

Stop Backsliding!

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The most important decision in life is when you decide to follow Christ. This decision will affect your entire life on earth, and seal your eternal destiny. Life with Christ is exciting, but not easy. All the way you will have to swim against the tide. You must constantly guard yourself against the temptations and tendencies to turn back. This message is to help you prevent backsliding in your life, and the backsliders to return. Backsliding is an epidemic!

(A) Causes of Backsliding

1. Superficial Conversion

Jesus spoke about four kinds of soil in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. The stony ground speaks of superficial conversion (vv20,21). The candidate receives the Word of God joyfully and repents tearfully. But the root cannot penetrate into the rock. When problems and troubles shoot up, he gives up. He had misunderstood that Christian life would be a bed of roses. He thought that coming to Jesus would end all his problems. On the other hand, the Bible says, in Acts 14:22, "We must go through **many** hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." If someone says that Jesus would give you a troublefree, problemfree life, that's the greatest lie ever told!

2. Bad Company

As the people of Israel were marching towards Canaan through the wilderness, they started craving for the foodstuff of Egypt (Num 11:4,5). This is how it happened: When God told the Hebrews to leave Egypt, a few other nationals accompanied them. It was they who reminded the Israelites about the old taste of Egypt. This can happen to you in the college campus or the hostel rooms. Ungodly guys and girls may entice you into sinful things. In order that you may not displease them, you get back to the old ways of sin. Unless you are ready to earn the displeasure of ungodly friends, you will fail.

Bad company invariably corrupts good character (1 Cor 15:33). This is where you need the help of parents and seniors. As you grow intellectually, there will come a tendency to disregard them. Beware! In spite of His unusual wisdom and understanding, the Boy Jesus was "obedient to His parents" (Lk 2:47,51,52). Obedience to parents brings you God's smile (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1-3).

3. Unholy Marriage Alliance

One of the foremost reasons for backsliding among youngsters has been choosing an unequal yoke in marriage. The Bible makes no compromise on this. It forbids believers in Christ marrying unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14). It calls believers as the children of "light," and unbelievers as the children of "darkness." Here's where King Solomon failed. He had wisdom for others but not for himself. He married idol-worshippers who made him backslide (1 Ki 11:1-4).

Dear Friend, marriage will either make you or break you! Don't take chances! Believe God's promise that He would perfect "everything" concerning you (Psa 138:8). This

“everything” cannot but include your marriage. Don’t fall in love at first sight! That’s utter foolishness. In these highly competitive days, don’t get distracted from your studies. Don’t keep arguing whether it’s right or wrong to fall in love. The answer is that you just don’t have time for this in the student days. What looks rosy now will become thorny tomorrow! If you have already fallen in love, keep the matter in the back-seat until you finish your studies and settle in a job. It’s advisable that you avoid contacts until then.

4. Material-mindedness

Love of money does not begin after you earn money but before. If you don’t set your attitude towards money right during your youthhood, it’s very unlikely you will escape this trap as an adult. The Bible does not exaggerate when it says, “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10). This was written to a youngster, Timothy, by Paul a senior servant of God. Paul also quotes to Timothy a bad example of one Demas “who loved this present world,” and left the Gospel team (2 Tim 4:10).

Referring to the Parable of the Sower again, it’s material-mindedness that choke the plant like thorns and prevents fruitbearing though it’s leafy (Mt 13:22). Before choosing a career, seek God’s guidance on your knees. He knows the end from the beginning, and what’s best for you. Don’t simply jump into greener pastures! The end may be disastrous.

5. Failure to maintain a good conscience

Both Christians and non-Christians know that the conscience is the greatest of the gifts received from God. The Bible says, “The conscience of a man is the lamp of God” (Prov 20:27). What a blessing in a world of darkness!

But it’s our responsibility to oil the lamp and trim its wick. If we blunt our conscience, it’s like shipwrecking our faith (1 Tim 1:19).

Maintaining a good conscience should be not only before God but also before men (Acts 24:16). How to do it? Sit quiet before God often to search your heart of any known sin. Confess it to Him and get cleansed by the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:14). Reconcile with all those whom you have wronged with your words or deeds. Restitute matters. If you thus keep your conscience clear and sharp, your life will become better and brighter everyday, and your ship will not run aground.

6. Over self-confidence

If you do not have confidence in yourself, you cannot be successful in life. But at the same time, overconfidence is destructive. The Bible says, “The backslider in heart is filled with his own ways” (Prov 14:14). That was the problem of Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus. He decided that he would never desert Him whatever happens. A good decision indeed; but he depended on his own strength. How do we say that? When Jesus predicted that he would be severely tested by Satan, and he would deny Him, he should have sought the Lord for strength to withstand such a situation. He failed because of his overconfidence.

Friend, listen to this Biblical warning: “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (1 Cor 10:12). Let it be studies or career or whatever, if you trust in God above all things, you will have His blessing in all these.

7. Impatience

We are in an age of instant everything. We are always in haste. It’s not so with God. He waits patiently. He will do

the right thing, in the right way, to the right person, at the right time. We must not overstep God. With all our scientific and technological knowledge, we cannot accelerate God's doing. Blessed are those who have learnt to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises! (Heb 10:35-39).

Seek the Lord with all your heart for deliverance in times of crisis. The answer to your prayer may not come instantly. Don't try to bail yourself out by employing ungodly methods. Wait like young Joseph of the Old Testament. During the waiting period, he kept meditating God's Word which purified him. Then in God's time he walked away from the prison to the palace (Psa 105:16-22). It's patience that makes the man!

There are still several other reasons why folks backslide in their faith. But the ones we have considered here are the major ones. Let's now see how we can prevent backsliding. After all, prevention is better than cure!

