

BACKSLIDING

As Preached in Early 1900's
by Billy Sunday
in Boston, Massachusetts

For information regarding Billy Sunday's baseball career and life as an evangelist, go to www.billysunday.org.

"Thy own wickedness shall correct thee. Thy backsliding shall reprove thee. Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of Hosts." - Jeremiah 11:19.

Many start the voyage of the Christian life under sending skies and upon smooth waters, but as they sail out of the harbor the sky becomes dark and the craft of their religion crashes upon the rocks. At first they are careful to obey the command of God, but after the revival they neglect their duties and finally come to wreck.

God speaks much of the sin of backsliding, and in the Bible has spoken of it in many places. There are all kinds of backsliding.

First, there is the careless kind. The invitation is never given at the revival but there are those who will respond to it, and for a time will live as Christians should. Then, when the revival is over and the routine of everyday life begins, they slip gradually back into their former ways. They become negligent and drift back to the old haunts and the old gang.

Oh, it is easy to think of things divine when the revival is on and there is inspiration on every side and the bands are playing and the crowds are marching.

I've sometimes thought, almost, that it might be a Godsend to many a community if it could only be swept by typhoid fever or pneumonia or scarlet fever just after a good revival and before the people have a chance to slide back.

The second class of backsliders is the class that started soberly and seriously, but not seriously enough. They do not make a complete surrender. If you secure a balloon with 100 ropes and cut 99 of them, the balloon will still be held, but don't cut the shore lines. They have failed to cut loose from sin, and it is drawing them back.

A friend of mine holding a meeting, asked how many who were present

had been Christians, but were now backsliders. Finally forty fessed up. Then he asked them for the reasons for their falling away. Finally a man got up and said he backslid through believing that he could be a Christian and keep his store open on Sundays.

A young lady arose and said that she backslid because of cards. A friend had given a card party and she had to give one in reciprocity. She said she had invited a young man to attend, but that he didn't know what kind of a party it was to be. He came, but when he found out he said he was sorry, but he must go, for he could not stay there. "I admired him for his loyalty to his religion; he made me feel that I wasn't worthy to have my name as a church member," the young lady said.

Another man stood up and said: "I backslid when I voted for the saloon." You bet he did or he would not have voted for the dirty, rotten thing. Why, he backslid before he voted that ticket, or he wouldn't have voted it.

A young lady said: "I thought I could be a member of the church and dance." Sure she could. You can be a member of the church and a burglar too, but not a member of the body of Christ. She said, "I attended a dance and found my desire to pray diminishing. I attended another and I found my desire to pray had become nebulous. And then," she said, "my desire to pray disappeared."

I tell you I never saw a drinking, dancing, card playing Christian who amounted to anything. The dance is a quagmire of wreckage. It's as rotten as hell. You wait until I get at it.

I believe more people in the church backslide because of the dance, card playing and theatre gadding than through the saloons. But hold on there, don't you think for a minute that I'm in favor of the dirty, stinking, rotting saloons.

I'm against a lot of amusements popular among church members, as you people are going to find out before I am through in Boston. I don't give that (snapping his fingers) whether you like my preaching or not. Understand? It's a question of whether you are interested in decency. If you live wrong you can't die right. Emerson said: "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

This is an age of incompleteness of unfinished things. Life is full of half done things. Education is begun and abandoned. Obedience to the law of God is begun - and given up. People start in business - and fail. They attempt to learn a trade - and don't do it thoroughly. A hound once started running after a stag and after running for a while it saw a fox and turned after it. A little farther along it saw a rabbit and ran after that, and finally wound up holing a field mouse. So it is with so many who enter the Christian life. They

started to hunt and compromised on a glass of booze. They enter a royal race, but compromised on a glass of beer or on some little gain through dishonesty.

Not every backslider is an apostate, but every apostate is a backslider. Peter was a backslider, but he came back and preached that sermon at Pentecost. Judas was a backslider, and what he did so preyed upon his mind that he did not want it. He went out but he never came back.

I have never tabooed but two towns in my life and one of them was a little town in Iowa, where I once held a meeting before I really became an evangelist. That town had an infidel club of 150 members. There were only two church members in the place, and there was an interrogation point after them at that. They could have started a founding asylum of their own in that community. My life was not safe there - they threw stones at me in the streets.

A storekeeper there told me he was going to sell out and leave the town for purely moral reasons, at a loss of about \$8000.00. He said that he had daughters and that there wasn't a young man in the town that he would trust with them. He said that any young man in that town were to call on any of his daughters he wouldn't go upstairs to bed unless he had a Gatling gun he could train on the visitor at a moment's notice. It is not only for here and now, it is not only for a time, but it is for eternity. It is one of the great things. All other things are incidents.

The leader of that God-forsaken, iniquitous gang was a man named Dickson, who ran a one-horse country grocery business in a place about as big as a boxcar. He had been a Christian - used to be a classleader in a Methodist church. He kept a store. I used to pass the store as I went to preach, and I would see the bunch, as many as 40 sometimes, sitting around in the little store.

