Backsliding

There was a time not so long ago that we used the term backsliding in the church. Why do we not use it anymore? Maybe it is because the word denotes a negative situation in a Christians life, and like society, we have garnered a sort of political correctness (?). Nevertheless, the word is accurate when considering one who has become unfaithful to God. According to Dictionary.com, backsliding means to revert or slip back into a previous, worse condition, habit, or state of behavior after making progress. Relating this idea to Christianity, backsliding could include falling back into sinful practices, or drifting away from spiritual practices like prayer and worship attendance after obeying the Gospel.

When one obeys the gospel of Christ, he/she begins a walk with God down the path of righteousness. Paul states, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). This new walk indicates a forward direction, just as the Hebrew writer instructs - "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Chris, let us go on to perfection..." (Hebrews 6:1). A faithful child of God should never be going backward, or backsliding as a Christian.

There are numerous Bible examples of those who backslid in their walk with God. Consider one example of God's people, the Israelites, under the Old Law. God delivered His children from Egyptian captivity. As they stepped away from captivity into freedom, their steps in the wilderness were taking them to a land that flowed with milk and honey, the Promised Land. They stopped at Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. Mount Sinai is where they backslid (Exodus 32:1-6).

Backsliding is almost too nice of a word when we take into account what the Israelites did at the base of Mount Sinai. They pitied their situation so much that they longed for the days in which they were once enslaved by Egypt, including the false gods, which once loomed over them. Fortunately, God apprises Moses of the situation and Moses goes back down the base of mountain where the Israelites were camped. The Israelites may well have marched back into Egyptian captivity had God, through Moses, not intervened. Their backsliding brought punishment upon them both physically and spiritually (Exodus 32:25-30).

Another example of backsliding can be seen in the actions of the churches in Galatia. Paul had converted many of these individuals, now Christians, on his first journey. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul notes their eagerness to move forward

when they initially obeyed the gospel. He commends them, saying, “You ran well…” (Galatians 5:7). However, Judaizing teachers had entered into their midst. The efforts of the false teachers turned some of the Christians in Galatia back to Judaism - backsliders causing others to backslide. Paul rebukes them, stating, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth" (Galatians 3:1). Their backsliding caused the Apostle Paul to marvel, but not in a good way. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

These examples help us understand that it is possible to backslide instead of moving forward in our Christian walk. The reality is that backsliding for most is usually not immediately recognized. Backsliding usually begins slowly, a small backward step at a time. How? We slip up on the words that come out of our mouth (consider Peter when he betrayed Jesus, Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:71) and think it is no big deal. We fail to study the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). We fail to pray as we should (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We miss the worship assembly because we go on vacation, or because someone comes to visit us (Hebrews 10:24-25). And finally, we start down the path of trying to rationalize and explain away our sinful mistakes. At this point, sadly, many Christians never return. The Hebrew writer provides us with harrowing words - "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Backsliding is one of the Devil's tools, craftily used to deceive away from a proper relationship with God. Let us purpose not to allow the Devil to fool us into complacency.