

Beware Of Backsliding

Hosea 7

This chapter in Hosea specifically speaks to the act of backsliding. Most Christians today don't even have any idea what that means. In fact, many believers today choose to believe in the once saved always saved concept. This allows them to go through life not worrying about the accountability that God requires of us. The thing is that most Christians, just like Israel here, don't even recognize many sins as sin anymore.

So, what is backsliding? The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes it as to lapse morally in the practice of religion or to revert to a worse condition. But what does scripture say about it? Luke 9:62 says, ⁶² *Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

The text today speaks directly to this.

¹ whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed. They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets; ² but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.

The problem among the people and leaders of Israel was they forgot, willfully, that the LORD saw and remembered their sin. This happens with a lot of believers today. Just like Israel we tend to forget that God sees and remembers everything we do. You may be able to keep things a secret before men but not God.

Every true Christian today should ask themselves: Have you forgotten? Do you think God doesn't see? Do you think God is blind to your adultery or pre-marital sex? Do you think your pornography habit goes unnoticed? Do you think God's eyes are closed when you get drunk or take drugs? Do you think God doesn't hear us when we curse or gossip about others?

There are many church-going people today who think that God forgets, never sees, or hears these things. They do them and then they come to church and make a profession of their godliness and pretend that those things are never part

of their life. They think that Jesus dying on the cross covers them sinning repeatedly, but it doesn't.

Now don't get me wrong. I believe what it says in Jeremiah 31:34, ³⁴ *No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* But, we must also remember that when we accept Him we are a new creation and should strive to sin no more.

Take notice of what it says in verse 1, "whenever I would heal them". God was always willing to heal Israel from their sin and its effects, but not as long as they acted as if God did not see their sin. They had to treat God as He really is, a God who sees and remembers unrepentant, uncovered sin.

³ *"They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies.*

This most likely refers to one of the successful assassination plots against the throne of Israel during the ministry of Hosea. Since there were four kings violently overthrown during his ministry, it's hard to exactly know which one he means.

⁴ *They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises. ⁵ On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers.*

⁶ *Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them calls on me.*

What it is saying here is that Israel was inflamed with desire and passion after idols just like the coals of a freshly stoked fire. The imagery of a hot, well-stoked oven here shows the heat of treachery, the heated pursuit of vain political alliances, and immoral sexual passions flamed within a context of idolatry. Showing yet again how they were sinning repeatedly. Doing the same things again and again and not recognizing God for who He is. Thinking even more that somehow because they are His chosen people that they are covered no matter what they do. You cannot chase after sin and turn around and call upon the name of the Lord. It does not work that way.

⁸ *“Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat loaf not turned over.*

Here it says they are mixing with other nations. This is referring to the fact that they were prohibited from taking the Canaanite women to be their wives and giving their daughters to be married to Canaanite men. The reason for this was very clear. The danger was that those who “mixed” themselves among the Canaanites would adopt the idolatrous practices of the people, which in fact was what they did.

Then it says they were a flat loaf not turned over. Let’s put that in the context of a pancake. What happens if you don’t flip it? It becomes half-baked. Burnt on one side and soft on the other. This is an image of the Israelites worthlessness in the sight of God. Sadly, I see this in many churches today. Churches across America are filled with half-baked believers.

Spiritually they were distorted; hard in one area and soft in another. Imbalanced and unbalanced they were no good to the Lord. Their kind of religious experience did more harm than good. This led to a total lack of discernment.

John MacArthur writes that in its simplest definition, discernment is nothing more than the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong. Discernment is the process of making careful distinctions in our thinking about truth. In other words, the ability to think with discernment is synonymous with an ability to think biblically.

The Bible teaches us that it is the responsibility of every Christian to be discerning: "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 says, ²¹ *but test them all; hold on to what is good,* ²² *reject every kind of evil.*

The apostle John issues a similar warning in 1 John 4:1 where he says, *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

According to the New Testament, discernment is not optional for the believer-it is required. The key to living an uncompromising life lies in one's ability to exercise discernment in every area of his or her life. For example, failure to distinguish between truth and error leaves the Christian subject to all manner of false

teaching. False teaching then leads to an unbiblical mindset, which results in unfruitful and disobedient living#

⁹ Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realize it. His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice.

Israel is so wrapped up in their sin that they don't even know it. People have an amazing ability to deceive themselves when they are in sin. They don't even notice it. How many Christians have convinced themselves that things like abortion, cursing once in a while, lying, cheating in business, and so on is ok?

What provides us with more spiritual weakness than allowed unacknowledged sin? Here when it says that foreigners sap his strength it tells us of the powerlessness they had under their sin.

¹⁰ Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him.

Backsliding happens when we fail to confess our sins. It is kind of like when you pick a sandbur out of your shoelaces and one of the little thorns gets stuck in your finger. You try to use tweezers to get it out or pinch the skin, but it is stuck in there. Eventually it turns red and festers.

When we fail to confess our sins, and Christians do sin, we allow sin to fester. We Christians resist the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and we harden our hearts. We desensitize our conscience, and it becomes more and more difficult to repent. So our priority must be to keep good accounts with God where sin is concerned. When we realize that we have sinned we should confess it immediately! Don't delay and don't procrastinate.

"Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. ¹² When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like the birds in the sky. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.

Israel is like a bird fluttering about, confused and without direction. They think they can escape God by running to other nations, but the Lord says, "I will throw my net over them." This shows us that God will not let them, or us, escape from the accountability of sin.

What you have to understand here is that in order to backslide means that you have to be believer to begin with. Which in turn means that you have knowledge of God, at least to some degree, and have a greater accountability. Just as Jesus said in Luke 12:48, *⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

Let's finish out the chapter.

¹³ Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak about me falsely. ¹⁴ They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail on their beds. They slash themselves,^[a] appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from me. ¹⁵ I trained them and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against me. ¹⁶ They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.

Israel understood that they had problems, but they did not see their sin. Sound anything like the world today? When God's hand is against man, he easily sees he has a problem but often does not see it as sin against the LORD. We cry in our beds as if to pray but it falls on a deaf ear when we continue to live in sin. We seek out remedies from others but not God.

It even says here that we speak about Him falsely. This not only refers to false prophets but to the fact that people often blame God for their own sin. It is like saying ' "why doesn't God stop me from continuing to look at porn?" It is not up to God to stop you it is up to you to seek his face and turn from your wicked ways.

2 Chronicles 7:14 says, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

It also says here that Israel was like a faulty bow. A worthless weapon that won't shoot straight. It always misses the mark. They have backslidden and everything they try is superficial and fails in the sight of God.

Let me leave you with this.

Hebrews 2:1-3 says, We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

We must guard ourselves from the things of this world so that we can be protected from backsliding. Then we must follow what it says in Matthew 5:14-16.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

We are not to be of this world but rather a light in it and to take others out of it.