Whenever a new preacher came they would assemble to talk him over, and if old Dickson gave consent, they would go to church to hear him. I remember one old brush rat. He had bushy whiskers with a dirty brown streak down the middle, and he could spit 30 yards and hit a fly. I'll bet my life he could hit a post down there. He used to come in late, with one pant leg tucked in his boot, no coat or vest, no galoshes - just a rope around his paunch - the old son of perdition.

He'd sit down and turn the hose on the wall. He looked to me as if he had had only one bath in his life and that one when he was born. He came clattering down the aisle - old hair and beard twisted - looked like a cow's tail. He started as a backslider, ended in apostasy, just as disease ends in death if not checked.

In business life, crises come unforeseen. Hard times come. When they do, you may be able to get away with a overdraft at the bank if the cashier knows you too well. At the bank of heaven no checks on God's mercy, when signed by God's loyal followers have ever been turned down. If you come with honest heart God will honor the appeal if your hands are red with blood.

In a campaign like this, for some little thing many men will sell out. There are men whose honor hang like meat in butcher shop, for sale for so much a pound. I thank God though, that most men are honest and most women are virtuous, and that even the minority can be made to yield when you preach the gospel right.

I ask about a man. "Has he reached the burning bush?" They answer, "Yes, and got past it." I ask, "Is he a K. of P.?" They say he is. I ask, "Has he jumped?" They say, "Yes." I don't know what it means to jump, for I am not a K. of P. I heard a couple of K. of P.'s talking, though. I suppose it has something to do with the initiation. I ask, "Is he an Odd Fellow?" "Yes." They tell me he will share his last dollar with a needy person, die for the widow or the orphan, put his head on the track ahead of the Black Diamond or allow himself to be shot to pieces before he would be false to the vows he took amid the scent of the orange blossoms.

That sounds like a good man, but there are lots of men who will be true in all these things, and false to Jesus Christ. They will go to church and partake of the communion, then will line up in front of some bar and tell smutty stories. True in business, true to lodge, true in society, true in the home, but a perjurer in the sight of God. If you are such a man you are a backslider - a backslider, sir, and a liar.

If I were to go to a man and say: "They say you're an old liar," would he say, "Well, Bill, I suppose I am, but you mustn't put the standard too high for poor, weak humanity, and I'm only human"? If I were to say to him, "They say you are an old thief and that they have to hide everything when you come around," would he say he supposed it was true, but I mustn't set the standard too high for poor human nature? If I say, "They tell me that you are a rotten old libertine and that you have ruined many innocent girls, that you would crush a woman's virtue as quickly as a snake beneath your foot," would he say he supposed it was true, but I mustn't set the standard too high for poor human nature?

No sir. If he were anything of a man at all he would say, "I demand, sir, that you prove your charges." But that's not what a man does when you charge him with being a backslider or to say that he is a liar. Oh, for the Presbyterian or Baptist or Episcopal backslider who stands up and talks

about poor human nature - yet to say a man is a backslider is to say that he is a liar. Of, for power to come to you and show what you ought to be.

I can imagine a man being untrue in business. I can imagine him being untrue in politics. I can even - but it is difficult - imagine him being untrue to the vows made at the altar - but to be untrue to God! Be untrue to God and you will lose heaven and lose all. Be true to God and you will lose hell. I pray that God will so work upon the consciences of you backsliders who hear me that you will cry salt tears and turn and roll upon your pillows when you go home tonight and seek a dry spot that he may reproach you until you have been stung into a return to the God to whom you have been false.

A heathen woman named Panathea was famous for her great beauty, and King Cyrus wanted her for his harem. He sent his representatives to her and offered her money and jewels to come, but she repulsed them and spurned their advances. Again he sent them, this time with offers more generous and tempting; but again she sent them away with scorn. A third time she said "Nay." Then King Cyrus went in person to see her and he doubled and tripled and quadrupled the offers his men had made, but still she would not go. She told him that she was a wife, and that she was true to her husband.

He said "Panathea, where dwellest thee?"

"In the arms and on the breast of my husband," she said.

"Take her away," said Cyrus. "She is of no use to me."

Then he put her husband in command of the charioteers and sent him into battle at the head of the troops. Panathea knew what this meant - that her husband had been sent in that he might be killed.

She waited while the battle raged and when the field was cleared she shouted his name and searched for him and finally found him wounded and dying. She knelt and clasped him in her arms, and as they kissed, his lamp of life went out forever.

King Cyrus heard of the man's death and came to the field. Panathea saw him coming, careening on his camel like a ship in a storm. She called, "Oh, husband! He comes - he shall not have me. I was true to you in life and will be true to you in death." And she drew her dead husband's poniard from its sheath, drove it into her own breast and fell dead across his body.

King Cyrus came up and dismounted. He removed his turban and knelt by the dead husband and wife and thanked his God that he had found in his kingdom one true and virtuous woman that his money could not buy nor his power intimidate.

A person of Boston, preachers, the problem of this century is the problem of the first century. We must win the world for God and we will win the world for God just as soon as we have men and women who will be faithful

to God and will not lie and will not sell out to the devil.