

Backsliding

IN ITS
THREE ASPECTS.

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IN ITS THREE ASPECTS.

MORAL decline has marked the history of man from the beginning. Look where you will, from Eden to Sinai, from Sinai to the throne of Solomon, from Solomon to Pentecost, from Pentecost to the present day, decline is stamped upon every page.

Perhaps one of the saddest things in connection with this subject is, that we may not always be *conscious* of our decline. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." (Hosea vii. 9.)

The desire of the writer is to bring the light of God's word to bear upon this solemn subject, and to help each reader to answer for himself the pointed question we propose, namely, *Are you one of them?*

The word "backslider" only occurs in the *Old Testament*, although that which it signifies is found in many places in the *New*. By backsliding we mean, speaking broadly, a leaving or sliding back from a position or profession once maintained, or from a state of soul once enjoyed.

That a truly converted soul may backslide is sadly, sadly true, but to limit the thought of backsliding to such has been the source of endless confusion and mischief. There are really three great classes of backsliders in connection with the profession of Christianity, and each class, as we shall see, perfectly distinct from the other.

1. THE APOSTATE BACKSLIDER.

Where Repentance is an Impossibility.

Though the *apostate* is not a backslider in the ordinary use of the term, yet as a matter of fact he is one, and we therefore class him as such here. He is one who, after making a profession of faith in the doctrines of Christianity, *wilfully and totally abandons them*, alleging that Christianity is a false religion. Such an one has placed himself beyond the pale of salvation. Shut up in judicial darkness, there is nothing for him, as we shall see, but to die "without mercy." (Heb. x. 28, 29.) Awful position!

2. THE ORDINARY UNCONVERTED BACKSLIDER.

Where Repentance is Possible, but not Certain.

This class takes in all who, *without* a work of grace in the soul—that is,

without the new birth—make a *profession* of being converted, and afterwards break down morally, but do not apostatize; that is, they don't give up Christianity. They endure for a while, like the stony ground hearer in the parable, but in time of temptation they "fall away." Like the unclean dog which turns to his own vomit again, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, they go back to the world and their old habits, with a keener zest than ever. They have really "no root in themselves." Whatever "profession" they may have made, they are not as yet "plants of the Father's planting," and cannot fail to wither up, sooner or later. Perhaps we might say, the sooner the better; for many, alas! are not aware of the hollowness of their profession till the breakdown comes. So, in that way, the breakdown is a mercy; for anything is preferable to self-deception.

3. THE CONVERTED BACKSLIDER.

Where Restoration is Certain.

This is only true in the case of a genuinely converted one. Thus we read, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John ii. 1.) The "we" refers to believers only. And, again, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life.*" (Rom. v. 10.)

Let us now consider each case more particularly.

I. THE APOSTATE BACKSLIDER.

If you turn to Heb. vi. and x. you will find this class described; the former scripture giving us the height of their privileges, the latter the depth of their fall.

Now, although, without question, these solemn scriptures refer primarily

to those *Jews*, who, having outwardly embraced Christianity, subsequently discarded the whole thing and returned to Judaism, yet it is greatly to be feared that the number of apostates from among the Gentiles is alarmingly on the increase.

Notice that it is not here a matter of *moral* breakdown. There is no charge of immoral conduct brought against them. Let the reader examine these scriptures carefully, and grasp this fact firmly, for it is of the utmost importance in the understanding of this part of our subject.

Three things are made clear concerning them :

1. The height of the privileges which (short of the new birth) were once theirs.
2. The way they treated those privileges.
3. The solemn consequences which followed.

They had gone as far as privilege and profession could possibly carry them, and therein lay the ground of their condemnation. They had been present in the assembly of God's saints, where the Spirit of God was working. (See 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.) They had "tasted the good word of God," "received the knowledge of the truth," and were made partakers* of the Holy Ghost, yet they deliberately threw overboard that which is the very soul and substance of Christianity, namely,

1. *The Person of the Son of God.*
2. *The Testimony of the Spirit of Grace.*
3. *The Precious Blood of Christ.*

Such an one, says the apostle, has "trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the

* The word here translated "*partakers*," means literally, *holding along with*, that is, in the sense of companionship. It is translated in Luke v. 7 "*partners*"—"they beckoned unto their partners." That is, it is not that

covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy † thing, and hath done despite unto [or insulted] the Spirit of grace." (Heb. x. 29.) What an indictment!