(B) Antidotes for Backsliding

1. Watchful Prayer

"A praying man will stop sinning; and a sinning man will stop praying!" This old saying is a nugget of wisdom. Let's go to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus went before He was betrayed to be crucified. It was an hour of agony for Him. He told His disciples to "watch and pray" so they might not fall into temptation (Mt 26:41). But they took it lightly and we know what happened. We may have a strong mind and a willing spirit; but we must not forget that our bodies are frail.

Choose specific times for prayer. Stick to the timings. King David prayed thrice a day. Prophet Daniel prayed thrice a day. They were all quite busy people though. Sometimes

you may not feel like praying. Someone rightly said, "Pray when you feel like praying; pray when you don't feel like praying; pray until you feel like praying!" The more you pray, the more you will want to pray. Prayer strengthens our spiritual muscles to battle against temptations.

2. Bible Meditation

In Matthew 12, we read about an evil spirit that was driven out of a man. It went everywhere searching for a vacant house. When it found none, it returned to the old house. Finding it cleaned up and lying vacant, it brought seven other spirits more evil than itself and occupied it. This made the condition of that man worse than what it was earlier. Don't keep your heart and mind empty. Fill it with God's Word. The Psalmist testified, "O Lord, I have hidden Your Word in my heart so I might not sin against You" (Psa 119:11). Yes, the Bible will keep you away from sin; and sin will keep you away from the Bible!

The blessings of regular Bible meditation are too numerous to mention. The longest Book in the Bible is the Book of Psalms. It begins as, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of mockers; but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psa 1:1-3). Freshness. Fruitfulness. No backsliding!

3. Fullness of the Holy Spirit

We saw earlier that with our own strength we cannot overcome temptations. That's why God has sent the Holy

Spirit to indwell us and empower us. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, He gives you power to say no to sin. He helps you stay away from the deeds of the sinful nature; and He enables you produce godly virtues as His fruit (Gal 5:19-23).

Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. He has promised to satisfy the thirsty (Jn 7:37-39). Pray with Spirit-filled Christians. With the new power that the Holy Spirit gives, you will go from victory to victory.

4. Fellowship of God's children

Christian life cannot be lived in isolation. We need the help of other Christians. That's why the Church of Christ is called a Body, and individual Christians are its organs (1 Cor 12:24). Can you imagine any organ of our body functioning independently? Even Jesus during His earthly life sought the company of His disciples though He was well aware of their weaknesses.

Besides attending a Bible-believing Church regularly, find out a couple of friends whom you can regularly meet for prayer, Bible meditation and mutual sharing. Four young men had such a fellowship in Babylon (Dan 2:17,18). A single firewood stick if taken out of fire cannot maintain the heat for long. A chick that strays away from the hen and other chicks becomes an easy prey to the eagle. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 and understand the importance of fellowship.

5. Sharing of Faith

When you come to Christ, you become like a candle that's lit. It's supposed to be kept on a stand to give light to others. What will happen if it's covered? This is a simple illustration through which Jesus has challenged us to brighten others

(Mt 5:14-16). Jesus also said that His children are the "salt" of the earth (v13). What's the use of salt unless it's shaken out the bottle and sprayed on food?

To start with, you may feel shy and hesitate to share the Gospel of Christ with others. But as you begin to witness, you will become stronger and stronger. The Holy Spirit gives you the necessary power to bring others to Christ (Acts 1:8). The disciples of Christ, who were once cowards, became bold after they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). Soulwinning fills you with so much of joy that you refuse to indulge in the sinful pleasures of this world.

6. Beware of Beginnings!

Backsliding is never sudden. It's always in stages. King David, in Psalm 19:12,13, speaks of the steady decline. First it will be just "errors," then "hidden faults," then "willful sins," and it ends up in "great transgression." Carelessness at the beginning leads to chaos. Don't we say, "Nip it at the bud?"

You cannot prevent an eagle flying overhead; but you can definitely stop it from alighting on you and building its nest on your head! Arrest temptations at the thought level itself. Thoughts beget words; and words lead to deeds. In sexual failures, it's first look, then talk, finally touch. Avoid persons and places of temptation. Apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy, "Flee (not fight) youthful lusts!" (2 Tim 2:22).

7. Looking at Christ, not problems

There will be plenty of problems in Christian life. Several of them cannot be solved. We must learn to handle them successfully. Victorious life is not absence of problems, but living above the problems. Christ is not only the Beginner of our faith but also its Perfector (Heb 12:1). We are to keep

looking to Him. That's how we can run our race successfully. Christ is there at the finishing line to embrace you, saying, "Well done, my son!"

If you keep these 7 things in mind and follow the exhortations, it will not be easy for you to backslide.

(C) If you are already backslidden ...

Some of the symptoms of backsliding are: Insensitiveness to sin, loss of appetite for devotional habits, and satisfaction leading to stagnation.

If you think you are backslidden, just turn back to Christ. Don't run to religion and destroy yourself as Judas did. Turn to Jesus like Peter. There's no sin that cannot be washed by the blood of Christ (Isa 1:18; 1 Jn 1:7-9). There's no one like our God so rich in mercies and forgiveness (Dan 9:9; Psa 130:3,4). When the prodigal son returned home, his father was not interested in his sin confessions one by one! He embraced him as he was, filthy and stinking! (Lk 15:20-24). There was music and dance and feasting. The father said, "My son was dead; he is back to life again!" (Cover picture)

Dear friend, have you gone away from God, to live with pigs? Don't worry if He would accept you after you have rebelled against Him so much. Jesus has promised, "He who comes to Me, I will never drive away" (Jn 6:37b).

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me;
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*This message originally preached by the author in Halo 2004,
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