

ARE BACKSLIDERS IN DANGER OF GOING TO HELL?

TEXT: PROVERBS 14:12-14

Introduction:

1. I once heard a preacher say the words “backslider” and “backslidden” are not found in the NT. While this is true, we certainly see many examples of backsliding in the NT.
2. Consider Peter, who denied the Lord three times.
3. Consider Demas, who preached and traveled with the apostle Paul. Paul wrote in II Timothy 4:10, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.”
4. Our Lord said to the church of Ephesus, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4). If you have left your first love, you are backslidden.
5. Our Lord said to the church in Sardis, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1). A dead church is a backslidden church.
6. Our Lord said to the church at Laodicea, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15, 16).
7. If you had to stand before the Lord today, what would you prefer – Him rebuking you as a backslider or Him telling you that He found you so nauseating He was going to vomit you out of His mouth?
8. There are many warnings about carnality in the NT. The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 3:1, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.”
9. Carnality and lukewarmness indicate a backslidden condition.
10. Many preachers insist that all impenitent backsliders go to hell when they die. But is this what the Bible teaches?

I. MANY BACKSLIDERS HAVE NEVER BEEN SAVED IN THE FIRST PLACE

1. Not everyone who professes faith in Christ is genuinely saved.
2. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:21, 22, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”

3. Let us consider Judas Iscariot. Outwardly, he was a disciple of Christ, but inwardly he was a devil.
4. In fact, our Lord said this about Judas, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70).
5. Judas Iscariot heard the preaching of Jesus but he never repented. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
6. But it is not appropriate to refer to Judas as a backslider, because he was never saved in the first place.
7. Our Lord said this about Judas Iscariot: “But woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).
8. Our Lord would never say that about a child of God who has eternal life.
9. Acts 1:25 says that after Judas hanged himself, he went “to his own place.” His own place was hell. A man with the devil inside him doesn’t go to heaven (cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:27).
10. Referring to men like Judas, John R. Rice said, “No one can be a backslider who has not first been a ‘frontslider.’ Only Christians, born again children of God, are backsliders.”
11. In Matthew 13, our Lord gave the parable of the wheat and the tares. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (Matthew 13:24, 25).
12. The tares closely resemble the wheat. Remember, none of the other disciples suspected that Judas was a traitor.
13. “But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?” (Matthew 13:26, 27).
14. Our Lord then told them, “An enemy hath done this” (Matt. 13:28).
15. He identified the “enemy” in verse 39 as “the devil,” and he identified the tares in verse 38 as “the children of the wicked one.”
16. These imposters were never saved in the first place, and so they really aren’t “backsliders” (cf. I John 2:19).
17. The tares will eventually be separated from the wheat and cast into the fires of hell (Matt. 13:30).

II. SOME BACKSLIDERS REPENT AND GET RIGHT WITH GOD.

1. Some say the parable of the prodigal son is a story of a young man who was lost and then got saved. It can certainly be interpreted that way, but I think it is primarily a lesson on a backslider repenting and getting right with God.
2. “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee...” (Jeremiah 2:19).

I've wandered far away from God,
Now I'm coming home;
The paths of sin too long I've trod,
Lord, I'm coming home.

Coming home, coming home,
Nevermore to roam,
Open wide Thine arms of love,
Lord, I'm coming home.

I've wasted many precious years,
Now I'm coming home;
I now repent with bitter tears,
Lord, I'm coming home.

I'm tired of sin and straying, Lord,
Now I'm coming home;
I'll trust Thy love, believe Thy Word,
Lord, I'm coming home.

My soul is sick, my heart is sore,
Now I'm coming home;
My strength renew, my hope restore,
Lord, I'm coming home. – William Kirkpatrick

3. There is an interesting story behind this great song. William Kirkpatrick wrote this song at a camp meeting in Rawlinsville, Pennsylvania, with a very specific purpose in mind – he wanted his soloist to get saved. After Kirkpatrick prayed for the young man, the words of the song came to him. He wrote them down quickly, and after the soloist sang them that night, he got saved.
4. That story reminds us that there are people in the ministry who are backslidden. And there are some people in the ministry who have never been saved in the first place.
5. But whatever the situation, the Bible says, “Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 1:3).
6. Probably the most famous backslider in the OT is King David, and the most famous backslider in the NT is Peter. Both these men got right with God.
7. The Bible tells how Peter denied Christ and how he cursed and swore; and how later Peter (after the day of Pentecost), fearing the Jewish Christians,

