

## Backsliding — With a Word to Christian Workers

F. B. Hole.

Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 2, 1910 page 296.

A friend lately remarked in my hearing that there are villages and hamlets in the British Isles where it is not so easy to find a sinner. The population seems to be composed of *true Christians* on the one hand and *backsliders* on the other.

This may have been a somewhat exaggerated, if picturesque, way of putting the case; that a serious fact was enshrined in the statement does not however admit of any doubt. There are immense multitudes who have at some time or other registered a profession of religion or even of definite conversion, and yet to-day they are far — *very far* many of them — from the kingdom of God.

Why is this? What does it all mean? Can we discern anything which accounts for it? How should we diagnose the case?

It is impossible, of course, to diagnose *every* individual case, or indeed to diagnose with infallible accuracy any individual case. There are subtleties and intricacies in the soul of man that defy all save God alone. A divine plumb-line is needed if we would fathom the heart, and we possess it not. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Still, while avoiding the error of announcing even our judgments with an air of papal infallibility, let us not fail to observe the clear distinctions which Scripture makes in regard to this subject.

Taking the Bible into our hands we find that backsliders are divided into three classes:

- (1) The apostate backslider.
- (2) The ordinary unconverted backslider.
- (3) The believing backslider.

### **The First Class.**

Hebrews 6: 4-8) describes the first class. Every Jew who had embraced Christianity had thereby found an entrance into a most privileged circle, and became a partaker of many striking benefits, irrespective of whether at the bottom he was really converted or not. It was possible that under stress of persecution and trouble some might wish to shake off allegiance to Christ and return to their Judaism, and in these verses the Spirit of God warns such of the consequences. In order to be properly reinstated amongst their former Jewish associates they would have to "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."

This is to "fall away" indeed! To fall from the profession of Christianity right away until the depth of apostasy is reached. This is backsliding in its most aggravated form, so aggravated as to be possible only to an unconverted person and to be worthy of the most tremendous and unsparing judgment. It is IMPOSSIBLE to renew such to repentance. Their doom is irrevocably fixed.

Has this a present application? Is backsliding of this terrible character possible to-day? We certainly believe it is. When in South Africa some years ago a friend wished us to visit the Mohammedan mosque in a certain town. Permission could easily be obtained, he said, for an Englishman held a leading place in connection with it. On inquiry we were informed that he had definitely abandoned Christ for Mohammed, and the Bible for the Koran. The light, the heavenly gift, the Holy Ghost, the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come are found exclusively in

the Christian circle. Out of that into the darkness he had plunged.

That such cases are rare we may earnestly hope and believe, nevertheless they are possible. Let us therefore hold aloft the warning beacon of Hebrews 6 as much as ever.

### **The Second Class.**

In the parable of the sower (Luke 8: 6, 13) we find the second class, to which the great majority of backsliders belong. The gospel seed is sown on the rock covered with a fine layer of soil. There is *apparent* result almost immediately, but there being no depth there is no root, and hence nothing permanent is done.

Upon the surface of this the meaning lies. What untold thousands have at some time or other come beneath the sound of the gospel and its influences. They have been moved and have professed conversion. A little while and they have slidden back into the world, and their profession is seen to be empty and worthless. They fall away.

Do not confound this class with that first named. Those fall from the profession of *the Christian religion* to apostasy. These from profession of definite *conversion* to worldliness and indifference.

That this kind of backslider would inevitably appear in connection with the work of the gospel was recognized by our Lord Jesus Christ in this parable; but the terrible degree to which this kind of backsliding has prevailed in this our day should really alarm us, and lead to many heart-searchings as to what it all means. Its sorrowful effects are upon us on every hand. Such people are themselves doubly hard to win, and are the greatest possible stumbling-blocks to others.

Upon all Christian workers we would seriously and affectionately urge that there has been far too much slipshod and sometimes almost flippant evangelism. We have sought to influence people far too much by that which is merely human, by sentimental hymns, charming singing, eloquent speaking, pathetic incidents, and the like; we have far too little relied upon that which is divine. We have thereby produced an unnecessarily large crop of "stony ground hearers."

In the first century designing men, Pharisees and scribes, knew how to twist about the indifferent Jewish multitude until they all cried out as with one voice, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." If, in the twentieth century, we use the latest and most approved modern methods of evangelism to prevail upon the multitudes to signify their acceptance of Christ, what have we gained? Nothing, except there be those really "pricked in the heart" by the mighty convicting power of the Holy Spirit, as were the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. *Nothing*, and worse than nothing, for we have gained the harm and loss of poor souls, hurried into a false position which they soon fall from to their own discomfort and the discredit of the gospel.

Let us eschew everything that would lead to these disastrous results, regardless of the effect on our own reputation, for success in the work of the Lord. Never daub the wall with untempered mortar, saying, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. Never hurry a soul into confession. Never treat sin lightly. Preach truth as well as grace. Emphasize repentance. Neither count your chickens before they are hatched, nor break the shell to hatch them. If you do they will not be strong.

Backsliders of this class are not hopeless. They may be restored, but the only restoration possible is sound and thorough-going conversion to God.

### **The Third Class.**

The third class of backslider is described in 2 Peter 1: 8-10. Read the verses carefully and note

that we do not here read of "falling away." It says, "If ye do these things ye shall never fall." The believer may *fall*, though he does not fall away. Fall from what? From communion with God, from the pursuit of the excellent Christian graces described in 2 Peter 1: 5, 6, 7. Fall to what? To spiritual blindness, to insensibility and forgetfulness of the wonderful cleansing and forgiveness that grace has made his own. It does not say that such a backsliding believer is *no longer* purged from his sins, but that he has forgotten that *he was purged* from his old sins (2 Peter 1: 9).

These lines will meet the eye of some fallen and distressed believer. Your cry is, What shall I do? Confess your sin and backsliding to God. Forgiveness and cleansing, according to 1 John 1: 9, will be yours. The cure for you is confession, so that the obstruction may be removed, and then the diligent pursuit of that which is good (2 Peter 1: 10).

Notice, in conclusion, that in the life of the Lord Jesus we are provided with an example and illustration of each class of backslider. The apostate backslider answering to Hebrews 6 was Judas Iscariot. He plunged in one reckless moment from his position of outward privilege and friendship to the depths of apostate treachery; and as a hopeless wreck he passed into perdition.

The professed believers of John 2: 23, 24 illustrate the second class. There was no real work with them and Jesus knew it. A little later (John 6: 66) and they had gone back to the world where they had been before.

Peter himself is the example of the third. How fitting that he should allude to such backsliding in his epistle. By confession he was recovered and restored.

Are you a backslider, my reader? If so, return to the Lord, return by way of *conversion* or *confession*, just as suits your case, but RETURN!

Or are you a servant of the Lord Jesus — a worker in the harvest field? Then we beseech you to seriously and prayerfully set your face against unreality in the work of the Lord, to eschew all mere surface work, that there may be some recovery from the epidemic of backsliding which has become such a scandal in the church of God.