

Proverbs 14:14 The Godly Path: Spiritual Relapse

Some Bible names cause one to shudder – for instance, Judas Iscariot (**Matthew 10:4**); Demas (**2 Timothy 4:10**); Diotrephes (**3 John 9**); and other names coupled together in the scriptures have a similar effect upon us – for example, David and Bathsheba (**2 Samuel 11:3-4**); Samson and Delilah (**Judges 16:20**); Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1**). Then there are names of places that cause us to search our hearts – such as Sodom (**Genesis 13:13**); Sardis (**Revelation 3:1**). Perhaps certain words cause us to think seriously: “**disqualified**” (**1 Corinthians 9:27**); “**reprobate**” (**2 Corinthians 13:5**, KJV); or the word in our key verse – “**backslider**” (**Proverbs 14:14**). What or who is a backslider?

Proverbs 14:14: “The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.”

- **Grammatical Usage:** “**backslider**” in the Hebrew is “sūg” meaning, “flinch; go back; disloyal”; “**good man**” or “tō·wḇ” meaning, “favored”.
- **Literal Interpretation:** The disloyal one will get what his conduct deserves, and a favored one, what his deeds deserve.
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. A backslider is a Christian who gets out of touch with the Lord, a careless, disobedient, unhappy, ineffective Christian who has suffered a relapse. The Christian who is enjoying the fullness of blessing in Christ is entirely satisfied with the Lord Himself; the non-Christian can be happy up to a point because he has never tasted (and therefore does not miss) the things of Christ. But the backslider is isolated between two worlds – not enjoying the Lord or the world!

Notice three vital truths which emerge from our key verse:

1. Every Christian is faced with the danger and the possibility of spiritual relapse. Backsliding is not necessary, for in the Lord Jesus Christ every provision has been made for us to be more than conquerors, able to live a life of deliverance (**Romans 8:37**). However, there is no position of grace from which a fall is impossible (**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**, particularly noticing **vv. 6, 11** and **13**.) If we depend upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit, we need not backslide and suffer the spiritual and moral lapses that are so common among the people of God. But we are always faced with the danger of backsliding.

2. Backsliding always begins in the heart.

The backslider’s heart is filled with his own ways. Backsliding begins inwardly, long before outward evidences (such as giving up church attendance, prayer and Bible reading, and losing love for the Lord’s work including soul-winning). Read about the relapse of John Mark (**Acts 13:13**); of Demas (**2 Timothy 4:10**); but note that the record only tells of the outward evidence of backsliding which had begun previously in the heart. Sooner or later our heart’s state will be manifested in our life and the inward condition will be on public display. When some trial, bereavement or trouble comes, then we may find we have no resources to draw upon, and we shall be “filled with (our) own ways.”

3. The outward evidence or the result of backsliding is always the same.

Our key verse says, “**The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.**” In New Testament language that means “walking according to the sinful nature” instead of “**living by**

the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). What a paradox! A Christian filled with himself – self-willed, self-assertive, self-centered, self-opinionated, filled with self-pity, self-enthroned instead of Christ – a self-filled Christian! Notice that because the backslider is filled with himself instead of with Christ:

- His state is insecure. As to our standing, we are everlastingly **“in Christ”**, and thank God, that can never be altered (**Ephesians 1:3**)! But as to our state, what we actually are down here in the flesh, that can and does alter very much. Our state is what we are in ourselves, and the first result of backsliding is that the backslider is insecure. He is still a Christian, but he has no sense of assurance – no spiritual prosperity in any sense.
- His profession is insincere. When we backslide we usually keep up a pose before our friends and the world (**Matthew 15:8**). What insincerity! – still going to church, holding office, making a great profession – but a backslider!
- His life is inconsistent. God wants our profession and our walk to correspond, but every backslider is living an inconsistent life – it cannot be otherwise.
- His service is ineffective. How can service be effective if self, instead of Christ, is on the throne? The energy of the flesh can bear no fruit nor bring any glory to God. The service of a backsliding Christian is always ineffective.

The Backslide Crisis of Faith:

In **Mark 14:27** Jesus tells His disciples, **“You will all fall away.”** What He meant was that, when He was arrested, they would experience a crisis of faith, a life event so shocking that they would run from Jesus and question the very core of their beliefs. It was a night of offense, a night of stumbling for them. But this was a temporary condition. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples. Their faith was restored, stronger than ever.

The Backslide Test Drive:

We see another type of **“falling away”** in **Hebrews 6:4–6** and **Luke 8:13**. **Hebrews 6** describes the apostate, someone who had only **“tasted the goodness of the word”** (v. 5) and later rejects it. In **Luke 8:13** Jesus illustrates apostasy with the rocky soil—some fall away or backslide because **“they have no root.”** In each of these passages, a person appears outwardly to be a Christian, at least for a while, but he has not committed himself to God wholly, long-term.

Salvation comes by means of a genuine confession of Jesus as Lord to a heart that believes in Jesus’ death and resurrection (**Romans 10:9–10**). If a person who has been truly saved later backslides—that is, slips back into spiritually damaging attitudes and behaviors—the slide will be temporary. The chastening of the Lord will bring him back (**Hebrews 12:4–13**). The Good Shepherd will seek out the wandering lamb (**Luke 15:3–7**).

If a person who was never saved but only putting on a good front backslides—that is, drops the charade and shows true colors—the last condition will be worse than the first (**Hebrews 10:26–31**). How can we tell one type of backsliding from the other? We can’t always, unless given time, and, even then, we don’t know how much time God will take in restoring the backslider or commending, “Ok, thy will be done” to both unbeliever/backslider. Only God can see the heart.

Thank God, backsliders may return and be sure of a welcome – look up **Jeremiah 3:12**! If we need to do so, then let us come back with contrition and confession in our hearts and upon our lips, as we rest upon and rejoice in the truth of **1 John 1:9**.

➤ **Conclusion:** In my heart, does the Spirit confirm I’m totally...truly His?