

Bible Witness

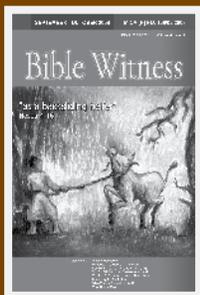
"as a backsliding heifer"

Hosea 4:16



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- What is Backsliding?
- Evidence of a Backslidden Heart
- Relationships that Lead to Backsliding
- Do You Minimise the Sinfulness of Sin?
- The Lord's Chastening of the Backslider
- Restoring the Backslider
- Bible Trivia - Genesis 41 & 42
- First Things First



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What is Backsliding?

The Bible repeatedly sounds out strong warnings against backsliding. The reason why it warns so much about backsliding is because we are often unaware of its presence in our lives. Backsliding begins unexpectedly. Then like a dangerous cancer, it pervades our lives quickly. So we must learn what backsliding is all about and then exercise utmost vigilance against it lest we be taken unawares.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (1 Samuel 15:23)



Meaning of "backsliding"

In the King James Bible, the word "backsliding" and its various forms appear about 17 times; and all of them appear in the Old Testament (cf. Proverbs 14:14; Jeremiah 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7; 31:22; 49:4; Hosea 4:16; 11:7; 14:4). Though the word "backsliding" is not found in the New Testament, the concept is abundantly found in it.

In the Old Testament, the English word "backsliding" and its derivatives are translated mainly from three Hebrew words. The first Hebrew word *m^ešûbā(h)* and other forms of its root word (*šôbāb* and *šôbēb*) depict "a figurative extension of the non-linear motion of turning aside off a correct path". Hence they indicate apostasy, faithlessness, defection, waywardness, disloyalty, betrayal, etc. One who is not true to a belief and

course of action, and so cannot be trusted is therefore considered to be a backslider. The second Hebrew word *sārār* portrays stubbornness and rebelliousness. It is used in the Bible to describe obstinate persons who are unwilling to change their behaviour under any circumstances, living in open defiance to divine authority. The third Hebrew word *sûg* is also translated as "turning away" or "turning back", to depict one's faithless, disloyal, untrustworthy behaviour. In the Old Testament, it refers to Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

Cause of backsliding

Nowhere in all Scripture is the cause of a backslider more succinctly described than in Proverbs 14:14a: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." It teaches us that backsliding is caused by the departure of one's heart from God. The primary cause

of this grievous disorder is the corruption, depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart. When one's heart is not right with the Lord, he is backsliding from the Lord. All deviations from God originate from this contaminated source. Hosea 10:2 cautions: "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images."

A man may be a backslider in heart even though he cannot be charged with an open notorious sin. In fact, most backsliders in heart do not appear as backsliders in life. So it is important that we remember that the first stage of backsliding is a divided heart. Backsliding begins when one entertains desires, thoughts, temper and arguments that are contrary to God's will. The heart then gradually digresses and accommodates sin by relinquishing divine principles, showing laxity of practice and neglecting Christian duties. So the backslider in heart is one who has left his first love. He is lukewarm in spirit; mixed up with the world; and he is also too double-minded and faint-hearted to serve the Lord. It is not easy to reverse his interest. It is always difficult to reach his conscience.

A backslider empties his heart of God's ways and fills it with his own ways. Backsliding begins when one develops self-gratifying, self-glorifying desires that are contrary to God's will and purposes. Backsliders "are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him" (Zephaniah 1:6). Matthew Henry says, "The backslider in heart, who for fear of suffering, or in hope of profit or pleasure, forsakes God and his duty, and shall be filled with his own ways." Because the heart of a backslider is so full of himself, the danger of his backslidden

condition might remain hidden from him. This would probably explain why great men like Abraham, Lot, David and Peter suddenly found themselves in wretched sins. How much more then, lesser men like you and me! Let us pray, "O, Lord, deliver us from the evil of our self-willed hearts."

Two groups of backsliders

In the Bible, the backsliders are those who once appeared to be religious or spiritual, whether they are true believers or not. It hardly describes non-religious people or those who belong to non-biblical religion as backsliders.

There appears to be two kinds of spiritual backsliding: (i) "Perpetual backsliding" and (ii) occasional or temporary backsliding. Perpetual backsliding characterises hypocritical men or professors of religion, who "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). These are not true believers, though they appear to be religious. They have regarded themselves as true converts and are also seen by others as such. They have joined the full communion of the church but have subsequently gone back to the world, given up their profession and in many cases become immoral or sceptical. Their end is worse than their beginning. These persons might have even partaken in and have experienced the fellowship and services of the church, but without true faith in the Lord Jesus. Hebrews 6:4-8 shows that even though they have had some noticeable religious experiences, how awful and hopeless will be their fall. "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 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. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” Jeremiah the prophet describes their backsliding as perpetual backsliding: “Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return” (Jeremiah 8:5).

Secondly, there is an occasional or temporary backsliding of true believers. Believers may at times backslide; and in some cases, their backsliding might even resemble the perpetual backsliding of professing Christians or false believers. But God will discipline and restore them to repentance, so that they are never finally lost, but are kept by God’s power.

