

Quotes on Backsliding

by

Jonathan Edwards

Backsliding is a disease that is exceeding secret in its way of working. It is a flattering distemper; it works like a consumption wherein persons often flatter themselves that they are not worse, but something better, and in a hopeful way to recover, till a few days before they die. So backsliding commonly comes on gradually, and steals on men insensibly, and they still flatter themselves that they are not backslidden.—They plead that they are seeking yet, and they hope they have not lost their convictions. And by the time they find it out, and cannot pretend so any longer, they are commonly so far gone, that they care not much if they have lost their convictions. And when it is come to that, it is commonly a gone case as to those convictions. Thus they blind themselves, and keep themselves insensible of their own disease, and so are not terrified with it, nor awakened to use means for relief, till it is past cure...Let the consideration of this your danger excite you to the greatest care and diligence to keep your hearts, and to watchfulness and constant prayer against backsliding. And let it put you upon endeavours to strengthen your resolutions of guarding against everything that tends to the contrary, that you may indeed hold out to the end, for *then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord.*

So it was very often with backsliders, though they may live a considerable time after. When they look back, after they have been taking pains for their salvation, they lose all, they put themselves under vast disadvantages; by quenching the Spirit of God, and losing their convictions, they dreadfully harden their own hearts, and stupefy their souls. They make way for discouragements, dreadfully strengthen and establish the interest of sin in their hearts, many ways give Satan great advantages to ruin them, and provoke God oftentimes utterly to leave them to hardness of heart. When they come to look back, their souls presently become dead and hard like the body of Lot's wife. And though they live long after, they never get any further; it is worse for them than if they were immediately damned. When persons in fleeing out of Sodom look back, their last case is far worse than the first.

It is impossible a man should go anywhere else than to hell in a way of disobedience to God...The connexion between a wicked life and damnation is so certain, that if a man lives a wicked life, it proves that all his supposed experiences are nothing. If a man at the last day be found a worker of iniquity, nothing else will be inquired of about him. Let him pretend what he will, Christ will say to him and all others like him, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye that work iniquity." And God has revealed these threatenings and this connexion, not only to deter wicked men, but also godly men, from sin. And though God will keep men that are converted from damnation, yet this is the means by which he will keep them from it; viz. he will keep them from a wicked life.

We may determine, by the effect that a general decay of religion has with respect to *(practises and customs)*, whether they be things of a sinful tendency or not. If they be things that come with a decay of religion, that creep in as that decays, we may determine they are things of no good tendency. The withdrawing of good does not let in good but evil. Evil, not good, comes in, as good gradually ceases. What is it but darkness that comes in, as light withdraws? Therefore, if there be any decay of religion in the town, or in particular persons, and upon this, any certain customs or practices take place and are allowed, which were wholly abstained from and renounced, when religion was in a more flourishing state; we may safely conclude that such customs and practices are contrary to the nature of true religion; and therefore in themselves sinful, or tending to sin. We may in many things determine whether any custom be of a good tendency, by considering what the effect would be, if it was openly and universally owned and practised. There are many things which persons practise somewhat secretly, and which they plead to be not hurtful; but which if they had suitable consideration to discern the consequence of everybody openly practising the same, would soon show a most woeful state of things.

While sin is harboured and preserved alive, it tends to provoke God to frown and express his anger. Sin is God's mortal enemy. It is that which his soul infinitely hates, and to which he is an irreconcilable enemy. And therefore if we harbour this, and suffer it to live in our hearts, and to govern our practice, we can expect no other than that it will provoke God's frowns. Spiritual comfort consists in the manifestation of God's favour, and in friendly communion with God. But how can we expect this at the same time that we harbour his mortal enemy?

When they do not fall into any particular gross and scandalous transgression, yet they sometimes exceedingly darken their minds by corrupt frames and evil habits, into which they fall. There is much remaining corruption in the hearts of Christians, and oftentimes they get into very ill frames....They behave themselves unsuitably, so as to dishonour God, and greatly to wound religion. They do not appear to others to savour of a good spirit. They fall into the practice of allowing themselves too great liberties in indulging their sensual appetites, in the gratification of covetousness and pride, in strife, backbiting, and a violent pursuit after the world. They slide into those corrupt frames and evil ways commonly by means of their first giving way to a slothful spirit. They are not so diligent and earnest in religion as they once were; but indulge their slothful disposition, and discontinue their watch, and so lie open to temptation. Thus ill frames imperceptibly creep upon them, and they insensibly more and more fall into sinful practices.

Many Christians meet with a great deal of darkness, and see times in which their hopes are much clouded. Sometimes the sweet and comfortable influences of God's Spirit are withdrawn. They were wont to have spiritual discoveries made of God and Christ to their souls, but now they have none. Their minds seem to be darkened, and they cannot see spiritual things, as they have done in times past. Formerly, when they read the Scriptures, they used often to have light come in, and they seemed to have an understanding and relish for what they read, and were filled with comfort. But now when they read, it is all a dead letter, and they have no taste for it...Formerly they used to feel the sweet exercises of grace...but now they are dull and dead. Formerly they used to meet with God....But now it is otherwise. Formerly they used to delight in the duty of prayer: the time which they spent in their closet between God and their own souls was sweet to them. But now when they go thither, they do not meet God; and they take no delight in drawing near to God in their closets. When they do pray, it seems to be a mere lifeless, heartless performance. They utter such and such words, but they seem to be nothing but words; their hearts are not engaged. Their minds are continually wandering and going to and fro, after one vanity and another. With this decay of the exercise of grace their hope greatly decays; and the evidences of their piety are exceedingly clouded....It is sin which is the occasion of this trouble and darkness. Whenever the godly meet with such darkness, there is some Achan in their souls which is the occasion of all this; and this is sin. This is the occasion of the

darkness of the godly, as well as the troubles which natural men have under awakenings. It is not for want of love in God towards his saints, or readiness to grant comfort to them; neither is God's hand shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that he cannot hear. It is their sin which hides God's face from them.

Now I appeal to those who have made pretences to serious religion and saving piety. You have formerly pretended to keep up religion in your closets, and in your own souls; now seriously ask yourselves whether you have not found, that this practice (of young people of the opposite sex getting together in each other's company) has indisposed you to serious religion, and taken off your minds from it? Has it not tended to your neglect of secret prayer? And, if you have not wholly neglected it, have you not found, that you have been abundantly more ready to turn it off in any manner, and glad to have done with it? more backward to reading and serious meditation, and such things? And, that your mind has been exceedingly diverted from religion, and that for some time?—I do not send you far off to find out whether this custom be not of bad tendency—not beyond the sea, but your own breast; there let the matter be determined.

For those who have once been visible Christians and have apostatized and cast off that visibility, deserve to be treated with more abhorrence than those who have never made any pretensions to Christianity. The sin of such, in apostatizing from their profession, is more aggravated, than the sin of those who never made any profession. They far more dishonour religion, and are much more abhorred of God.

Indeed, this *custom (of young people of the opposite sex congregating together in the night time)*, as it is practised, does not only tend to sin, but is in itself very disorderly, sinful, and shameful. For it is attended late in the night, and in the dead of the night, to the neglect of family prayer, and violating all family order; which is disorder and profaneness. Is it lawful to rob God of his ordinary sacrifices, for the sake of your pleasure, diversion, and jollity? Are you of that mind, that it is a decent thing that the stated worship of the great God should give way to your mirth, and your diversions? Is this the way of God's holy children?