

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 29, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

freedom
THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS Backsliding into Legalism *Galatians 3:1-9*

“Backsliding” certainly is not limited to carnality. Christians can as easily backslide into false teaching and the error of extremism as they can into moral compromise. The Galatians believers are a prime example of this. Willingly and deliberately they turned away from the gospel of grace – an act of spiritual treason (Gal. 1:6) – and fell under the spell of legalism. Paul viewed this with such a critical eye that he claimed they had been “bewitched” in this foolish act (an act J.B. Phillips described as “idiotic”). Hence, the letter. Possibly we can be deterred from such a departure or compromise by observing the problem more closely.

“¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ²This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?— ⁶just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁷Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” ⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” – Galatians 3:1-9 (NKJV)

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ESSENTIALS

A place to begin might be to explain and define... and get our heads around a couple of words that are not used in our passage, but are implied. These two words are thrown around a lot in Christian, religious and church circles, and may carry with them some mixed up notions, erroneous implication, and false ideas that even promote false teaching in some church circles. Let’s look at the two essential words implied in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

2 Essentials Words in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 3:1-9):

1. **Backsliding** – Let's just give a word are regarding backsliding here. What is it? Who does it? And what are its implications? Backsliding is a term used to describe the weakening of a professed Christian's commitment to Christ that is often manifested in a more worldly attitude and behavior.

Defining backsliding:

- (1) **A Dictionary Definition of Backsliding** – *“To relapse into bad ways or error”*
- (2) **A Christian Understanding/Definition of Backsliding** - *“Backslide means to lapse or fall backward in your relationship with Christ. To lose interest in following and serving the Lord.”* Some Christians use terms like "lukewarm" or "faith that's grown cold" to describe a person who is spiritually backsliding. A believer who is "no longer on fire for the Lord" is another typical description of someone who is in a backslidden state. Notice that this definition does not clear up the issue of whether or not a person who “backslide” actually loses his or her salvation. The above definition could be interpreted either way. That is because within Christendom “backsliding” has been applied in at least 2 different basic ways. These actually line up with Christian denominations today and the questions of “eternal security of the believer” or “perseverance of the saints,” and the potential for a believer to “fall from grace” or “lose their salvation.”

2 Basic Christian Understandings/Interpretations of Backsliding:

[1] **The Arminian View of Backsliding** – Backsliding is also known as **falling away** or losing one's salvation within some “Christian” churches, and is used to describe a process by which an individual who has converted to Christianity reverts to pre-conversion habits and/or lapses or falls into sin, when a person turns from God to pursue their own desire. In Christianity, within denominations which teach Arminianism, such as the Methodist Church and Pentecostal Holiness Churches (Nazarene, Church of God, Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal, etc.), as well as in the Roman Catholic Church, backsliding is a state in which any free willed believer is capable of losing their salvation... sometimes called falling from grace.

[2] **The Reformed (Calvinists) View of Backsliding** - This belief, that one can lose their salvation or fall from grace, is rejected by reformed Christian groups (Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Evangelical Free, etc.) and those particularly influenced by early Church leaders and reformers such as John Calvin, who taught the doctrine of “the perseverance of the saints” otherwise known as “the eternal security of the believer.” In these denominations, it is taught that “backsliding” for a Christian does not mean that the individual has “fallen from grace” or lost his or her salvation, rather may be an indicator that either the person was never saved to start with or an indication of a Christian life in need or repentance, renewal and revival due to a spiritual drift, but never loss of salvation. It should be noted that historically, backsliding was considered a trait of the Biblical Israel which would turn from the Abrahamic God to follow idols. In the New Testament church (see Acts of the Apostles and Christianity in the 1st century), the story of the Prodigal Son has become a representation of a backslider that repented.¹

- (3) **A Biblical Definition of Backsliding** - The term is used in the NKJV in Proverbs 14:14 (NKJV), and provides a good Bible definition of “backsliding”. *Proverbs 14:14 "The*

backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above.

