

LECTURES ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION - by: Rev. CHARLES G. FINNEY

Delivered in New York in 1835 (*words in italics were added to the original text*)

Lecture 21 THE BACKSLIDER IN HEART

Charles Finney 1792-1875 led over 500,000 souls to Christ. Not to just a new birth but to a full salvation, meaning saved from both the penalty and the power of sin. 85% of those he led to Christ were walking with God not backslidden 10 years after conversion compared to less than 1% today.

Prov. 14:14 **The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, But a good man will be satisfied from above.**

Prov 26:12 ***Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.***

I cannot conclude this course of lectures, without warning converts against backsliding.

What backsliding in heart is.

1. It's taking back the consecration to God and His service that constitutes true conversion.
2. It's the leaving, by a Christian, of his first love (*for God and of deep gratitude to Him*).
3. It's a Christian withdrawing himself from that state of entire and universal devotion to God, which is true Christianity, and coming again under the control of a self-pleasing spirit.

What are evidences of a backslidden heart.

1. Formality: A formal way of saying and doing things, that is clearly the result of habit, rather than the out-gushing of the Christian life. This formality will be emotionless and cold as an iceberg, and will evidence a total want of earnestness. Such a formality would be impossible where there existed a present, living faith and love, and Christian zeal.
2. A lack of enjoyment: We always enjoy the saying and doing of those things that please those whom we most love. When the heart is not backslidden, communion with God is kept up, and therefore all Christian activities are not only performed with pleasure, but the communion with God involved in them, is a source of rich and continual enjoyment.
3. An uncontrolled temper: While the heart is full of love, the temper will be sweet, or at any rate, the will likely will keep it under, and not allow it to break out in abuse. Especially will a loving heart confess and break down, if at any time bad temper gets the control. Wherever therefore, there is an irritable, uncontrolled temper allowed to manifest itself to those around one, you may know there is a backslidden heart.
4. A lack of interest in God's word: Perhaps nothing more conclusively proves that a Christian has a backslidden heart, than his losing his interest in the Bible. While the heart is full of love, no book in the world is so precious as the Bible. But when the love is gone, the Bible becomes not only uninteresting but often repulsive. There is no faith to accept its promises, but instead there is plenty of heart conviction to dread the Bible's warnings.

5. A lack of interest in private prayer: Christian! If you lose your interest in the Bible and in private prayer, stop, return to God, and give yourself no rest, until you enjoy the light of His countenance. If you feel disinclined to pray, or read your Bible, if when you pray and read your Bible, you have no heart in it, no enjoyment, if you are inclined to make your private devotions short, you may know that you are a backslider in heart, and your first business is, to break down, and see that your love and zeal are renewed.

6. The loss of interest in spiritual conversation: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Jesus said. No conversation is so sweet to a truly loving heart, as that which relates to Christ, and to our living Christian experience. A loving Christian heart will always seek the company of those who are most spiritually-minded, and whose conversation is most evangelical and spiritual. If you lose interest in speaking about heart matters, and of the various and wonderful experiences of Christians, if you ever knew what the true love of God is, you have fallen from it, and are a backslider in heart.

7. The loss of interest in sanctification: if you ever truly knew the love of God, you must have had a great interest in the question of entire consecration to God, or of entire sanctification. If you are a Christian, you have felt that sin was an abomination to your soul. You have had inexpressible longings to be rid of it forever, and everything that could throw light upon that question of agonizing importance, was most intensely interesting to you. If this holiness issue has been set aside, it is because you are backslidden in heart.

8. The loss of interest in those newly converted: Psalms 119:74 says, "All who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word." This he puts into the mouth of a convert, and who does not know that this is true? There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repents, and is there not joy among the saints on earth, over those that come to Christ, and are as babes newly born into the kingdom of heaven? If you have no such interest you are a backslider in heart, and a hypocrite.