While speaking about these two groups of backsliders, Charles Hodge said: “There is,

however, all the difference between these two cases that there is between a swoon and death. In appearance the two are alike. But, in a swoon there is still a dormant principle of life. It is sure to revive. Whereas, in the other, the principle of life is absent and revival is out of the question.”

A word of caution must be sounded to all those who find themselves in a backslidden state: they should return to God immediately! God’s message to those who continue in sin is that they must repent and follow the Lord – “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jeremiah 3:22). Otherwise, the consequences of sin can be severe. It is extreme folly to think that it will be alright to continue in self-willed ways. In the context of Proverbs 14:14 that taught us what backsliding is all about, there is a verse that warns us of the danger of walking in self-willed ways. It warns: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). 

All articles in this issue are from the editor, Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy. He ministers God’s Word in Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church and Far Eastern Bible College.



Evidence of a Backslidden Heart

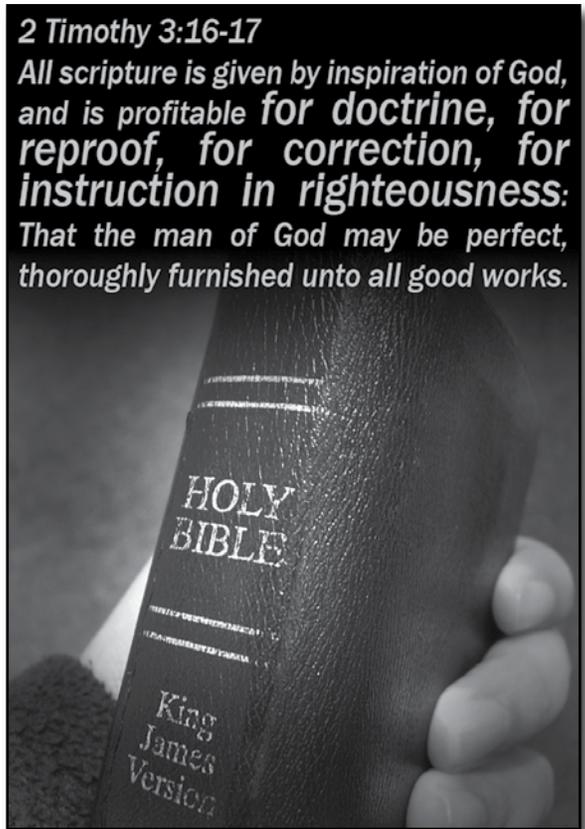
Backslidden Christians are everywhere. They are in the churches and outside of the churches. They are in the pews and in the pulpits. They are on boards and are bored. They serve on committees and teach Sunday school. Today, a great many churchgoers seem to be in some backslidden state. While backsliders do not all manifest the same traits, evidence of their condition is not difficult to pinpoint.

Several pastors and godly men of yesteryear, while writing on the subject of backsliding, have identified many signs of backsliding Christians. I have put together some of those signs that appear to be relevant and important to Christians of our time. The purpose of this article is to stir our hearts to examine our lives to see if there is any evidence of backsliding in us so that we may forsake our sins in true repentance and return to the Lord. If we acknowledge our sins and plead for our Lord's mercy, He will forgive us and revive us by His Spirit and the Word.

All of the following signs may not appear at one time or the other in a backslider. Nonetheless, even if only one of them is found, we must caution ourselves and take steps to renew ourselves in walking aright with the Lord.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.



Waning personal devotion to God

When your heart grows cold towards God and Jesus Christ, and has little reliance on the Holy Spirit, your passion for the meditation of God's Word and for prayer will wane too. When you become unconcerned about this lack of devotion to God, there is every reason to believe that you are settling into a backslidden state. Perhaps nothing more conclusively proves that a Christian has a backslidden heart than his vanishing interest

in daily devotion and prayers. While one's heart is full of love for God, no book in the world is more precious than the Bible; but when that love grows cold, the Bible becomes uninteresting, and even repulsive. There is no conviction to know and apply its glorious truths and commandments. There is little faith to accept its promises and pray upon them.

Growing concern for outward religious formality

Much care is taken to have an external appearance of spiritual devotion and zeal, while nothing is done to put the inner devotion in order. Contentment with a heartless religion is hypocrisy. In such a condition, the greatest concern will be others' impressions and opinions about one's self rather than God's opinion. The outward manifestation of spirituality becomes an enforced routine rather than the gushing out of a true inner spiritual life. A lack of sincerity and enthusiasm will characterise the performance of all spiritual service. Such formality in prayer, fellowship and service will be cold and lifeless; and it produces no spiritual growth. If we do good deeds without God in our hearts, we are backslidden.

Vanishing spiritual enjoyment

Are spiritual duties becoming unpleasant chores? Why is it so? Don't we always love saying and doing those things that please the one we love the most? Shouldn't it be the case if we truly love the Lord with all our hearts? When the heart is not backslidden, real communion with God is kept up, and therefore all spiritual devotions are performed with great pleasure. We will "serve the LORD with gladness" and "come before His presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2).

So when one does not enjoy the spiritual services to God, it is evident that his heart is not fully devoted to Him.