The bigger question may be, how may one know if he or is “backslidden” or currently living in a backslidden condition. Well certainly, for a genuine believer, if you are backslidden and living away from Christ, you will now it. The Holy Spirit in your will confirm it through conviction and an uneasiness in your own spirit. However, a Christian may drift so far and reject the Spirit drawing back so much that their conscience may become seared as Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 4:2. So what are some evidences that may indicate a backslidden life. How may one know he or she is backslidden. The following are 25 evidence of a backslidden condition taken from **Richard Owen Roberts** excellent book, “Revival.” Roberts says, “Backslidden Christians are evident everywhere. They are in the churches and out of the churches. They are in the pews and in the pulpits. They are on boards and are bored. They serve on committees and teach Sunday School. The backslidden seem to be as numerous as the upright, and their influence throughout the world may be equally profound. While backsliders do not all manifest the same traits, evidences of their condition are not difficult to pinpoint.” The he gives the following 25 characteristics of a backslidden condition.

25 Evidences of a Backslidden Condition: (Richard Owen Roberts, Revival, pg.37ff)

- 1. When prayer ceases to be a vital part of a professing Christian’s life, backsliding is present.**
- 2. When the quest for biblical truth ceases and one grows content with the knowledge of eternal things already acquired, there can be not mistaking the presence of backsliding.**
- 3. When the biblical knowledge possessed or acquired is treated as external fact and not applied inwardly, backsliding is present.**
- 4. When earnest thoughts about eternal things cease to be regular and gripping, it should be like a warning light to the backslider.**
- 5. When the services of the church lost their delight, a backslidden condition probably exists.**
- 6. When pointed spiritual discussions are an embarrassment, that is certain evidences of backsliding.**
- 7. When sports, recreation, and entertainment are a large and necessary part of your lifestyle, you may assume backsliding is in force.**
- 8. When sins of the body and of the mind can be indulged in without an uproar in your conscience, your backslidden condition is certain.**
- 9. When aspirations for Christ-like holiness cease to be dominant in your life and thinking, backsliding is there.**
- 10. When the acquisition of money and goods becomes a dominant part of your thinking , you have clear confirmation of backsliding.**
- 11. When you can mouth religious songs and words without heart, be sure backsliding is present.**
- 12. When you can hear the Lord’s name taken in vain, spiritual concerns mocked, and eternal issues flippantly treated, and not be moved to indignation and action, you are backslidden.**

13. When you can watch degrading movies and television and read morally debilitating literature, you can be sure you have backslidden.
14. When breaches of peace in the brotherhood are not no concern to you, that is proof of backsliding.
15. When the slightest excuse seems sufficient to keep you from spiritual duty and opportunity, you are backslidden.
16. When you become content with your lack of spiritual power and no longer seek repeated enduements of power from on high, you have backslidden.
17. When you pardon your own sin and sloth by saying the Lord understands and remembers that we are dust, you may have spoken gospel truth, but you have also revealed your backslidden condition.
18. When there is no music in your soul and no song in your heart, the silence testifies to your backsliding.
19. When you adjust happily to the world's lifestyle, your own mirror will tell the truth of your backsliding.
20. When injustice and human misery exist around you and you do little or nothing to relieve the suffering, be sure you are backslidden.
21. When your church has fallen into spiritual declension and the Word of God is no longer preached there with power and you are still content, you are in a backslidden condition.
22. When the spiritual condition of the world declines around you and you cannot perceive it, that is testimony you your backslidden stance.
23. When you are willing to cheat your employer, backsliding is apparent.
24. When you find yourself rich in grace and mercy and marvel at your own godlikeness, then you have fallen far in your backsliding.
25. When your tears are dried up and the hard, cold spiritual facts of your existence cannot unleash them, see this as an awful testimony to both the hardness of your heart and the depth of your backsliding.

Those are tough. I find that list very heavy and convicting in my own life, but also a very engaging way to examine my own heart and life, my motives, my drives, my actions. The truth is the Christian life is not always an easy road. Sometimes we get off track. The Bible says in the book of Hebrews to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ daily so that no one turns away from the living God. If you're feeling far away from the Lord and think you might be backslidden, these practical steps will help get right with God and back on course today.

