I. Backsliding. What a horrible sounding word. If I were to ask, "Are you a backslider?" How would you receive the question?

A. Some folks would simply say "no" because they don't want to admit that they are not right with God.

B. Others would say "no" because they don't really understand what it means to be backslidden.

C. It is possible that someone could say "no" because he or she truly is right with the LORD.

D. Very few of us would say "yes". In fact, I seriously doubt that any of us would admit that we are, at this present moment, out of the will of God.

   1. I should then be able to conclude that nobody has slipped backwards...that everyone’s walk is as strong as it has ever been.

   2. And to tell the truth, that is exactly the way it should be. Actually, our walk with the LORD ought to be stronger today than it was the day we got saved.

   3. By now, we should have grown in our faith. But you know, as well as I do that this is not normally the way things work.

II. The reality is that the sin of backsliding is very difficult to see in ourselves.

A. We usually like to believe that we are right in what we are doing. Nobody actually WANTS to be wrong. But sometimes our faulty way of thinking will allow us to justifying our actions.

B. We ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And our hearts grow a little bit harder, a little bit colder.

C. Then the day comes when we can no longer hear the voice of conviction and now NOBODY, can convince us that we are wrong.

III. So what is backsliding? We often think that backsliding is when a believer commits a "big" sin. But backsliding is more subtle that that.

A. It is anytime a believer starts living at a lower standard of belief or behavior than where he knows he should be living. A backslider is one who lives or thinks in ways that are unbiblical.

IV. Let us take a look at the problem of backsliding from three different approaches:

A. First, what are the identifying signs of backsliding? Second, what are the consequences when we backslide. And last, if we discover that we are backslidden, how can we correct the problem?

B. But as we begin, I really want us to take an honest look at ourselves as we look at the dangers of backsliding.

THE WARNING SIGNS (2 Pet 3:17)

2 Peter 3:17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

I. As you can see from the verse, backsliding signifies that you knew something before but you fell away from that because you were led away by some error.
A. That's why a brand new believer may be doing something that is unbiblical and yet is NOT backslidden yet. He didn't know. He has a growth issue.

B. A more mature Christian may do the same thing but he is backsliding. He doesn't have a growth issue. He has a backsliding issue!

II. So, as we look at these warning signs, let try to remember that they all indicate a change from a good state to a bad state. So what are the signs?

A. **A change of heart and a bad attitude toward the things of God.**

   **Jeremiah 17:5** Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.

   1. This is a shift away from that which is spiritual and catering to the pleasures of this life. The heart has departed from the LORD.

   2. The day that we accepted Christ as our Saviour we understood that we were no longer trusting in ourselves. We knew we could not do anything to save ourselves. We ran to the LORD!

   3. But now, we are moving in the opposite direction. Our heart is more focused on everything that is contrary to God.

   4. As believers, we begin to learn that we must die to self, crucify the flesh, and embrace the things of the Spirit.

   **Galatians 5:24-25** And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

   **Romans 8:5-9** For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. [6] For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. [7] Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. [8] So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. [9] But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

   5. So, having read all the verses, we can put it very plainly.

   6. One major warning sign is when we place more importance in the flesh, in the pleasures of this world, in doing our thing, than THE THINGS OF GOD, AND HIS WILL.

B. A second major warning sign is **if more than one person tries to point out the same spiritual flaw in you.**

   1. One concerned Christian should be enough to get our attention, if more than one brother begins to call attention to the same area, it is time to get serious. Notice the emphasis in these passages:

   **2 Timothy 4:3-4** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; [4] And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

   **Proverbs 12:15** The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

   **Proverbs 6:23** For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:

   2. So what can we conclude from the verses we just read?

      a) First, we don't like to hear things that rub against us. We enjoy having our ears tickled.

      b) Second, sometimes, we are prone to rejecting wise counsel. And when we do, we look at ourselves and think we are just fine. But the Bible says when we do this, we are foolish.
c) And thirdly, reproof is a way of life. Since man is such a hard-headed creature, it requires a bit of reproof from time to time.

3. So, when we bristle up against the reproof of our pastor, parents, or other caring brothers and sisters, it is a good indication that we are backslidden.

C. Another good indication that we are backslidden is **when we begin to view God in any other light than who or what he truly is.**

1. We may never admit it, but there can be times or situations where we become so angry, discouraged, distressed, or disappointed, that we actually begin to question God.
   a) “Why God? Why are you doing this to me?” - we are not seeking to learn why God allowed some problem into our lives. Instead, we begin to question God's authority.
   b) In our discouragement, in our mental anguish, we may even become angry with God for our current situation. - but what we are really doing is viewing God as being less than who he truly is.
   c) Some people get so depressed that they begin to believe that God has and ones them.

2. Another common mistake we make, which shows that we don't see God as GOD, is when we take credit for things that God should get the glory for.
   a) We actually think we have figured out the solution to some problem that God resolved.
   b) Or we take credit for something good in our lives (the good...but never the bad). But the truth is, without God, NOTHING TRULY GOOD EVER HAPPENS!