For such "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb. x. 26, 27.) And Heb. vi. 4-6, states that it is *impossible to renew them again to repentance*. How solemn, beyond all expression solemn! though none the less true.

But there is a marked and vital difference between this case and that of a true believer, overcome for a time

these apostate Jews were ever personally *indwelt* of the Spirit, but they had come into the assembly where the Holy Ghost dwelt, and thus were made partakers of the Holy Ghost in that outward way.

† The word "*unholy*" in this verse is the same as is translated three times over "common" or unclean in Acts x. 14, 15, 28.

by his fleshly lusts, or ensnared by the allurements of an enticing world. Let the moral downfall of a truly converted one be ever so glaring, he does not give up the bulwarks of Christianity. Just ask him on whom he lays the blame of his present state of soul, on himself or on Christ, and he will have no hesitation in saying, "On my own shoulders entirely."

"But do you not, in heart, feel disposed to give Christ up?"

"Give *Him* up, did you say? I *could* not. I dare not."

"Have you, then, any fault to find with what He has done? Have you discovered any flaw in His sacrifice?"

"None whatever; in itself His work is as perfect as ever, and His blood as precious. It is I who am to blame, not the worthy spotless Son of God. And as for giving *Him* up the thought has never once entered my heart. 'Tis true I have had many

a secret foreboding that, after such a sinful, inexcusable course as mine, He will give me up. Indeed, I have often feared that my case is described in Heb. vi. and x., that I have sinned away my day of grace, and that there is no salvation for me. But give *Him* up I never could."

"Then you are not disposed to give up the thought of salvation through Christ alone, and fly elsewhere for refuge? You still believe in the efficacy of the blood of Christ for the salvation of the soul?"

"With all my heart I can say, I know no other refuge. I believe that 'there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.'" (Acts iv. 12.)

It is perfectly certain, then, that the cases mentioned in Heb. vi. and x. are not patterns of yours. Whatever sin you may have been guilty of, you have not been guilty of what is here called sinning "wil-

fully." The difference is just this. You are quarrelling with *yourself*, while the apostate in Heb. x. quarrels with *Christ*. You have no fault to find with the work of Christ, but plenty to find with yourself: he has none to find with himself, but as for the Son of God he tramples Him underfoot! The Spirit of God has come down from heaven with His wondrous ministry of grace, bearing testimony to the precious efficacy of the work of Christ, and to the glory of His holy person; but the "wilful" apostate, described in this Scripture, *insults* the Spirit of grace; he asserts that there is no efficacy whatever in the death of Christ, that it was only the death of a common impostor, or, at best, of an ordinary martyr; and that he would prefer trusting the blood of a bull or of a goat to trusting the death of the Son of God for salvation. Nor did he count himself an ignoramus in such matters;

knew all about it, for he had tried it— “tasted” it and found it worthless! He had even been *associated* with Christians; his name had been enrolled as one of them; he had been to their meetings and heard all they had to say, and this was his deliberate conclusion!

There was no uncertain sound about all this: no plea of ignorance could be raised. *It was a wilful abandonment of Christianity from its foundation to its top-stone.* It was apostacy.

Now for the certain consequences. No repentance, and no other sacrifice for sins than the one he had abandoned. No salvation, but a drawing back to perdition! Nothing now remained but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Nothing but certain damnation. *They have drawn back to perdition.* (Heb. x. 39.)

In a day like the present, when the very foundations of the Christian faith are being sapped by men who, though

in the position of professed ministers of the gospel, are fast filling the ranks of those who wantonly and wilfully throw overboard the very essentials of Christianity, such statements as those we have been considering are, to say the least, overwhelmingly solemn. All that we can do is to point out the peculiar character of the offence, and sound forth distinctly the certain consequences to the offender, leaving each particular case with Him who seeth not as man seeth, and who judgeth righteously, praying earnestly that the reader may never find himself *one of them*. "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead." (Prov. xxi. 16.)

We trust we have said enough to show that these solemn scriptures could not apply to an ordinary backslider; for it would then be "impossible" for *any* backslider to be restored, which is not the case.