10 Ways to Avoid Backsliding: Each of these practical steps is backed by a passage (or passages) from the Bible.

- (1) **Examine your faith-life regularly** - 2 Corinthians 13:5, (NIV) *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*
- (2) **If you find yourself drifting away, turn back immediately** – Hebrews 3:12-13 (NIV). *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

- (3) **Come to God daily for forgiveness and cleansing** - 1 John 1:9 (NIV), *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* Revelation 22:14 (NIV), *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*
- (4) **Continue daily seeking the Lord with your whole heart** - 1 Chronicles 28:9 (NIV), *And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.*
- (5) **Stay in the Word of God; keep studying and learning daily** - Proverbs 4:13 (NIV), *Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.*
- (6) **Stay in fellowship often with other believers** - You can't make it alone as a Christian. We need the strength and prayers of other believers. Hebrews 10:25 (NLT), *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*
- (7) **Stand firm in your faith and expect difficult times in your Christian life** - Matthew 10:22 (NIV), *All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* Galatians 5:1 (NIV), *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*
- (8) **Persevere** - 1 Timothy 4:15-17 (NIV), *Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*
- (9) **Run the race to win** - 1 Corinthians 9: 24-25 (NIV), *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training ... we do it to get a crown that will last forever.* 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV), *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness...*
- (10) **Remember what God has done for you in the past** - Hebrews 10:32, 35-39 (NIV), *Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised ... we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*

If you're concerned about backsliding, or drifting away from the Lord, learn these practical ways to stay on track spiritually. That is a bit of an understanding of "backsliding." Paul's words to the Galatians in the first few verses of the 3rd chapter indicate that was confronting them in their backsliding, but second there was the issue of what had perhaps caused their backsliding...

Legalism – Just for a brief description of legalism... the use of this word varies in different groups and setting. Although it is not a word used in Scripture, it is a term we use, meaning "law-like." Legalism is basically conformity to a standard for the purpose of exalting self (Note Charles Ryrie's discussion of the subject in his book *Balancing the Christian Life*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1970, pp. 159-162). Applying this to the Galatians, they had been

saved by grace because they had believed the message from Paul, but with the passing of time they deserted that message. They slipped back into a salvation-by-works, legalistic mentality. There are two kinds of legalism: the first kind (legalistic salvation) being the variety found among the Galatians.

2 Kinds of Legalism:

- (1) **Legalistic salvation** – This says that in order for one to be right with God, he must do something... he must add to the work of Christ so that God will be pleased with his good works. Thus, that one may be brought into God’s family.
- (2) **Legalistic sanctification** – This says that since a person is in Christ, his relationship with Christ will be closer... more intimate... if he stops or starts doing certain things so that people in God’s family will think better of him. These are things to which no direct reference is made in Scripture, but which sound plausible or probable.

4 Dangers of Legalism: *Legalism: In its most basic sense legalism believes that we can earn or keep God’s favor by what we do.*

- (1) **Legalism promotes unbiblical standards (self-authority)** – To elevate any other standard outside of the work of Jesus Christ is to promote an unbiblical standard... it is to make a law that is not binding. It may be what you do or do not eat or drink, what you do on Sundays, or it may be what you wear for clothes, what kind of music you listen to, or whether you have piercings or tattoos, wear a suit or don’t on Sundays, or home school or not, or whatever. It is to take something that cannot being or keep your favor with God and make it binding on yourself and others. This is dangerous, but it is so prevalent.
- (2) **Legalism promotes performance (self-righteousness)** – Legalism says, “I do or do not do.” The Gospel says, “I can’t do, but Jesus did.” There is a big difference. Legalism promotes the earning and keeping of God’s pleasure based on what I do or do not do. When legalistic thinking is prevalent you are always trying to cut a deal with God or your conscience. You may feel guilty about what you have done instead of running to Christ you run to Sinai, the Law, and look for something to do to make yourself feel better about yourself.
- (3) **Legalism promotes division** – Legalism is a system that thrives on “personal performance, personal supremacy, and sadly, the trampling of others. It relentlessly pushes others out of the way so that you may advance. Someone must always have the upper-hand, do it better than other, be more Holy, more Spiritual, more moral... etc. If we are saved and made right by what we do, that what I do must be better than what you do or I will not be as favored and as liked as you are... it always promotes division in this way. It cannot unify. It must by necessity divide.
- (4) **Legalism demotes Jesus (and His sufficient righteousness)** – This at its core, the real offense of legalism. To maintain that you can merit God’s favor by what you do and outside of the work of Christ is to say that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was not necessary or was not sufficient. To cling to personal merit through doing things (however good or biblical they may seem) is to demote Jesus from his place of supremacy.