Forsaking worship services, prayer meetings and Bible studies for trivial reasons

Apart from the worship service, no other meetings are more important to a Christian than the prayer and Bible study meetings. Everyone who gives pre-eminence to God and His people, will not be absent from such meetings unless prevented by some urgent matters which God has called them to do. If a person's attendance or participation in such meetings can be prevented by a casual call or visit from a friend, or a favourite football game, or a TV show, etc., it is strong evidence that he has grown to love their presence in his life more than God's presence. Would those incidents have prevented him from attending a wedding, a party, a picnic, a concert or some other event? Doesn't it show that spiritual matters have become less significant in his life?

Neglecting evangelism and foreign missions

If a person is disinterested in the work of the Gospel and the conversion of souls everywhere, he is being negligent of the very purpose of his calling as a Christian. Such was the spirit of Jonah, the prophet who had backslidden and wandered away from God's commission to him to preach in Nineveh.

Refusing to contribute to the edification of the body of Christ

There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents, and is there not joy among the saints on earth over those that come to Christ and are His newborn babes

in the Kingdom? Refusing to edify fellow members of Christ's body is dishonouring our common Saviour, and the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual gifts to edify one another. Any professing Christian who does not have a passionate interest in the edification of fellow believers is a backslider in heart and a hypocrite - he professes religion, but actually has none.

Avoiding outreaches to the poor and needy

Surely if you were converted to Christ at all, you will have an interest in all charitable Christian enterprises. The Scriptures say: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Of course, a converted soul takes the deepest interest in all outreaches to reform, help and save mankind - in the provision of the needs for the poor and needy - and in short, in every good word and work. If a man has lost interest in these things, it is evident that he has backslidden in heart.

Losing interest in spiritual conversations

While no conversation is as sweet to a godly heart as that which relates to Christ and His truth, a backsliding soul takes more pleasure in unedifying conversations that dwell on the materialistic, carnal aspects of life. "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34).

Disregarding family worship

Parents who do not guide their children to worship the Lord together at home are

certainly neglecting a very important God-given duty (cf. Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 11:19-21; 32:46; Job 1:5; Psalm 78:2-9). A daily time of prayer and Bible reading with the family is crucial in keeping the home godly. Christians who give excuses for not having regular family devotions are certainly in danger of being backslidden in heart.

Nurturing an uncontrolled temper

While the heart is full of God's love, the temper will naturally be patient and sweet. Or if at any time it escapes from self-control, a truly loving heart will quickly confess and break down, repenting with true humility. Whenever there is an irritable, uncontrolled temper, there's a backslidden heart which is not submissive to the control of the Holy Spirit but to the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:19-23).

Maintaining a fault-finding, critical, gossiping spirit

It is the spirit that ventures to quickly blame others, showing a lack of confidence in the good intentions and motives of others. It is a spirit of distrust of Christian character and in what others say. It is a state of mind that reveals itself in harsh words and harsh judgments of individuals. This state is entirely incompatible with a true loving heart. Whenever a professing Christian manifests a false judgmental spirit, you may know that there is a backslidden heart. James puts it this way: "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James 3:10-11).

Having a self-indulgent spirit

A backslider will develop an inclination to gratify the appetites and passions of lust. He

strives to fulfil “the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Ephesians 2:3). “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14). Such a person is more fond of his own physical needs, comfort and pleasure than the spiritual needs of his own and others.

Pursuing worldly amusements

A heart that delights itself in the pursuit of worldly fashion, luxuries, amusements, etc., evidently lacks a growing love for God. The Apostle Paul instructs us: “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). James warns us: “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). Everyone who is devoted to the Lord knows full well that worldliness is a hindrance to his spiritual devotion. When the soul does not find more delight in God than in the pursuit of worldly things, the heart is sadly backslidden. While backslidden hearts conform to worldliness, devoted hearts seek after godliness.

Growing bolder with sin

When a person becomes less watchful about temptations, takes liberty to be in places of

temptation and be with men and women who indulge in sins, and even permits himself to be tempted, he is certainly in a backslidden condition. He is the exact opposite of the godly man who is described as “the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1).

Losing interest in holy living

If you are a Christian, you will realise that sin is an abomination within your soul. You have had inexpressible longings to be rid of it forever, and such a desire becomes desperately crucial to you. If this desire has been dismissed and is no longer of any interest to you, it is because you are backslidden in heart.

Repent now from all your backsliding ways that the Lord may restore you once again to spiritual excellence. He says: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4). 

**“Remember that if you are a child of God,
you will never be happy in sin.**

You are spoiled for the world, the flesh and the devil.

**When you were regenerated there was put into you a vital principle,
which can never be content to dwell in the dead world.**

You will have to come back, if indeed you belong to the family.”

