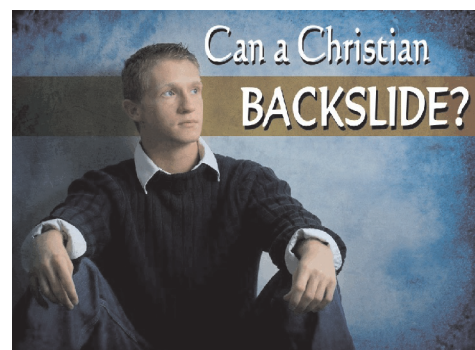


Church of God

Sunday School

CAN A CHRISTIAN BACKSLIDE?



DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Bible talks about "backsliding" Israel (Jeremiah 3:6-15).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God was greatly displeased with Israel's backsliding (Jeremiah 2:13, 19-20).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** New Testament descriptions of backsliding (Luke 8:13; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 Timothy 4:1).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God's plea to the backslider (Jeremiah 3:22; Revelation 2:4-5).
- ❑ **Friday:** The backslider becomes spiritually dead (Ezekiel 18:20-24).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God requires faithfulness in His people (Matthew 25:21-23; Revelation 14:12; Revelation 17:14).

MEMORY VERSE: *"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God . . ."* —Jeremiah 2:19

What Does It Mean to Backslide?

Several times in the Old Testament, the Israelites were warned of the dangers of backsliding. What did it mean to backslide, and why was it such a danger to God's people? Is it still a possibility for the Christian today? Is backsliding just a temporary loss of faith or is it much more serious? By studying God's Word, we can find the answers to these questions.

The first time the word *backslidings* is found in the Bible is in Jeremiah 2:19. The Prophet Jeremiah told the people of Israel that a time of trouble was coming because they continually turned away from God to idol worship. The word *backsliding* is defined as "turning back, to turn away, to be rebellious and stubborn." By looking at the key words in Jeremiah 2:19, you can understand what God thought about backsliding in the Old Testament. He described it as an "evil thing" and "bitter." Why did God speak so strongly concerning backsliding?

When God chose Israel to be His people, He had a special purpose for them. God wanted them to tell the rest of the world about the one true God. Also, from this nation would come the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ. God made many promises to the people of Israel. Those promises included God's protection and providing for all of Israel's needs. What did God require in return? We find the answer in Deuteronomy 10:12, which says, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."



Sadly, time after time Israel failed to fear and love God and serve Him with all their heart. Many stories in the Old Testament are about the people of Israel worshiping false gods, such as Baal, Molech, and Chemosh. When they did this, they broke the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). They turned away from God and replaced Him with false gods. Second Kings 17:7 says that by doing this, they "sinned against the LORD their God." Sin put a separation between Israel and God (Isaiah 59:2). Many times God pleaded with the people of Israel to "return" to Him and He would "heal [their] backslidings" (Jeremiah 3:22).

Backsliding Today

Although the actual word *backsliding* is not found in the New Testament, we can find other similar terms that describe the same spiritual condition. These terms include: "fall away" (Luke 8:13); "looking back" (Luke 9:62); "to turn from" (2 Peter 2:20-22); letting things "slip" (Hebrews 2:1); and "depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1). People

who backslide are described as leaving "thy first love" (Revelation 2:4); trying to "serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24); having "turned aside" (1 Timothy 5:15); and growing "cold" (Matthew 24:12). These terms describe someone who was saved, following Christ, living the life of a Christian, but for some reason, he or she changed direction, no longer moving forward in a walk with Christ.

The life of a Christian is to be a forward, ongoing spiritual walk. What does that mean? Before you were saved, God convicted you of your sins. You realized that you were a sinner. That was understanding. What did you do with that light, or understanding? If you acknowledged your sins, believed on the Lord Jesus, confessed and forsook your sins, you moved forward; you accepted the light, or understanding; you began your walk with Christ. But the walk does not stop there. God continually shows you things in your life to work on—things to add and things to remove. He also will give you understanding about other important things, such as verses in the Bible and how a Christian should talk and act. It is your responsibility to accept that light from God and make the changes in your spiritual life.

What Causes Backsliding?