II. THE ORDINARY UNCONVERTED BACKSLIDER.

We now come to the case of those who, being unsaved, make a profession of faith in Christ, and afterwards fall back into their old carnal, worldly ways. I have called them *ordinary* unconverted backsliders, because, thank God, the class already alluded to is an *extraordinary* one.

If you turn to Ruth i. you will get, I think, an illustration of this type of backslider. I refer to the case of Orpah. She was thrown into the company of real pilgrims to Canaan—Naomi and Ruth—and for a time she seemed to be travelling the same road, for evidently they all set out together. But when the test came she utterly broke down. The chance offered itself of returning to her people and to her gods, and back she went. 'Tis true she went back

respectfully — she kissed her mother-in-law—*but she went back!*

Possibly the reader is one of this very class. Perhaps you are the child of believing parents, you have listened to the sweet story of the gospel from earliest childhood. The privileges of being a Christian have been constantly brought before you, and one day, perhaps, you heard of others having been lately converted—your brother or your sister, your friend or some old schoolfellow—and you thought it would be a good thing if you became a Christian too; so you followed the fashion and made a profession. Perhaps in a crowded meeting you held up your hand, or “stood up for Jesus,” as it is called; or, perhaps, you *felt* very happy, and took it for granted that this was being converted. But God knew there was no real work in your soul, and when temptation came *you* proved it.

Now there seem to be two ways

in which the case of many a backslider is like that of Orpah. In the way of natural affection, and in the way of providence. Love has a great power and influence. Perhaps I am addressing one who has been outwardly led along in the right road by love to a converted husband or wife, or by the personal influence of some fondly-cherished friend. But let me tell you plainly, natural love won't save your soul, nor will it always keep you. Don't deceive yourself. We read that *Orpah lifted up her voice and wept* the same as Ruth did; yet when the test came she went back! Her heart was in Moab. Solemn warning. Providential association and natural affection carried her a certain distance, but in the end she went back to her people and to her gods, and we hear of her no more.

In Lot's wife we have another solemn example of an unconverted backslider. The wife of a believer,—

“just Lot”—she shared for a time in God’s providential interposition on his behalf. Drawn by the hand of an angel, she went a bit of the road with her husband, as though fleeing in obedience to divine command from the certain overthrow of the burning city. But if Orpah’s heart was in Moab, the heart of Lot’s wife was in Sodom. They might drag her body out of Sodom, but they couldn’t drag her affections away. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. Solemn monument of the divine judgment which awaits every unconverted backslider. The blessed Lord Himself pointed to that monument with the one significant word, “REMEMBER!”

Reader, are *you* one of this class? Then be warned in time. The companionship of a christian, or outward association with a company of believers, is a great privilege, but to be saved you must have more, you must have Christ for yourself. Mere senti-

ment can avail you nothing. Before He can own you as His *saint* you must take your place at His feet as a *sinner*. To hear the word "with joy" without the sharp ploughshare of conviction having entered your soul; to have the natural feelings wrought upon without real exercise of conscience in the presence of God, is but to leave you in the position of an Orpah for time, with the doom of a Lot's wife for eternity. Beware!

III. THE CONVERTED BACKSLIDER.

What a mercy it is that the believer's acceptance before God does not change with the ever-changing feelings of his fickle heart. When Abel brought his offering to the Lord, we are told that "he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." (Heb. xi. 4.) How was this? Was not Abel a born sinner like Cain? Yes. But it was *not the*

natural excellence of Abel that God looked at in counting him righteous, but at the "excellent sacrifice" on which his faith rested.

When a business man takes a cheque to the bank he gets in full what his cheque is worth. He would not get a farthing more if his character were ever so good, or a farthing less if it were ever so bad. It would not be a question of what *he* was worth, but what the *cheque* was worth in the eye of the banker.

Now, God reckons to the account of every believer all that *He* knows the work of Christ to be worth. Is *it* perfect? Yes. Is it *for ever* perfect? Surely. Then the believer's place of acceptance corresponds therewith. Therefore we read, "By one offering He hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified." (Heb. x. 14.) What a statement for the ears of any poor, trembling believer, who has been looking at *his own* personal worthi-

ness, instead of at the acceptability of Christ, to know that he is "perfected" before the eye of God! As to his conscience he is

Perfected for ever,

because the offering which he trusts is

Perfect for ever.