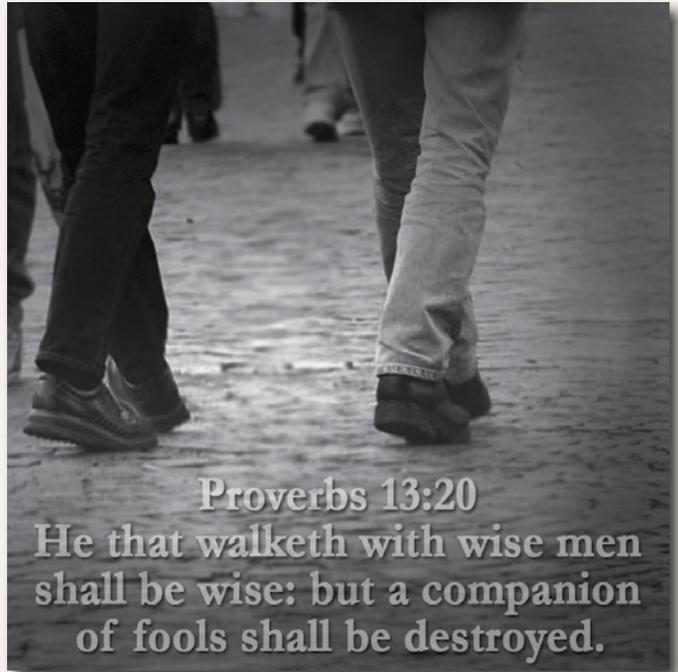
C.H. Spurgeon

Relationships that Lead to Backsliding

Christians ought to remember that their relationships with others can be either helpful or detrimental to their spiritual life. In the Scriptures, there are clear warnings against relationships that can lead to the spiritual backsliding of God's people. There are also many stories of friendships which hinder the spiritual progress of believers, even wrecking their spiritual pursuits for very long periods.

Bad friendships

It is a good thing to have many friends. But God's Word sounds strong warnings against entering into friendships with people who are ungodly because they will bring great temptations to Christians. In Proverbs 13:20, we have a good example of such biblical caution - "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." The word "fools" refers to those who detest God's wisdom, truth and instructions. Likewise in Ephesians 5:3-7, we are exhorted not to be companions of those who live in ungodliness: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are



Proverbs 13:20

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them."

Proverbs 4:14-15 cautions: "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Proverbs 24:1-2 teaches

us: "Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief." The caution against associating with the wicked is also found in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Even in the church, we must be careful about forging close friendships with certain types of people. There are those who live in sin, engage in unwholesome conversations, wear immodest clothes, cherish worldly behaviour and enjoy carnal entertainment. We must avoid joining them and learning their ways. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers to avoid those who walked disorderly in the church: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:6 & 14).

Bad friendships corrupt not only our character but also our beliefs. The Apostle Paul illustrates this truth in 2 Timothy 2:16-18 – "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."

Nowadays, we see many young persons being influenced by worldly and materialistic men who appear as Christian pastors and teachers,

but teaching unscriptural doctrines, even heresies. The Scriptures forewarn that in the last days, a great number of people will be influenced by such false teachers. "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2). "For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:18-20).

Marriage to unbelievers

It is common knowledge that marriage to the unbelieving has caused many to totally forsake their Christian walk or to live in a sad state of spiritual inactivity and spiritual degeneration for a considerable period of time.

When the Israelites were brought to the Promised Land, the Lord forewarned them of spiritual tragedies that would befall them should they marry the ungodly people of that land: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

The Bible also records true stories of men who suffered much spiritual declension due to their marriage to unbelievers. Concerning King Solomon who married heathen women, the Scriptures say: "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:4). In the time of Nehemiah, when many Israelites married heathen women who did not worship the Lord, Nehemiah rebuked them, saying: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?" (Nehemiah 13:26-27).

Because such Scriptural warnings go unheeded, thousands in our Christian world are undone by irreligious, ungodly marriages. Therefore, there is more reason to fear that such ungodly marriages will pervert the hearts of Christians than to hope that the unsaved spouse will be converted. The Apostle Paul warns us: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Adulterous relationships

Spiritual joy, peace and progress of Christians are greatly hindered when they are entangled in an adulterous relationship even though they manage to hide their ungodly relationship from others. As soon as they are involved in adulterous relationships, serious spiritual troubles will arise. Although all sins obstruct Christians' spiritual progress, adultery does more damage than most sins. It brings great shame and hurt not only to the adulterers, but also to their family members and friends. Its consequences are particularly painful and hard to rectify.

Proverbs 6:26 cautions: "For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life." So we are commanded, "Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger" (Proverbs 5:8-10).

Christians can avoid much spiritual problems and retrogression if they would take heed to James 4:4 – "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." 

"Men fall in private long before they fall in public."

J.C. Ryle

Do You Minimise the Sinfulness of Sin?

“Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Ezekiel 8:17-18).

Do you also minimise the sinfulness of your sins, just as the house of Judah did?

We are living in a very spiritually disastrous time because our society minimises the sinfulness of sin. Woe unto our human tendency to make light of sin than what it really is! Christians too have adopted such a tendency.

Many a Christian passionately pursue unwholesome music and filthy songs of worldly men, without feeling any shame at all. In fact, they arrogantly and unabashedly defend their pursuit by declaring that there is nothing wrong with such music. Many watch carnal and sensual shows on TV and other such media, and do not feel at all that they are allowing sinful thoughts and vain imaginations to enter their minds. Many young Christians follow the worldly way of



life – engaging in pornography, fornication (premarital sex), adulterous relationships, covetousness, etc. They casually engage in them without thinking about the evil of those pleasures.

