

# *a community called ...*

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## ADDRESS TO BACKSLIDERS.

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I will heal their backslidings ; I will love them freely : mine anger is turned away from them.—HOSEA xiv, 4.

To such as have turned away from the holy commandment delivered unto them, is this word of exhortation sent. I mean such as have once known the way of righteousness and peace, by having had the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, but are now dead to God, and live in the neglect of religious duties. That such unhappy persons may be convinced of their dangerous course, and be induced to return unto God, it seems expedient to describe their characters, and exhibit the danger to which they are exposed. They may be comprehended in three classes.

1. Those who, though they may retain an external profession of godliness, and are yet

members of the visible Church, are nevertheless destitute of the life of God in the soul. Such may know their state by comparing their present views, enjoyments, and general practice, with what they were when first brought into the liberty of God's children. They then possessed an honest simplicity of soul, delighted in prayer, private and public, and the word and ordinances of the Gospel were their continual food. The company also and conversation of Christians afforded them a rich repast whenever they associated together. By these means their souls were feasted with marrow and fat things. They could joyfully sing,

“ I then rode on the sky,  
Freely justified I,  
Nor did envy Elijah his seat;  
My glad soul mounted higher  
In a chariot of fire,  
And the moon it was under my feet,”

But now, instead of this sacred delight in Divine things, their closet is seldom, if ever, visited; prayer is a burdensome task; the word of God and ordinances of the Church

are irksome, and religious conversation tiresome and disgustful. If they attend the administration of the word at all, it is more from an idle curiosity, and to indulge themselves in censorious remarks upon the speaker, than it is to learn the lessons of wisdom, or to be fed with the sincere milk of the word. Inquire of them respecting the spiritual prosperity of their souls, they will probably answer you with a deep sigh, expressive of their conscious guilt, and by saying, "It is not with me as I wish!" Instead of entering into the spirit and power of religion in their communications with each other, they dwell, if the subject is mentioned at all, upon some circumstantial of it; and more frequently exhausting their time, and employing their tongue, in exhibiting the supposed or real faults of others. While in the house of God, instead of that solemn devotion so essential to be benefited by Divine worship, their attention is attracted by the conduct, and their own enjoyment interrupted by the supposed or real improprieties of others. You will also find them in conver-

sation departing from honest simplicity, indulging in flattery or censoriousness; imitating in their dress and manners the unscriptural fashions and maxims of the world. These are the sad marks of a backslidden soul.

Now unless these unhappy persons stop in their career of apostasy, *repent and do their first works*, they will be likely soon to come under the

2. Second class of backsliders. These are characterized by their having abandoned the Church and people of God, and thrown off the restraints of religion altogether, and have joined affinity with that world which knows not God. Having thus plunged themselves into the mire of iniquity, they now are associated with those who make no pretensions at all to religion. The fascinating charms of the world have bewildered their souls; but they have been like children and fools, who

“Leap at the stars, and fasten in the mud.”

Instead of finding that satisfaction which the alluring pleasures of sin promised them,

when they immersed themselves into it, they find themselves surrounded with thorns and briers; and their sad experience teaches them the truth of the wise man's declaration, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Yet they may not have gone so far as to be beyond the reach of Divine mercy.

I once conversed with a man of this description, who had wandered so far into the wilderness of error as to have become a complete skeptic; but he nevertheless expressed a great desire to believe in Christ, and again to enjoy the favor of God, but he found himself incompetent on account of his present blindness and hardness.

He had once been a zealous professor of Christianity, and no doubt had enjoyed its renovating influence. In addition to the light of scriptural truth, his mind was irradiated by human science, and improved by a very general knowledge of mankind. And the candor and frankness with which he acknowledged his present incredulity greatly interested me in his favor. His case reminded

me of the solemn caution of the Lord Jesus: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" His light had indeed departed from him, and great was the darkness which surrounded his soul!

After presenting to him some of the leading evidences of Divine truth, adverting to the superior advantages it possessed over every other system which had been embraced by men, the truth of all which he acknowledged in express terms, while he confessed his incapacity to apply them to himself so as to be benefited by them, I left him with a sorrowful heart. During this interesting conversation he alluded to some affecting testimonies of saints and sinners upon their death-bed, which so wrought upon his feelings while he related them that he wept profusely, and expressed an ardent desire to test the truth of Christianity by his own experience. I left him a fearful monument of the dangerous possibility of apostasy from the faith of the Gospel—not without a hope, however, that his case was not desperate, but that he might yet be

brought back to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul.