9A. The absence of the Spirit of prayer: While the love of Christ remains fresh in the soul, the indwelling Spirit of Christ will reveal Himself as the Spirit of grace and supplication. He will inspire strong desires in the soul for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of believers. If the Spirit of prayer departs, it is a sure indication of a backslidden heart, for while the first love of a Christian continues he is sure to be drawn by the Holy Spirit to wrestle much in prayer. *(but due to the absence of the Spirit of prayer)*

9B. Now praying as one self-condemned: or very much like a convicted sinner. His manner of praying will reveal the fact, that he has no communion with God; that instead of being filled with faith and love, he is more or less convicted of sin, and conscious that he is not in a state of acceptance with God. That he is having a 7th Chapter of Romans experience, in bondage to sin, instead of an 8th Chapter experience, freedom from sin.

9C. Praying almost exclusively for self, and for those dearest to self: It is often shocking to attend a backslider's prayer meeting, and I am very sorry to say that many prayer meetings of the Church are little else. Their prayers are timid and hesitating, and reveal the fact that they have little or no faith. And they have little concern for others.

9D. Absence from Prayer Meetings for trivial reasons: No meeting is more interesting to an awakened Christian than the prayer meeting, and while they have any heart to pray, they will not be absent from prayer meetings unless at God's specific direction. The fact is, it is hypocrisy for them to pretend that they really want to attend, while they can be kept away for such superficial reasons. They demonstrate they are backsliders in heart.

10. An attraction to worldly amusements, While the heart is full of love and faith, an hour, or an evening spent alone, in communion with God, is more delightful than all the amusements which the world can offer. A loving heart is jealous of everything that will break up or interfere with its communion with God. When the soul does not find more delight in God than in all worldly things, the heart is sadly backslidden.

11. An inclination to gratify the appetites and passions: This, in the Bible, is represented as a state of spiritual death. I am satisfied that the most common occasion of backsliding in heart, is to be found in the desire for indulgence of the various appetites (*with the sole exception of what is done in faith, meaning, with the conviction of its approval by God Rom 14:23 AMP*). The appetite for food is more frequently than any other, the occasion of backsliding. God's injunction is, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" 1 Cor. 10:31. Christians forget this, and eat and drink to please themselves. They consult their appetites, instead of the laws of life and health. The table is a snare of death to multitudes that no man can number. Show me a gluttonous Christian, and I will show you a backslider.

12. A seared conscience: While the soul is awakened and loving, the conscience is tender. But when the heart is backslidden, the conscience is silent and seared, on matters of self-indulgence and in regard to sins of omission or of neglected duties.

13. The fear of man: While the heart is full of the love of God, God is feared, and not man. A desire for the applause of men is kept down, and it is enough for such a one to please God, whether men are pleased or displeased. But when the love of God fades, "The fear of man, that brings a snare," gets possession of the man. Concern over what man thinks rather than God, is then his aim. In such a state he will sooner offend God than man.

Heb 10:38-39 (God) "Now the just (the righteous) shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him". But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (Strong's: ruin, loss, destruction, death, and damnation) but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

What are the consequences of backsliding in heart.

1. They will be full of their own feelings. Instead of that sweet peace and rest, and joy in the Holy Spirit, that he once experienced, he will find himself in a state of unrest, dissatisfied with himself and everybody else. His feelings are often painful, humiliating, and as unpleasant and unlovely, as can be conceived. It is often very trying to live with a backslider. They are often very touchy, critical, and irritating, in all their ways. They have forsaken God, and in their feelings there is more of hell than heaven.