Are you, my reader, also viewing temptations and sin with reduced or minimised gravity? If you are engaging in filthy conversations or activities without any restraint; if you are a keen adherent of contemporary trends, fashions and such, then you are certainly lying to yourself when you say within you while engaging in them that all will be all right. You might feel that you should passionately follow after those unrestrained fleshly desires to stay relevant and ‘in-touch’ with the modern world. But, the reality of the matter is that sin is perilous. We need to see sin for what it really is. Consider in your heart what sin is truly all about. Then consider whether it is worth pursuing.

Firstly, sin is contrary to all that God is. God is holy; there is no sin in Him. Let us remember that sin is contrary to the nature of God, the name of God, the will of God, the purposes of God, the Word of God, the works of God and the glory of God. God hates sin. Will you, then, love that which God hates? To consider sin lightly is to defy the holy God. Romans 8:7 says that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”.

It must be remembered that the most outrageous thing about sin is that it blasphemes God. Sin does not honour God's glory. It does not show reverence for the holiness of God. It does not regard the omnipresence of God. It violates the love of God. It does not acknowledge the greatness of God. It takes God's grace for granted. It does not regard the truth of God. It despises the wisdom of God. It doubts the faithfulness of God. It defies the law of God. It provokes the justice of God. It does not fear the wrath of God. It despises the goodness of God. Therefore, let us remember, minimising the seriousness of sin is the ultimate outrage against God.

So let us also take note that our sin will provoke God to wrath. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). Again, we are warned: “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:5-6).

Secondly, let us remember that if we allow sin to slowly take root in us, it will soon become a terrible enslavement or addiction in our life. Sin is not freedom, as many think. Instead, it can become a sort of hardening of the heart, or a deadening of the soul from living a righteous life. Jesus said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). So let us take heed to Paul's advice: “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19).

Thirdly, take note that sin will make you a distressed, troubled soul. Those who engage in sin without restraint will soon experience guilt, a loss of meaning, and all the resultant emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical and mental chaos. He will be filled with shame and sorrow. In Psalm 32:3-4, David spoke of his terrible experiences resulting from secretly engaging in sin – “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy (God's) hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.”

Fourthly, our sins will hurt others too. The uncontrolled pursuit of lust, covetousness, self-glory, etc. can hurt many others. Many of the hurts inflicted on others can never be fully repaired. Sin is violent and cruel. Its pleasures are for a moment, but its consequences over time will be damaging and tormenting even unto others around us.



The Lord's Chastening of the Backslider

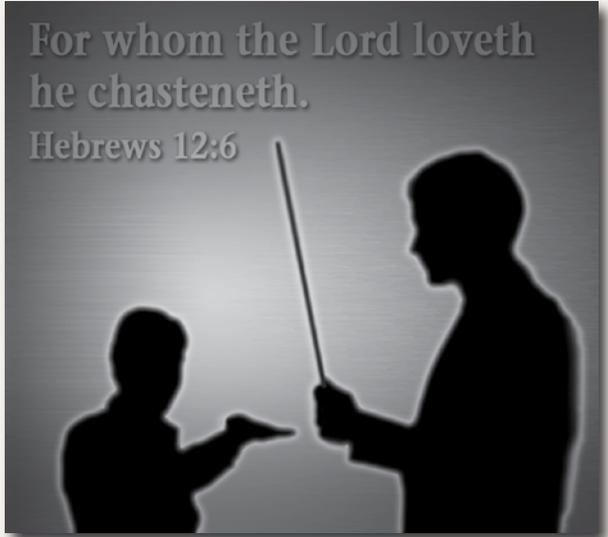
An urgent message for backsliders

The chastisement of the Lord is something we seldom hear about from today's pulpits. Seldom, too, can we find any book written specifically on the subject. But it is an issue that all Christians should learn about because almost all Christians will soon discover, in one way or another, what it is to be chastened of the Lord.

In the Scriptures, the term "chasten" is used to describe acts of discipline, correction and corporeal punishment. The Lord's chastening is also portrayed as painful and unpleasant. We read in Hebrews 12:11a: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous."

Like Noah who for 120 years had warned the world that perished and Jonah who was sent to warn Nineveh which later repented, every pastor and preacher of this age must relentlessly warn his flock and hearers about God's sure judgment on the unrepentant ones. This is absolutely vital as people in modern churches are ever increasing in their licentious living. Many would reject the appeal, but we have good reasons to believe that some will repent from their sins like the people of Nineveh.

For whom the Lord loveth
he chasteneth.
Hebrews 12:6



Severity of the Lord's chastisement

How does the Lord chastise His erring people? It varies from person to person as the Lord finds it fit. Sometimes it may occur only as an inner "rebuke" or conviction that our Father is displeased with our sin. But from Scripture, it also appears that when necessary, God will remove His hand of blessing and allow difficulty and trouble to come our way, not to destroy us, but to bring us back on our knees in repentance.

