerning Samson who lost his separation, strength, liberty, eyesight and finally his life, all because of backsliding. In losing his eyes how painful it was; a lifetime of affliction, a constant reminder of what he once was, and had now become. His sin and folly would ever be before him. He would never forget the seed that he sowed which yielded such a lamentable harvest. Wounds may heal but scars remain.

Young Christian, beware of the thin edge of the wedge, that first sin. If Satan succeeds in getting it started he will keep driving it home until it becomes a habit. As days, months and years roll by it increases its hold upon you until the gap between your soul and God Is vast. It is the little foxes that spoil the vines. They just nibble a little at first, but they grow and the little foxes become

big ones and you are overcome, overpowered by that which at the beginning could have been overcome with little effort on your part.

A vine speaks of fruitfulness and Satan will seek to stop your growth and your bearing fruit to God's glory. A fox is active, crafty, and destructive and so is Satan and the sins he employs. Nip the matter in the bud lest you experience what James gives utterance to: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

We are often like a vessel drifting with the tide, unconscious of the power that's carrying us away from God. It is said of Ephraim in Hosea 7:9... "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." Gray hairs speak of decay and decline. How sad if spiritual decay and decline have set in with any of us and we know it not.

Let us be exercised before God as to our condition lest we wake up to find ourselves like Samson, a wrecked vessel on the shores of time having lost our life for God.

Samson's sight being gone reminds us of Leviticus 21:18 where the disqualifications of the priests are brought before us. The priest's duty was to worship, but if he were a "blind man" he was barred from that office. How many Christians have lost their spiritual eyesight. They have lost sight of God's claims upon them, their duties, responsibilities and privileges. They know nothing of true worship. God is robbed; they are impoverished. They may sit at His table but are not happy there. The Scriptures have lost their preciousness; they read them

but see little of their contents. The wondrous truths of God's Word are hid from their eyes. They have lost sight of the fact that sinners are perishing on every hand. Their own loved ones are in the ranks of the ungodly and they see it not. What a sad state for children of God who once like Samson had their eyes opened to these things, were gripped and stirred by them, but now as backsliders from God, they have settled down In the world. Repent Return! Rejoice. He waits to be gracious to all comers.

We will now come to David, the man after God's own heart, but lifted up as a lighthouse of warning, lest we make the same mistake he did. When a man writes a biography of his fellow man he gives account of his good deeds and the bright side of his Life, but never mentions the bad deeds or the black side of his life. God gives both. Although man lovely things are said of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, his heinous sins of adultery and murder are also recorded. If we turn to II Samuel 11:1 we find the secret of his fall. It happened at a time when kings go forth to battle. David should have been with his men but remained at home. It would seem that David manifested a careless, indifferent attitude In doing this. It was during those hours of leisure he looked, coveted and fell.

Many a backslider can trace his departure from God to carelessness. He became careless about reading the Word of God, spending time In prayer, winning souls for Christ, fighting the battles of the Lord. How true the Proverb: "Idleness is the devil's workshop." Young Christian, spend your spare moments for God or you will spend them for the Devil. Whatever time you have at your disposal, use it in reading, praying and doing the

Lord's work. Keep actively engaged In these things, remembering lost time can never be regained, and lost time means lost opportunities and this means lost souls.

Let us notice a few verses In the Psalms where David's condition is described. In Psalm 32:3 we read "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture la turned into the drought of summer." The first thing we notice is his silence. He was silent to Clod, self and man. This Is true of backsliders, instead of "Singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord" they are silent; no praise, no joy, no word of cheer for other fellow Christians, no word In the gospel for a poor sinner, no prayer, no reading of the Scriptures, no interest in the things of God at all. Such is the condition of a backslider.

Furthermore, one away from God will try to conceal his sin and justify himself instead of acknowledging his transgression and Justifying God in judgment upon it. The true attitude of a backslider seeking restoration should be to condemn self and Justify God. Notice some of David's language: "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will) confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And in Psalm 51 we read: "Have mercy upon me, 0 God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me throughly from my Iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin Is ever before me. Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil In thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Notice all sin is against God. Did David not

“sin” against Bathsheba and Uriah? He did, but his sin first of all was against God and thus God alone could forgive him. When Nathan, the prophet, said “Thou art the man” David said, “I have sinned against the Lord.,, Then notice Nathan’s words: “Me Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” II Samuel 12:13. “Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.,’ Psalm 32:5.

In Psalm 51:7 we see how David was cleansed: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” He undoubtedly had in mind the sprinkling of the blood with hyssop as mentioned in the 12th of Exodus. It is only through the blood of the Lamb that we can be cleansed. “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” Let us confess our sins before Him and receive the cleansing. This fits us for service as we read In Psalm 51:12: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” He did not say, “Restore unto me thy salvation,” but the joy of it. A child of God has God’s salvation but loses the joy of it when he becomes a backslider. When he is restored and he knows by the Word of God he is forgiven, then the joy returns, and this is his strength.

We will conclude with a few remarks about Peter. Peter boasted of his love for Christ; he was self confident. Had he leaned upon Christ and remembered his word, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” he never would have denied the Lord. After his boasting the decline set in. He was sleeping when he should have been watching and praying, smiting with the sword when he should have been quiet, following afar off when he should have been near Christ, warming himself at the

world's fire when he should have been separated, denying his Lord when he should have been witnessing for Him.

You remember how the Lord turned and looked on Peter when the cock crew. That look was enough. We read, "And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and went out and wept bitterly." Luke 22:61-62.

It is said a tear glistened in Peter's eye the rest of his life. Here is the road to restoration for any who are away from God. A look of love and compassion from the One who says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." Hosea 14:4. And a reminder of His word, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding." Jeremiah 3:22. And, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Isaiah 44:22. May the look and word of the One who loves us reach our heart.

Is God using the language of Jeremiah 2:2 with any of us? "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me In the wilderness, In a land not sown." What had Israel in the wilderness? God and the sand. God was enough for them at the beginning, but they departed from Him. Does God remember the days of our first love, when we were wholeheartedly, out and out for Christ, able to sing from the heart, "I have given up all for Jesus?" Has that simplicity, devotion and love departed? Have we left our first love? If not, thank God and seek his grace and strength that it may continue, remembering that solemn verse, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

May these noble characters that we have been considering, who made such grievous mistakes, be a warning unto us. If we have left these happy days of fellowship with Him and are under a cloud, remember, “’Tis that look that melted Peter, ’Tis that face that Stephen saw;

’Tis the heart that wept with Mary,
Can alone from idols draw.”

A closing word to the unsaved: remember it’s not what you do before you are saved or after that saves you; it’s not what you do for Christ that saves but what Christ did for you on the cross. Your works will not save you, your baptism will not save you, your church will not save you, your prayers, tears, money, will not save you. Only Christ can, and He will if you will take Him as a gift from God. Take the Gift and say, “Thank you Lord for saving my soul, thank you Lord for making me whole, thank you Lord for giving to me Thy great salvation so rich, so free.”

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