And then, as though God would stamp this blessed statement with special divine authority, He adds, "Whereof the HOLY GHOST also is a witness to us." (v. 15.) Mark, not a witness *in* us, although, when faith receives it, it is in our souls that we have the comfort of it; but a witness *to* us, that is, *in the Word*. He turns the eye to Christ.

Now we believe that the knowledge of our place of unchanging acceptance and favour before God is the only power to enable us to face the question of our practical wanderings from Him, if they should occur; the power for taking our true place

before Him in unsparing self-judgment; and therefore we have purposely stated the ground of a believer's acceptance, before going on to speak of his backsliding.

Let us now come to the solemn question of

SPIRITUAL DECLINE.

You will find in the 15th chapter of Job (*vv.* 11 and 12) four questions. They are as searching as they are simple, and we would earnestly beseech every reader for himself to take them to heart as before God. They have more than once searched the writer's own heart, and this gives him the greater confidence in commending them to the reader's solemn consideration.

QUESTION 1. "*Are the consolations of God small with thee?*" Can you look back to a time in your Christian history, when your soul was in greater freshness than now, when you had

more love for Christ and His people, more zeal for Christ and His interests than at present, because of a deeper enjoyment of His love to you? I would not unnecessarily cast you in upon yourself, but I do believe that plain dealing is as wholesome as it is necessary, and would therefore entreat you not to quarrel with these questions, but to face them honestly. "Are the consolations of God small with thee?" Then there is a reason for it; and the three questions which follow may help in the discovery of what the hindrance is.

QUESTION 2. "*Is there any secret thing with thee?*" Is there anything in your walk and ways, in your business or your household; anything in the secret of your own heart before God which you know perfectly well is contrary to His holy mind and will? It is solemnly possible to be going on with jealously studied exactitude as to outward conduct, and with correct

ecclesiastical principles into the bargain, and yet to have some hidden evil estranging the heart from God all the time. Reader, is it your case? "Is there *any* secret thing with thee?" No wonder, then, that heavenly comforts are so few, while the heavenly Comforter is so grieved; for well does *He* know your secret. Outwardly all may seem right with the gallant ship as she sails out of harbour, but there is a villainous stowaway on board who may reduce her to a helpless wreck any day; and that is his fell purpose. The captain is aware of it, but he regards not the warning of the only one on board, beside himself, who is in the secret. Now what will it avail under such circumstances that the captain perfectly understands all the laws of navigation? It will avail him nothing.

Is there any such stowaway in *your* vessel? What matter is it that all is clear and clean upon the public

"deck," if some villainous "wrecker" is hidden below? What avails it that, as to doctrine, your head is as clear as spring-water, if your heart's affections are as cold? You have left your first love, and the Lord calls upon you to repent. (Rev. ii. 5.)

QUESTION 3. "*Why doth thine heart carry thee away?*" Perhaps you may say, "I am not conscious of going on with any moral evil, either publicly or in secret, and yet I cannot but confess that it is 'low water' with my soul." Possibly. But remember it is often the very things which you or others are pleased to fix the "no harm" label upon, that materially rob a believer of the enjoyment of heavenly communion. You may safely take it for granted that whatever diminishes in your soul the savour of Christ, whatever lessens the sense of His love, must be looked upon as a robber, and treated accordingly. It may just be some pet hobby, some outcome of

the natural propensity of your heart and mind, something which men would rather praise than blame you for, but if it rob your soul of the comfort of His love, **IT MUST GO.** Nay, in proportion as you value the joy of communion with Him will you be *glad* to get rid of it and say, **IT SHALL GO.** We are slow to believe how small a thing may be a bar to our fellowship. To illustrate this on one occasion, George Whitfield drew the attention of an open-air audience to the smallness of his finger and thumb in comparison with the magnitude of the sun in the heavens; "yet," said he, "these little members are sufficient to shut out, completely, the light of yon blazing sun!" It is the "little foxes" which spoil the vines.

In Old Testament days God instructed His people, by figures and pictures, as to what was clean and what was unclean. If you read the 11th of Leviticus you will notice

how careful He was to furnish a detailed list of the unclean "*creeping things*," and to guard His people against them. And has this no voice to us to-day? Have *we* no need to beware of *creeping things*? I mean, of course, in a moral sense. Ah, yes. The world may creep in bit by bit; old tastes may become revived and cultivated, little by little; and then, remember, most creepers are *clingers* too! The smaller the sin, as *you* judge of its gravity, the greater the difficulty, oftentimes, in getting rid of it. The *sow* and the *mouse* are both classed among the unclean, and spoken of together in Isaiah lxvi. 17. Now if a *sow* were to walk in at your front door to-morrow, you would not be three minutes expelling her; while if a tiny mouse paid you a visit, you might be as many months in getting clear of it.