If you are paddling a canoe against the current, what happens if you stop paddling? Do you stay in the same place? It is the same way in your Christian walk. Too many times, people start the Christian walk well, but after a time they do not move forward as they should. Failing to move forward spiritually does not result in staying in the same place, but it causes one to drift, fall away, and grow cold. In time, the man or woman who once was saved and living for God is in a backslidden spiritual condition.

It is important to recognize the dangers of backsliding or drifting away from God so that you do not make the same mistakes many other people have made. Often it is not obvious to others when one has accepted Christ into their heart (salvation) or when one has begun a spiritual drifting away (backsliding). That is because it begins in the heart. It is a gradual process. That is why it is so deceiving. However, what is working in your heart (good or bad), in time, will become apparent to your family and friends.

To understand what some of the causes of backsliding are, think of what can cause the Christian to grow cold in his or her walk with God. Not reading the Bible and praying are the two most common causes of backsliding. Other dangers are having the wrong friends, failure to attend church, and listening to or watching things that are not good. Another danger is failing to obey what God's Spirit tells you to do. These signs of carelessness and neglect warn that you are growing cold and drifting away. It does not always happen immediately. The farther you drift away from God, the harder it becomes to hear His voice. That is why you must be careful and watchful for the signs of backsliding.

What Does God Say About Backsliding?

There are several verses in the Bible that tell us God's opinion concerning backsliding. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God pleaded with people who had backslidden to "return" (Jeremiah 3:12) or "repent" (Revelation 2:5). Is the backslider still a Christian? Ezekiel 18:24 (AMP) asks, "But if the righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity [sin] . . . shall he live?" The same verse answers that question: ". . . in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die [spiritually]." God requires His people to be faithful. When speaking to people who had grown cold spiritually in Revelation 2:4, God said, "I have somewhat against thee." (It is important to understand the word *somewhat* is not in the original Greek manuscripts. It was added by the translators to help the reader understand.) You can see what God truly thought about this in Revelation 2:5, when He said, "Repent . . . or else." One cannot stay in a backslidden condition and continue to be a Christian.

God has provided a remedy, or a cure, for backsliding. Just as the prodigal son had to come to himself and return to his father's house, so the backslider must awaken to his spiritual condition and return to God. Returning to God is a change in direction. Once that happens, God has promised to forgive and restore. The return of the prodigal son and his father's love toward him is a beautiful example of what God desires to do for every backslider.

The old shepherd who offered prayer in a Welsh revival meeting put it exactly right when he expressed grief for his backsliding in these words: "Lord, I got among the thorns and briars, and was scratched and torn and bleeding; but Lord, it is only fair to say that it was not on Thy ground. I had wandered out of Thy pasture."



1. What is the definition of "backsliding"? _____

2. What strong words did God use to describe backsliding in Jeremiah 2:19? _____

3. What was God's special purpose in choosing Israel to be His people? _____

4. God made many promises to Israel. What did He require in return? (Read Deuteronomy 10:12.) _____

5. What did God warn would happen to the Israelites who worshiped Molech? (Read Leviticus 20:5.) _____

6. What commandment was broken when Israel worshiped false gods? _____

7. List three of the terms that are used in the New Testament to describe a spiritual condition of backsliding: _____

8. List three of the many things that cause backsliding: _____

9. What two words did God use when pleading with the backslider? (Read Jeremiah 3:12; Revelation 2:5.) _____

10. What does Ezekiel 18:24 say about the righteous man who turns from righteousness and commits sin? _____

11. What is the remedy, or cure, for backsliding? _____



Examples of Backsliding

Look up the following Scripture verses and write the name of the man or woman or group of people being described.

"And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him" (Judges 16:20). _____

". . . an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him" (1 Samuel 16:14). _____

"_____ hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10).

"Then entered Satan into _____, being of the number of the twelve" (Luke 22:3).

"Hast thou seen that which backsliding _____ hath done?" (Jeremiah 3:6).

"Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is _____ and _____ . . ." (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

"This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are _____ and _____" (2 Timothy 1:15).

"For it came to pass, when _____ was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods . . ." (1 Kings 11:4).

"And _____ said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13).

"From that time many of _____ went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66).