2. **A General Comment Regarding the Galatians** – They backslid because they deserted the message of grace for one which was a distortion... “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-7). Those who introduced such a gospel were identified by Paul as “false brethren”(Gal. 2:4) or false teacher who had sneaked into the Galatians assembly to spy out the new found liberty of the believers there. Their objective was to put those who were free under the bondage of the Mosaic Law. Why? What would be the purpose of introducing such a teaching (legalism) into the Galatian churches? Whether realized or not “legalism” is a system of control... specifically controlling others. It creates hierarchies, orders, a pecking order and is oppressive in that it keeps others under the thumbs of the higher-ups by controlling their behavior and making judgements on what one does and doesn't do.

ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENT (Galatians 3:2-9)

Two elements comprise Paul's argument: first, a severe rebuke (v.1), second reason for his confrontation (vv.2-9). Let's look at these two elements.

2 Elements of Paul's Argument:

1. **The Rebuke (v.1)** – Paul opens the third chapter with a rhetorical question in Galatians 3:1, *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”* Paul was not saying that the Galatians had observed with their own eyes the crucifixion, but that they had seen the crucifixion through the Gospel message which had been clearly displayed, presented before them. The term “portrayed” means “placarded,” in the sense of posting signboard. The word was used to describe the notice a father publicly posted, disclaiming his son's debts. In this way, this was “before their eyes.” Paul chose a strong word when he wrote that they were “bewitched.” It means “to be under a spell” or “to be hypnotized.” Also, it suggests one being without reason or sanity.
2. **The Reasons (vv.2-9)** – Paul not only confronts them with the fact of their lapse, but gives reasons to support his thinking that they are at fault.

Parenthetical Insight: *How is it that a person in a backslidden state can think so illogically and unbiblically? Perhaps Luke 15 helps to answer the question. The parable describes a son who left home to find everything which he already had there, and which could really not be found elsewhere. This tragic scene shows that the boy was blinded by a loss of reason. It was a total breakdown of his life for him to “come to his senses” (Luke 15:17). Feeling swine, desiring food which they were eating, his eyes were opened. In a sense, the boy had experienced temporary insanity or irrationality, buying message antithetical to the truth... accepting an entire world of strange reasoning. In **Proverbs 18:1** Solomon explained it this way, *“A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.”* Apparently, this is what had happened with the Galatians. Here are the reasons they were wrong.*

2 Reasons the Galatians Were Wrong:

- (1) **Because of their own salvation experience (vv.2-5)** – Their own experience should have taught them that they had believed something that was untrue. Notice Paul's words in verses 2-5, *“²This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun in the*

Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

The answer to each was an obvious and resounding “No!”

- (2) **Because of the Old Testament teaching (vv.6-9)** – Notice Paul’s words in verses 6-9, *“⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁷ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”* Paul called to their attention the man of whom most think when the word “faith” is mentioned... Abraham. The text he quoted was drawn up from Genesis 15:1-6, “... Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Abraham was old, and his conversation with God resulted in a promise being made to him, “... One who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir” (Gen. 15:4). This man, whose own body (and whose wife’s body) was beyond the years of child-bearing, believed God. Paul reminded the Galatians that works played no part in Abraham’s life with God. He hadn’t worked to earn God’s approval. He handed added a thing to God’s promise to strengthen its quality. He was a man of faith, not works. Thus... they were to be also... and so are we.

LESSONS THAT LINGER

3 Take-away Lessons:

1. **Legalism is an aggressive enemy** – Don’t make friends with it.
2. **Backsliding is temporary insanity, irrationality, senselessness, absurdity, lunacy** – Don’t attempt to reason with it or understand it.
3. **Salvation is a free gift** – Don’t try to earn it or add to it.