Notice, too, the way in which some of these "creeping things" are coupled

together in this chapter ; for example, the *mouse* and the *tortoise* in verse 29, and the *lizard* and *snail*, verse 30. How different the habits and movements of these creatures. The mouse, if he *should* come into view, moves so rapidly that he is out of sight again instantly ; perhaps you might be the only person in the house to see him. But he is there still, and the *results* of his activities are a constant source of worry and annoyance. How different with the *tortoise* and the *snail*. They move so slowly that their progress is hardly perceptible. You might almost persuade yourself that they make no progress at all ; but stealthily, steadily, they keep creeping on, and if left to themselves a few hours, it can be easily traced that they have made distinct headway.

Then there is the *mole*. We all know its nature. It burrows beneath the earth, and is rarely to be seen in daylight. It is essentially an *under-*

ground worker, and therefore all the more difficult to catch, though the result of his underground burrowing may be constantly traced on the surface. So with the hidden sin of the heart. It may be burrowing there for many a day, and everyone but myself ignorant of its workings; but, if not judged, depend upon it God will one day bring the mischief to the surface. How well, therefore, to listen to the exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs iv. 23.)

QUESTION 4. "*What do thine eyes wink at?*" "Is there anything in my surroundings, my wife, my husband, my business connections, my fellow-workmen for which I am in a measure responsible, and which, though wrong, I am unrighteously passing over—'winking at'?" God's complaint against Eli was that "his sons made themselves vile, and *he restrained them*

not," or as the margin reads, "*He frowned not upon them.*" It has been said, and, alas! truly said, that many a man gives up the world for the Lord's sake, and goes back to it again for his wife's or his family's sake!

Things once frowned upon with godly jealousy may, in the end, be winked at, to the soul's deep loss and the Lord's sad dishonour. Oh, let us beware of the *beginnings* of evil, and never wink at sin. Its deadly power, like the locusts that eat up all the green, will sap our souls of all vigour and freshness, and leave us, like Samson shorn of his locks, a laughing stock to the enemies of the Lord.

I once read a fable, the moral of which struck me so much that I consider it worth repeating. A man was sitting one winter's day in his workshop plying his trade, when a camel came to the door. Looking in, he said to the man, "It is so very cold outside here, I wish you would have

the kindness to allow me to put my nose inside your shed?" "Oh yes," replied the man, civilly, "put your nose in and welcome." After a few minutes had elapsed the camel spoke again. "Oh, sir, the wind is whistling round my ears so dreadfully, that I could heartily wish you would let me put my *head* inside." "Certainly," replied the good-tempered fellow, without looking from his work; so the beast thrust his head in. Another few minutes rolled by, and for the third time the camel addressed his benefactor. "Sitting comfortably there, you have little idea how wild and tempestuous the weather is outside, or I'm sure you would allow me to bring my *neck* in." This time the answer came with more reluctance; but at last the man said, "Well, put your neck in, then, but don't keep bothering me." Another spell of silent waiting followed, and then the camel made his fourth overture. It was to bring

his *fore legs* inside. By this time he had well-nigh worn out his welcome, and the man answered abruptly, "I certainly think you are imposing on my kindness; but, for peace sake, bring your fore legs in too." Now listen to the end of the story. In a very brief space of time, and *without asking permission*, the camel brought in his *hind legs*; and now his *whole carcase* was in the small workshop! The man thereupon dropped his work, and, jumping up, exclaimed vigorously, "This is more than I will put up with; I'll not have you in here, be off at once!" To which the impudent camel calmly replied, "Then go out yourself, I'm master now!"

So it is; you give that old besetment of yours one inch, and it will not only be sure to take advantage of you, but, almost before you know it, assert complete mastery over you. Oh, don't wink at sin, either in yourself or in anyone else; for if you spare

it one hair's breadth, you will only be adding that hair's-breadth to Satan's weapon to torment you.

RESTORATION.