- 2. They will have many prejudices.** Their willingness to know and do the truth has gone. They will readily commit themselves against any truth that opposes their self-indulgent spirit. They will try to justify themselves, will neither read nor hear that which will rebuke their backslidden state, and they will become deeply prejudiced against everyone that shall cross their path. If anyone reproves them, they account him as an enemy.
- 3. They will make many mistakes.** He is not walking with God. He has fallen out of the Divine order. He is not led by the Spirit, but is walking in spiritual darkness. In this state he is sure to fall into many and grievous mistakes, and may get entangled in such a way as to mar his happiness, and, perhaps, destroy his usefulness for life. All will go wrong with him as long as he remains in a backslidden state.
- 4. They will be full of their own words.** He will not, and cannot, control his tongue. It will prove itself to be an unruly member, full of deadly poison, will set on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell. By his words he will involve himself in many vexing problems, from which he can never extricate himself, until he comes back to God.
- 5. He will bring many trials upon himself:** Instead of keeping out of temptation, he will run right into temptation. He will bring upon himself multitudes of trials that he never would have had, had he not departed from God. He will complain of his trials, and yet constantly multiply them. A backslider complains of being so tried by everything around him, but he constantly aggravates them because he is the author of them. A backslider is, indeed, the greatest fool in the world. Having known and experienced the true way of life, he has the infinite foolishness to abandon it. Conscience condemns him. God condemns him. All that know his state condemn him. "There is no peace to the wicked, says my God."
- 6. He will be full of worry and care.** He has turned back to selfishness. He counts himself and his possessions as his own. He has everything to care for. He will not hold himself and his possessions as belonging to God, and lay aside the responsibility of taking care of him and all that he possesses. He does not, will not, cast his care upon the Lord, but undertakes to manage everything for himself, and in his own wisdom, and for his own ends. Consequently, his cares will be multiplied, and come upon him like a deluge. He loses his property. He loses much of his time. He loses his Christian reputation. He loses his Christian influence, and if he persists he loses his soul.
- 7. He will become greatly deceived:** Having an evil eye, his whole body will be full of darkness. He will almost certainly fall into delusions about Christian teachings, such as: *sin is inevitable, God is still in control regardless of what I do, I can't lose my salvation anyway, a God of love won't send me to hell, and I received the Holy Spirit when I was born again.* Who has not observed these things of backsliders in heart?
- 8. He will be full of self-condemnation.** Having enjoyed the love of God, and forsaken Him, he feels condemned for everything. If he attempts Christian service, he knows he has no heart for it, and so condemns himself. If he neglects these duties, he of course condemns himself. If he reads his Bible, it condemns him. If he does not read it, he feels condemned. If he goes to a meeting, the services condemn him, and if he stays away, he

is condemned. If he prays he is not sincere, and feels condemned. If he refuses to pray, he likewise feels condemned. Everything condemns him.

How to recover from a state of backsliding.

- 1.** Remember the place from which you have fallen. Take up the question at once, and deliberately contrast your present state with that in which you once walked with God.
- 2.** Take to heart the conviction of your true position. No longer delay to understand the exact situation between God and your soul. *(As Jesus admonishes Christians in Rev 2:5:)*
- 3.** Repent at once *(completely change your mind about the way you have been living)*, and do your first works over again – *(receive God's forgiveness of your past sins, always forgive others - by faith, forsake pride, surrender you will unconditionally to God, give up your rights, receive and obey the Holy Spirit, cast your cares on, love and trust your God).*
- 4.** Do not attempt to restore yourself by just reforming your outside conduct. Begin with your heart, and at once set yourself to get right with God.
- 5.** Do not act like a mere unconverted convicted sinner, and attempt to recommend yourself to God, by any works or prayers that are without repentance. Do not think that you must reform, and make yourself better before you can come to Christ. But understand distinctly, that coming to Christ, alone, can make you better. However acutely distressed you may feel, know for a certainty that until you repent and accept God's will, unconditionally, you are no better, but are constantly growing worse. Until you throw yourself upon His sovereign mercy, and thus return to God, He will accept nothing from your hands.
- 6.** Do not imagine yourself to be in a righteous state, for you know you are not. Your conscience condemns you, and you know that God ought to condemn you, and if He justified you in your present state, your conscience could not respect Him. Come, then, to Christ at once, like a guilty, condemned sinner, as you are, own up, and take all the shame and blame to yourself and believe that notwithstanding all your wanderings from God, He loves you still. That He has loved you with an everlasting love, and, therefore, with loving-kindness is drawing you *(God is drawing you with the loving words of this message by Charles Finney and with these words of lovingkindness from the Scriptures):*

Jer 2:19 ***"Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the Lord your God, And the fear of Me is not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts.***

Jer 3:13-15 ***"Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God...And you have not obeyed My voice," says the Lord. "Return, O backsliding children" says the Lord "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Spiritual Zion is the true Church where I dwell - Heb 12:22-23).***