Those, however, who have thus far wandered from God, are in great danger of coming under the

3. Third class of backsliders, or of totally apostatizing from God and godliness. Such are forcibly characterized by the apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. vi, 4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Of these we have no hope. It is, therefore, only necessary to observe, for the purpose of preventing any from applying such awful warnings to themselves, and sinking into despair, that such apostates have entirely renounced Christianity. Like the Jews who crucified Christ as an impostor, they ridicule



him as such, deride his religion, and are now united to the infidel scoffers, who consider Christianity as an imposition upon mankind. In this sense *they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh*, exposing him, by their vile conduct, to an open shame, by declaring to the world that they despise him as an impostor. Having rejected Him, who is the only sacrifice for sin, the only Saviour of the world, there is no possibility of renewing them again to repentance. God cannot, because his unalterable method is to save sinners through Jesus Christ; but these apostates have rejected him, and certainly they cannot renew themselves.

It is to be hoped that but few such apostates are to be found. And those who yet retain a belief in Christ, who adhere to the system of Christianity as a system of truth, and who possess the smallest desire to return unto God, may take it for granted that they are not the ones described by the apostle. While, therefore, such have reason to apprehend that there is great danger of their be-

coming thus hardened in iniquity if they persist in their race of apostasy, they may nevertheless, return unto God, and find acceptance in the Beloved. And it is to prevent such from leaping into all the horrors of total and final apostasy that this friendly warning is given unto them.

Yes, reader, if you find yourself described by either of the two first classes of backsliders, you are earnestly requested to take into consideration the imminent danger to which you are exposed. Pursuing your present course, you cannot have the smallest hope of everlasting happiness. Of all men you are likely to be the most miserable. Having forsaken God, the infinite Fountain of happiness, and having plunged into the mire of iniquity, you are likely to end your life in sorrow, and to lie down in eternal torments.

Call to mind, for a moment, those hours of sacred pleasure and supreme delight which you once enjoyed in communion with God, and in fellowship with his people. You cannot, surely, have forgotten those moments of

heartfelt satisfaction, when your soul was ravished at beholding the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ; when the candle of the Lord shone upon your head, and you were mounted in the chariot of redeeming love, far above those sordid pleasures which sin affords. How cutting to your fallen soul must be the recollection of those hours when your happy soul feasted upon Divine love. And how base your ingratitude! how deep your revolt! how deplorable your condition! And will you still continue to abuse the long forbearance of your heavenly Father? Still provoke the thunder of his justice, and make his goodness an occasion of greater sin? Because grace abounds in Christ Jesus, will you give yourself license to persist in your ingratitude, rebellion, and apostasy? O how ungrateful is your heart! What unworthy returns you are making for all the benefits you have received!

Permit me to ask, "What besetting sin has bewildered your soul? By what worldly pleasure have you been infatuated? What

has the Lord done to you that you should treat him in so ungrateful a manner? Has he wearied you with his benefits? Has he not loaded you with mercies all your days? Why, then, prefer Satan to Christ? Do the gaudy fashions, the vain amusements, and the sinful pleasures of a wicked world, now afford you more satisfaction than you once enjoyed in communion with God? Tell me! Have you resolved, in defiance of all the tremendous warnings contained in the word of God, to persist in your present downward road to destruction? Before you form this mad resolution, stop and consider. Think, O think, of the dreadful account you are preparing to give to your almighty Judge! You cannot escape for ever. In addition to the unsatisfying nature of all sublunary enjoyments, they must soon terminate with you. *The fashion of this world passeth away*, and with it all your pleasure. Sickness may blast all your blooming prospects in an hour; and death, following hard after you, will soon cut you off from all your present enjoyments; and per-

haps a few steps farther in your downward road in apostasy may land you in the dismal gulf of complete and total despair. O stop, stop! and count the cost before you proceed any farther.

Do you ask, *What shall I do?* It is answered, *Repent, and do your first works.* Search, until you ascertain what those sins were which have separated between God and your soul. Having found out what they were, make haste to cast the fire out of your bosom. Be resolved, let the sacrifice be what it may, to part with the accursed thing. Do not demur one moment. The choice is between God and the devil, heaven and hell. If you persevere in your present course, hell must be your portion; but if you turn about, and regain the favor of God, heaven is your everlasting treasure. Can you hesitate which to choose?

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