Nothing is more touching than the thought of the Lord's tender dealings with those who, after having really believed on Him, wander, for a time, from Him.

Take, for example, the case of Naomi. (Ruth i.) She was undoubtedly a true Israelite, but when pressure of circumstances came she left the land of Canaan for the heathen land of Moab. God's ground, so to speak, was abandoned for the enemy's ground. She was the right person, but in the wrong place. Forsaking God's land and God's people, she went into the midst of idolatry, and for ten long years she seems to have settled down there; but how heavily she was made to feel the rod of discipline! Love

must and will adopt strong measures when such dealings are necessary. Cost what it may, God *will* bring the saved backslider back. Mark His dealings with poor Naomi. First Elimelech, her husband, sickens and dies. Does that take her back? No. Then her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, are stricken down by the hand of death. Yet even these heavy blows do not bring the wanderer home to Bethlehem.

And here let us notice another thing in connection with God's ways in restoring backsliders. He generally uses pressure on the one hand, and drawing on the other. So it is here. Just when His hand seemed heaviest upon Naomi; just when every loved one had been taken away from her, the tidings reached her ear that "the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread"; and this it was that turned her feet toward Canaan. It was like the bit of impetus sometimes

needed to launch a vessel, or like the necessary rising of the tidal wave to carry some heavy-laden craft across the harbour bar. So we read, "*Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was . . . to return unto the land of Judah.*" (Ruth i. 6, 7.)

There is another very painful thing about backsliding, namely, its baneful effects upon our surroundings; and this seems to stand out with saddening prominence in Naomi's case. What a stumbling-block she proved to be to one of her daughters-in-law! Indeed, she might have hindered both, but for Ruth's unbending purpose. Just think of a true Israelite trying to persuade her daughters to return to a people and a land steeped in idolatry! Yet such is the sad truth. How incomprehensible it would be, did we not know that there is no dishonour to the Lord's name, short of apostasy, which a believing backslider may not be guilty of.

“And yet to find *Him* still the same !
’T is this which humbles us with shame.”

There can be no question that the backsliding of Christians does more damage to the cause of Christ than all the opposition of scoffing sceptics put together. We may not say in so many words, “Stay where you are in the world.” But actions speak louder than words. It speaks badly for a pasture when the sheep are lean, and wander from it. I once saw a man start begging within two minutes of leaving a large well-built house where he had spent the night. But it did not surprise me, for it was the *union workhouse!* But think of leaving a banqueting house to return to a husk trough! Suppose you are walking along the street behind some person, and you suddenly see him stoop down and pick something from the pavement. You watch him narrowly; you see that he examines it most closely and carefully, and, having done so,

itches it into the gutter. Would *you* pick it up, think you, when you came to the place? No, indeed, you reply; for had it been worth keeping, that man would not have thrown it away as he did. His action proved that it was not worth picking up, and that he was sorry he had taken the trouble to do so. Exactly. And if I am addressing a backslider, let me tell you that this man is but a picture of yourself. There was a time when you found Christ. You told the world that you had; that He was enough to fill your heart as well as to save your soul; and that you no longer wanted the world and its attractions; you had found something incomparably better. But, alas! how is it now? You have, *as far as the world can see*, turned your back upon both the Lord and His people, and gone back to your old habits and associations. Do you expect that others, who never knew Him, will be drawn, by what

they see in you, to accept Him? The very opposite. Does not your conduct rather declare that you have been disappointed in Him? that, after all, you made a mistake, for you found He was *not* enough to satisfy even *your* narrow heart? Oh, what a back-handed blow to give the blessed Saviour! What a wound in the house of His friends! And is this the way you are going to return His love, His dying love to you? Let me beseech you to come back to Him; let the cords of His infinite, unchanging love draw you back, ere your sinful wandering be a further stumbling-block to those who know you—a further grief and dishonour to Him who will never cease to love you. John xiii. 1. Besides, remember this, He *will* bring you back: sooner or later He *will* have it out with you, if He has to bring you to your dying pillow to do it. He may, I say again, have to make your back smart with the

rod of discipline in order to accomplish His gracious purpose, but if you are one of His, He surely will accomplish it. He may have to strip you of everything which your heart clings to here below, as He did Naomi; and, like her, you may have to say, He hath "dealt very bitterly with me," but along with that complaint will have to come the confession of your own shameful wanderings, and His restoring grace. "*I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*"

ENCOURAGEMENT TO TROUBLED

WANDERERS.