3. Some people think that God has abandoned them if they run into any difficulties. Then they quit on God!

Matthew 13:20-21 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; [21] Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

4. But folks, God is God! He has the right to do whatever he wants. But he has also given us the assurance that whatever he does will always be right.

D. One of the most easily recognized warning signs of backsliding is **when we lose our appetite for the word of God.**

1. The Bible tells us time and again that there is a **direct correlation** between spiritual health and receiving the word of God:

Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

Hebrews 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. [13] For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. [14] But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Colossians 1:5-6 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; [6] Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

2. Is Bible study not exciting to you anymore? You might be backslidden. Are you no longer engaged in some form of study of the word of God? You might be backslidden.
3. Does good preaching bore you? Do the doctrines bore you? Does the reproof or correction offend you? Does the instruction annoy you? You might be backslidden!

E. Another very quick warning sign is a neglect of prayer.

1. Prayer is one of our basic spiritual nutrients. In fact, we are commanded to pray without ceasing.
   a) Do you live in the reality of God’s presence? Do you have a “prayerful attitude.” Don’t allow times of non-prayer to develop in life.
   b) True prayer is difficult ..painful ..requires some discipline; but it is the strength of a believer.

F. Another sure-fire indication of backsliding is your church attendance.

1. Some of us attempt to offer an acceptable excuse for why we don’t attend like we should. But often, they are just excuses.
2. If we were to be honest, we would admit that we could do much better. Coming to church should be a delight; not just a duty.

Psalm 84:10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

3. Maybe you aren’t aware of this but habitual non-attendance is a sin. Hebrews 10:25 tells us that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.
4. But in my experience, this is normally the first outward sign to others that things aren’t right for you spiritually.
5. I also believe that it is the one of the most commonly practiced sins and one of the least frowned upon as well.
6. I mean, we have heard of people being disciplined for big sins but I have never heard of anyone being disciplined for poor church attendance!

G. Along with non-attendance, another good indicator that a person is backslidden is non-involvement at church.

1. You see, a lot of folks will keep up their church attendance and yet, in their hearts, they are dealing with things that they need to forsake.
2. I think almost every church has a struggle to involve its members in God's work. And everything that happens in God's house ought to be God's work.
3. Anything and everything that we do to evangelize the lost, exalt the Lord or edify the saint, and all the support work that goes along with it is God's work.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; [7] Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; [8] Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Matthew 25:35-36 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: [36] Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

4. Preaching is God's work. But so is helping others, teaching a Sunday school class, encouraging another believer, giving, managing something, showing mercy to someone,
5. Helping someone who needs the basics of food or clothing. This is all the work of God!
6. One of the most common complaints of Christians is, "I don't feel like I am a part of the church, I don't feel connected." Solution: GET INVOLVED! Don't wait to be asked. Volunteer!

   a) I have noticed that the ones who complain about the church are usually the same people who don't do anything in the church.

   b) I read somewhere "the man who rows the boat does not have time to rock the boat."

7. And that leads me right into the next indication that a person is backslidden . . .

H. A Critical Spirit

1. A critical spirit is easier to see than to define. But basically, we have a critical spirit when we habitually look at life, people, and situations trying to find fault.

2. We have probably all been critical at some point. It is something that we must all keep a watch out for.

Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that ye be not judged. [2] For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. [3] And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? [4] Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? [5] Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Galatians 5:13-15 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. [14] For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [15] But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

3. Why can't we remember to extend the mercy God to others?

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: [32] And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

I. But sometimes it is not a bitter spirit, but a lack of concern that indicates a backslidden state.

1. The mark of Christianity is self-giving love (Phil. 2:4; John 13:34,35).

Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. [4] Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. [35] By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

2. It will be the heart of love that draws many to Christ. It will be the heart of love that causes a discouraged saint to take courage and get back into the fight.

3. To be unable to look outside of our own narrow interests to the needs and concerns of others is a serious thing indeed.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BACKSLIDING (LEV 26:14-18)

I. Just as there are symptoms of physical sickness, there are also symptoms of spiritual sickness.

A. And just as there are people who do not want to face the reality of their physical sickness, there are also people who do not want to face the reality of their spiritual sickness.

B. I know some folks who won't even go to a doctor because they are afraid of what the doctor will find. Those kinds of people will suffer for years rather than learn the truth and be healed!

C. There are folks who won't read a Bible, listen to a sermon, or come to church because they don't want to hear about their true spiritual condition.
II. But folks, lets take a look at our lives! If we have the symptoms, then we have a spiritual sickness and need a cure.

Lev 26:14-18 But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; (15) And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: (16) I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. (17) And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. (18) And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

I. God promises many blessings upon those who will walk in obedience and faith. But he also promises to bring punishment upon those who will not obey him.

II. In this chapter God promises very clear. He begins by saying, “If ye will not hearken unto me” and then proceeds to tell us what we can expect as a consequence to our sins.

A. First, he promised fear.

Lev 26:16 I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

1. God has ordained that the backslider feel a measure of fear concerning his ways.

2. The backslider knows he is deserving of God’s punishment and is constantly looking over his shoulder for the heavy hand of God’s wrath.