- went along with their false teachings, and even misled Barnabas with his dissimulations (cf. Gal. 2:11-13).
8. But Peter got straightened out because God can straighten out and use any backslidden believer (cf. Jonah).
 9. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 10. John Mark traveled with Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, but he left them (Acts 15:38).
 11. Because John Mark left, Paul refused to take him on his second missionary journey. However, the Lord did not give up on John Mark, and neither did Paul, for he wrote in II Timothy 4:11, “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”
 12. The Lord used John Mark to write the Gospel of Mark.
 13. The Bible tells how Abraham deceived the Egyptians by telling them Sarah was his sister. Later on he did it again, deceiving Abimelech, the king of Gerar.
 14. But Abraham repented and got right with God.
 15. Interestingly, later on his son Isaac did the same exact thing in Gerar (Genesis 26:7).
 16. Moses lost his temper. When God commanded him to speak to the rock, he beat upon it with his rod and so dishonored God that he laws not allowed into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12).
 17. The Bible tells how Samson, a judge of Israel who had been filled with the Holy Ghost and was a Nazarite from his birth, kept company with

- harlots until God took away his great strength, and the Philistines took out his eyes and made him a slave.
18. I have heard people question whether or not Samson was saved, but his name is recorded in Hebrews 11. Only men and women of faith are listed in that chapter.
 19. Thank God, not every Christian backslides, but it is good to know that if one does backslide, God will restore him.
 20. I should also point out that though God does forgive and restore the backslider, there are terrible consequences to sin.
 21. Consider Lot, Abraham's nephew. If all we had to go by was what is recorded in Genesis, we would assume Lot was not saved. But II Peter 2:7, 8 refers to Lot as a just man and a righteous man.
 22. Lot lost his reputation, and he lost his wife, and he lost his family. His own daughters committed the horrible sin of incest right after leaving Sodom and Gomorrah.
 23. Unfortunately there are carnal and backslidden people in our churches. The solution is not threatening them with eternal damnation, but warning them that sin has consequences.
 24. David and Bath-sheba lost their baby (cf. II Samuel 12:14, 15). Notice, "And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick" (II Sam. 12:15).
 25. David fasted and wept for seven days till finally the baby died. David suffered much over his sin, but this was only the beginning of his sorrows.
 26. Not long after that, David's oldest son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (II Sam. 13).
 27. Then two years later, David's wild son Absalom, murdered his half-brother Amnon in revenge for what he did to Tamar (his full sister).

28. Then after living in exile for three years, Absalom returned and tried to steal the kingdom from his father David.
29. Then in the battle of Mount Ephraim, Joab, David's general and cousin, killed Absalom, defying direct orders from David.
30. Then Sheba revolted against King David. And finally, David's son Adonijah attempted to take the throne, even though it was David's clear intention that Solomon should succeed him.
31. I reviewed all of this to emphasize that sin has serious consequences. Nathan said to David, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house" (II Sam. 12:10).

III. SOME BACKSLIDERS COMMIT THE SIN UNTO DEATH (I JOHN 5:16).

1. Sometimes God kills people prematurely. Proverbs 29:1 says, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."
2. There are many sinners in the Bible who were "suddenly destroyed" – Nadab and Abihu – the sons of Aaron, Eli's two wicked sons – Hophni and Phinehas, Nabal, King Saul, Absalom, Herod, et al.
3. When this premature death happens to Christians, it is referred to in I John 5:16 as the "sin unto death."
4. If these people are genuinely saved they still go to heaven (cf. I Cor. 5:5; 11:28-31; Hebrews 12:5-11; James 1:13-16).
5. There is some question over whether or not Ananias and Sapphira were saved, but I think they were (Acts 5:1-11).
6. Remember what Nathan said to King David, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (II Sam. 12:13).

CONCLUSION:

1. This is a very serious subject. It is very practical. It is very important.
2. Some preachers teach backsliders all go to hell.
3. Other preachers devote much time and energy in trying to get backsliders saved. But how can they get saved if they are already saved? This only causes confusion.
4. One of the big problems with the doctrine that all impenitent backsliders go to hell is this: how do you define a backslider?
5. Many backsliders continue to attend church services. But if their hearts are not right with God, they are backslidden. Backsliding first and foremost is a heart problem.
6. Proverbs 14:14 says, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.”
7. Backsliding is not necessarily committing adultery (like David, who was a man after God’s own heart but was backslidden), nor some other horrible sin, which can be very noticeable to others.
8. Backsliding is in the heart! Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”
9. Keep your heart – free from bitterness, pride, lust, foolishness, covetousness, unbelief, etc.
10. Our Lord said, “Out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21, 22).
11. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14). There may be some here that have drifted a bit. Like the Christians in the church at Ephesus, you have left your first love.

12. But you have not really noticed it. Perhaps you are like Samson who knew not that the Lord had departed from him ([Judges 16:20](#)).

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