Perhaps some troubled wanderer may be saying, "It is no use my coming back. After all my past conduct no one will have a kind word for me. They will never forget the past, and will rightly spurn me for it."

Be certain of this, then, that you will never be in a right state to come

back till you feel that you rightly *deserve* to be spurned, both by the Lord and by His people. At the same time you are making a great mistake, dear friend. The Lord's people are not so hard as you imagine them to be. Look at Naomi. Doubtless *she* expected nothing from those who had never wandered from Bethlehem but hard looks and reproachful words. But what did she find? Why, that although she had been away so long that at first they hardly knew her, the whole city was "moved" about her. Notice, too, how God took care that she should return at a time of plenty. It was "*in the beginning of barley harvest.*" How like to the God of all grace was this!

Think, too, of the Lord's tender solicitude for the erring Peter in those gracious words, "Tell his disciples and Peter"; and of His grace in trusting Peter to feed His sheep, when that disciple could no longer

trust himself. (Mark xvi. 7; John xxi. 17.)

But perhaps another may say, "I am *longing* to get back to fellowship with God, but I don't know how to set about it; I have grieved His heart so long, and dishonoured His holy name so shamefully, that I naturally shrink from approaching Him, especially when I have so often broken the solemn promises I made Him. He will surely never more regard, as genuine, any promise I make Him for the future."

But all this is a serious mistake. He is not asking you to make fair promises to Him, as though by this means you could make a sort of treaty of peace with Him. Turn to 1 John i. 9 and you will see what He would have you do. There it is plainly stated, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"But how is it," some one may ask,

“that sometimes, when I *have* confessed my sin before God, I have risen from my knees without the comforting sense of the forgiveness I crave for?”

Well, possibly you had not really *bottomed* the sin before God. Had you made diligent search you might, perchance, have discovered in your heart a secret purpose to indulge in that sin again. Or you might have *confessed your SIN and excused YOURSELF*, or only partially confessed it. If a child confesses to his father that he stole *two* apples from the orchard when he, in reality, stole *four*, he could not be honestly happy about it. But when he thoroughly condemns himself, and, as we say, “makes a clean breast of it,” his heart is at rest in his father’s presence. He is morally clear of it.

God would have you go back to the very root of your backsliding, to the very beginning of your sinful course, and in heart-broken confession lay it

all bare in His holy presence, assured that He will be "faithful and just" to forgive you if you do, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

On one occasion, a few years' since, the writer had some conversation with a man who kept a water-mill. He said that his supply of water had nearly ceased, and that he was then on his way up the stream to find out the obstruction. He knew well enough that the *source* of the stream had not dried up, and that something, therefore, had come in between his mill and the source, which was hindering his use of its power. He knew, too, that it was no use going further down the stream to try and bring the water back. He must go up the stream, so as to reach and remove the hindering thing. How far must he go? That all depends. If he doesn't find the obstruction in the first hundred yards, he must go *two* hundred. If not in the first mile,

he must go another, and so on, till the hindrance *is* reached. Apply this.

God's *love* never changes, but the even flow of our enjoyment of it is interrupted whenever sin comes in. And before we can return to the unclouded enjoyment of that love we must go back, in our histories, to the hindering thing, and when reached we must judge and confess it. It may be a day or a week, a month or a year, or even ten or twenty years, that we have to go back. But, until we *do* reach and judge it, we need not wonder that the consolations of God are at a low ebb in our souls, for the Comforter Himself is grieved, and His gracious operations in us are consequently hindered.

Let us never forget that the tide of this world is dead against us, and that we cannot, in the race to heaven, drop our oars, and still expect to make progress. The moment we cease to carry about with us a *secret purpose* to

be faithful to the One whom the world has despised and rejected we are spiritually declining. However imperceptible it may be, either to ourselves or to others, from that moment our course will be backward instead of forward. But instead of "looking back" may we be found "reaching forth unto those things which are before," being assured that if our hearts are not in the enjoyment of what is heavenly and divine, they will soon be hankering after what is earthly and sensual.

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." (Prov. iv. 18.)

"Great peace have they which love Thy law: and *they shall have no stumbling-block.*" (Ps. cxix. 165. See margin.) May this peace be yours, dear reader.

GEO. C.

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