King David, who sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba, experienced the Lord's chastisement. He spoke about the divine chastisement

he received with great clarity and it was certainly not a misjudged opinion. In one of his songs of repentance, namely Psalm 32, he recollected the heaviness of the Lord's chastisement. He wrote about what he experienced when he refrained from confessing his sins in repentance - "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4). Thus David revealed the intensity of the bodily torment he suffered as a result of God's chastising hand which was upon him.

The Lord Himself has spoken of the severity of His chastisement: "And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins" (Leviticus 26:27-28). This warning about chastising His erring people seven times speaks in no uncertain terms how sternly and severely God will rebuke and chastise those who continue in their sins.

Let us not falsely console ourselves by saying that such strong warnings of hard chastisement is no more a concern for the present-day Christians as it was given only to the Old Testament believers. If hard chastening from the Lord was only for the people of the old dispensation, why are we told in the New Testament: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" (Hebrews 12:11)?

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church which accommodated the carnal living of its members and their condemnable attitude in the administration of the bread

and cup, saying: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). God's chastening hand can bring about mental, emotional and physical weaknesses. Paul even mentioned death ("many sleep") as part of God's chastening action in the Corinthian church. True believers who live in sin will not be allowed to live that way all the time without God's painful and agonizing intervention in their lives.

Twice in the book of Psalms, David pleaded with the Lord: "O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure" (Psalms 6:1; 38:1). His real painful experience of running into God's displeasure and chastisement made him plead for mercy to prevail in God's dealing with him. In David's words, the Lord's chastisement is His "hot displeasure". It is no less an experience than like being burned severely in fire.

The Lord chastens because He is holy and just

All the verses we noted concerning the severe chastisement from the Lord, first of all portray the Lord as an holy and just God who will not tolerate sin in the lives of His people. Sinning believers will be chastened because the Lord is a righteous judge. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:32 - "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." The Lord is a just God and He will not judge unfairly. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17).

The Lord warned Judah of her backsliding through prophets like Jeremiah. But, because

the nation did not hearken to them, the Lord chastised the nation through the hands of the conquering army of Babylon. Judah's chastisement was devastating and the prophet lamented this, but he could only describe the terrible experience of Judah as from the righteous Lord who moved against a nation turned rebellious. The prophet lamented on behalf of Judah, saying: "The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity" (Lamentation 1:18). Towards the end of Judah's chastisement, almost at the end of seventy years of captivity in the foreign land, Daniel the prophet described the Lord's act of chastisement in the same way as Jeremiah in the beginning of the same chastisement. Daniel said: "Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice" (Daniel 9:14). Though Jeremiah and Daniel were partakers of the bitter cup of God's chastisement upon Israel, they both humbly declared that even in His wrath, God is righteous.

The Lord chastens because He loves His people

When believers are chastised, it is important that they understand that the Lord is unhappy with the way they live. However, this does not mean they have no more hope in the Lord. While the holiness and justice of God reprimand sinning believers, it is administered with special love and mercy towards them. In other words, the Lord's

chastisement is an act of both His holiness and love.

In His chastisement, the Lord acts as a loving father who both rebukes and corrects his children that they may walk in the right way. We are taught in Hebrews 12:5-8: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

While the Lord's chastisement shows believers His hatred for sin, it also proves His unfailing love towards them in that He is committed to sanctify and restore them as His holy children. Therefore, the chastisement of the Lord is not a bad thing. Although unpleasant, it is not to be confused with the wrath or judgment of God that leads to everlasting condemnation. It is to be understood as a disciplinary action that is meant for the correction of His erring children. God, like a loving parent who finds the occasional need to correct us with a spanking, corrects us by His chastisement when He sees us bent on backsliding. As the writer of Hebrews said, this proves to us that we are His beloved children, and not "bastards".

I must admit, I have never been fond of the idea of spankings — probably because as a kid, I had received quite a few of them! But as I look back, I recognize that the discipline of my parents was necessary to keep me out of trouble — and in many cases to spare me from greater pain and suffering. Furthermore,

I realize today that my parents went through the ordeals of correcting me, not because they disliked me, but because they loved me. The same is also true with the Lord and His chastening.



in 1 Corinthians 5:5 - "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

However painful may be the experience when God chastises, it is administered for a good purpose. The

The purpose of the Lord's chastisement

The purpose of His chastening is not to destroy eternally the erring believers even though in certain cases death may be the final outcome of a chastisement. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:32). In many cases, the chastisements do not bring about death. In Psalm 118:18, the Psalmist wrote: "The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." Many of us have been severely dealt with, even brought very close to death, yet God mercifully delivered us that we may live a godly life for His glory. But in some cases, the Lord's chastisement may bring an end to a sinning Christian's life, as Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:30. However, let us not forget that the intention of the whole process is nothing more than putting a stop to the waywardness of believers. So how about those who die as a result of the Lord's chastisement? I believe that the Lord will sanctify their souls through the sufferings before they are removed from this earth. This is the idea behind Paul's words

the good purpose of the Lord in the chastisement of His children is their sanctification or a change of behaviour for His glory. Firstly, the Lord uses His chastisement to lead the erring believer unto repentance. See Jeremiah's prophetic word concerning the repentance of Ephraim after the Lord's chastisement - "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth" (Jeremiah 31:18-19). Secondly, the Lord uses it to restore the erring believer to God's blessing - "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm 94:12).

May we remember the words of the writer of Hebrews when the Lord's chastising hand is upon us: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth

the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

Our response to the Lord's chastisement

The Bible gives us clear guidelines about our response to the Lord's chastisement. If we follow these biblical instructions, we shall have the good purpose of the Lord's chastisement fully accomplished in our lives.

First, we must not despise the Lord's chastisement. We must appreciate its good purpose and avoid neglecting the work the Lord is doing in our lives. We should not forget the significance of the lessons that the Lord is trying to teach us in the process of chastening. The Bible tells us three times: "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction" (Proverbs 3:11; cf. Job 5:17; Hebrews 12:5b).

Second, we must submit to the Lord when He chastises us, and should not rebel against Him again. "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:9-10).

Third, we must endure the Lord's chastisement and patiently wait for the Lord to accomplish His sanctification process in us. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons" (Hebrews 12:7a).

Fourth, we must repent and confess our sins. This is crucial for our Lord said: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). 

(continued from page 20)

Restore in love & meekness

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). An unforgiving, angry, impatient person would need to repent from his bitter spirit before he attempts to restore a fallen brother. It must be with love, gentleness, patience and a readiness to forgive that one should seek

to restore the backslider. In 2 Thessalonians 3:15, Paul exhorts: "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:1; 2 Timothy 2:25). Nonetheless, if the backslider hardens his heart and refuses to repent, we should also stop admonishing him because he has no pleasure in our correction (cf. Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). 

Restoring the Backslider

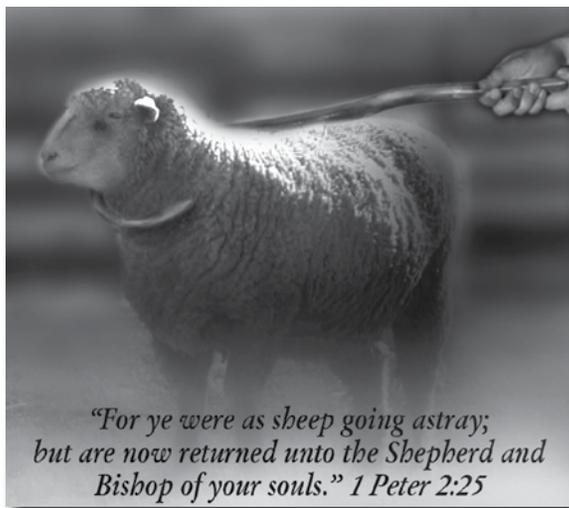
Here is some biblical advice on restoring a fellow believer who has backslidden. But let it be noted that those who attempt to restore a backslider must themselves be walking closely with the Lord (cf. Galatians 6:1; Matthew 7:3-5).

Pray for the backslider

Jeremiah the prophet was much frustrated by the backsliding Judah, and yet he lamented and prayed for them. He said: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD'S flock is carried away captive" (Jeremiah 13:17). Likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter, who would deny Him, that He had prayed that his faith would not fail: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). We must also pray for those who are in a backslidden condition that they would return unto the Lord. "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (Psalm 80:3; cf Psalm 85:4).

Confront, correct & call to repentance

In Ezekiel 3:18-21, the Lord exhorts us not to let a man, who has fallen into sin, die without being corrected: "When I say unto the



"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." 1 Peter 2:25

wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul" (cf. James 5:19-20).

(continued on page 19)

BIBLE TRIVIA - GENESIS 41 & 42

Sarah Yong

NAMES AND NUMBERS!

READ THE PASSAGES FROM YOUR BIBLE AND MATCH EACH QUESTION TO THE CORRECT ANSWER ON THE RIGHT.

1. How old was Joseph when he stood before Pharaoh? • • **Asenath**
2. What portion of the plenteous harvest was stored up? • • **2**
3. Who was given to be Joseph's wife? • • **Manasseh**
4. How many sons were born unto Joseph? • • **10**
5. What was the name of the elder son? • • **Benjamin**
6. What was the name of the younger son? • • **30**
7. How many brothers came to Egypt to buy grain? • • **Ephraim**
8. Which land did they come from? • • **3**
9. How many sons stayed behind? • • **Simeon**
10. Who remained behind with Jacob? • • **1/5**
11. How many days were the brothers kept in ward? • • **Canaan**
12. Who had to stay behind in Egypt? • • **1**

Answers to Vol. 8, Issue 4 - Bible Trivia - Genesis 41

p. 25 - Joseph - 2 - C; Baker - 4 - D; Pharaoh - 3 - A; Butler - 1 - B.

Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength; and love thy neighbour as thyself.

First Things First.

A real incident from the life of Jonathan Goforth, a Canadian missionary to China.

Bibliography: "GoForth of China" by Rosalind GoForth. The stories are written by Sis Ruth Low. Illustrations are done by Sis Sharon Ng.

Jonathan Goforth and his wife had two friends, Mr and Mrs X. They were new missionaries who had come to Lincheng where the Goforths lived.



Mr X. was a man with a very good record in his college days. He was a gold medalist, a fluent speaker and very talented in carpentry.



One day, Mrs Goforth visited Mrs X. She saw many things in their house which Mr X. had made for his wife.



Mrs Goforth was envious. She wished her husband could do the same for her.

So, on one occasion, she went up to him and said,

Jonathan, why don't you stop work for a while and make some things for me just like Mr X. does for his wife?

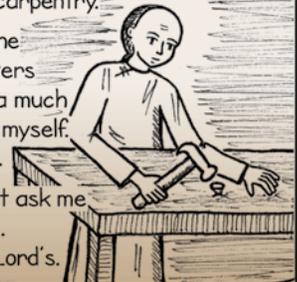


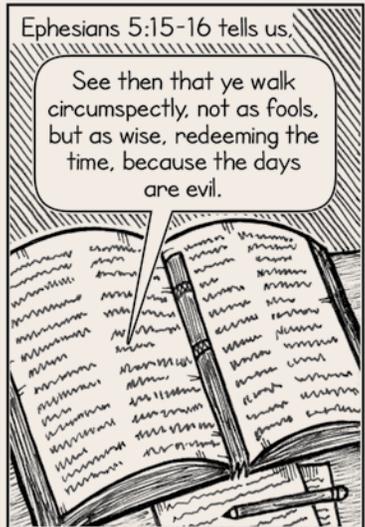
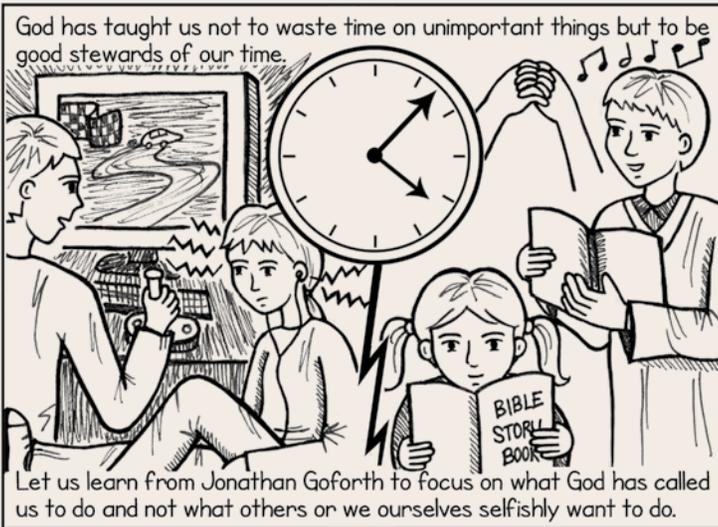
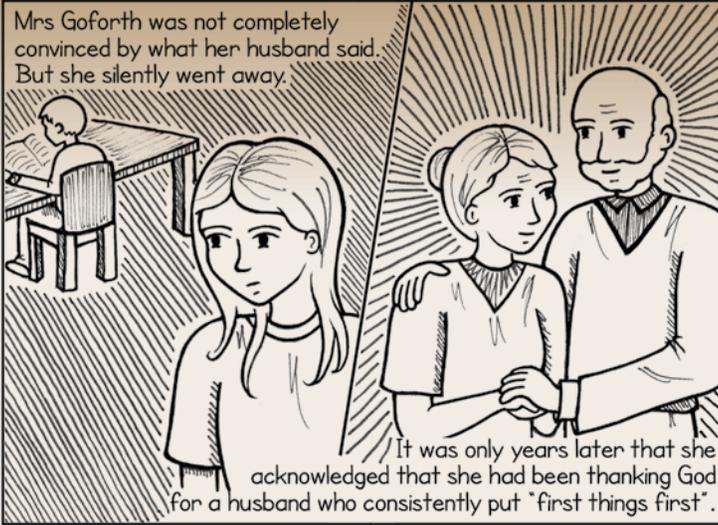
Jonathan Goforth lovingly replied,

My dear Rose, it is not that I do not want to make anything for you. But God has called me to preach His Word that will save souls. I must spend my time on that rather than on carpentry.

You may go to the Chinese carpenters and they will do a much better job than myself. I will foot the bill.

Just please don't ask me to do their work. My work is the Lord's.





“Backsliding, generally first begins with neglect of private prayer.”

J.C. Ryle

“The offenses given within the church are greater than those given among the heathen because when Christians degenerate, they are more godless than the heathen.”

Martin Luther

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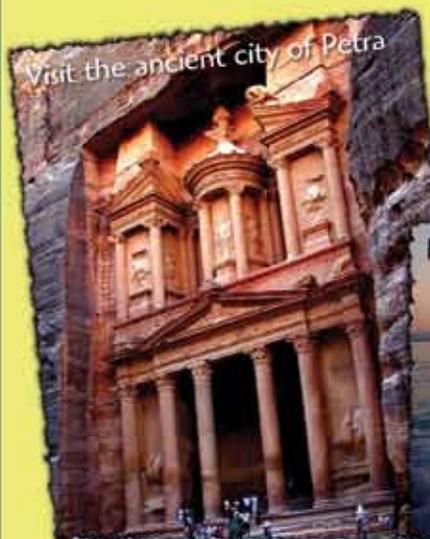
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