Heb 10:26-27 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, (27) But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

3. I know that it is popular to speak of how God’s children will never feel his wrath but that is not completely true. Notice this verse:

2Ki 23:26 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

4. We like to speak of the grace, love, and mercy of God but the fact is, God is also well willing to do whatever is necessary to restore us to a condition of fellowship with himself.

5. We will never face eternal condemnation, but the backslider may very well feel the punishing hand of God’s wrath!

B. Next in Lev 26:16, God promises “consumption” and a “burning” ague or, as it is translated in Dt 28:22, fever.

1. What is that? Etymologically, consumption refers to a disease of the lungs. It gets harder and harder to breathe.

2. And a fever is just that - a fever.

   a) Please understand that God was speaking to the Jews as a nation where he promised to allow general disease to the nation for disobedience.

   b) He also promised general health to the nation for obedience:

   Exo 15:26 And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

3. So lets make some application to ourselves now.
When we, as a church, begin to walk in disobedience, God will allow “sickness” to creep in and rob us of our spiritual strength.

And when we, as individuals, begin to walk in disobedience, then God will, not only allow, but actually ordain, a measure of spiritual weakness to creep into our lives.

Make no mistake, this sickness is ALWAYS spiritual, but could also be physical.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

We might look healthy on the outside. But on the inside, there is weakness, sickness, and ultimately, death.

A third consequence is laid out for us in Lev 26:16, and 20. “Ye shall sow your seed in vain” and “Your strength shall be spent in vain” To put it plainly, fruitlessness.

1. No fruit! Whether we are talking about the fruit of the Spirit, or the fruit of righteousness, or the fruit of seeing souls saved - NO FRUIT!

2. Look at how this played out in Judges 6:1-10:

And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

3. The end result of their backsliding was not more liberty or more fun - it was impoverishment!

4. And that is exactly what will happen to us if we slip back into our old ways. Sin will strip us of every fruitful thing in our lives!

5. We might even try to press on in our religious activity - we can go to church, invite others to come, preach loudly, but it will all be in vain.

6. We labor in vain when we labor without the power of the Spirit!

7. And you might point to the few and far in between that actually get saved but that is only because God blesses his word. But YOU have no fruit!

8. And besides the fact that you cannot produce new fruit, you will actually suffer the loss of fruit that you had!

I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate.

9. What a pitiful condition for a nation. To have such wealth and comfort and then to lose it all because of sin. And I feel like this is the path that America is heading!

10. And if you are backslidden, this could be the path you are on as well! Any fruitfulness that God had blessed you life with is slowly being trampled and destroyed by the enemy.

D. Going back to Lev 26, look at verse 17 again. “ ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you”. To put it simply, slavery.

1. Disobedience to the truth brings slavery. And the sad thing is that it is not the kind of slavery where you have no choice. We make ourselves into slaves.
2. To disobey God is to come under the tyranny of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

3. And you might not think you are a servant to sin but you are! You might think you will only allow yourself to go so far but you are deceived!

4. You would never commit the "big" sins but you would if you could. The Holy Spirit is not able to strengthen you. You are on your own.

E. Then notice Lev 26:19 - “I will make your Heaven as iron” - **unanswered prayer**.

1. But we have to come to grips with what is really the situation here. The backslider really doesn’t want to pray anyway.

2. So if a backslider doesn’t want to pray, then why does God say he will make the heavens as iron?

3. Because even though a backslider doesn’t really want to pray, he WILL pray.
   a) He will pray to keep up the charade that all is well within. When the pastor calls on him to lead in prayer, he will pray, but not to God.
   b) When he finds that the cares of life have become burdensome, he will pray. But God does not listen. God wants to hear only one prayer. And that is the prayer of confession.
   c) If the heavens are as brass to us it is an evidence that we ourselves are not right With God.

F. Another consequence of backsliding is the **loss of peace**. Notice Lev 26:37, 38:

   Lev 26:37-38  And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies.  (38) And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.

   1. Not only is there the enemy of the world and the devil, but our carnal nature begins to turn on us and we literally implode. We destroy ourselves - we fall upon one another!

   Jas 4:1-4  From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? (2) Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. (3) Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (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.

   2. Divisive members, critical spirits, and selfish decisions in the church. Why? Because a backslider is filled with his own ways and his ways are the ways of lust, criticism, selfishness!

   **CORRECTION OF BACKSLIDING (Heb 12:6-10)**

   Heb 12:6-10  For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (9) 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? (10) 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.

I. God’s purpose is to bring us back into a right relationship with himself. He does not chasten out of anger or hate. He chastens out of love. And all he wants is for you to return to him.

   Lev 26:40-45  If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; (41) And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be
humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: (42) Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. (43) The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. (44) And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. (45) But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.

a) Rather than point our fingers at others and complaining about the state of our homes, churches, and nations, WE need to make this personal. WE must confess OUR sin!

b) There must be a rending of our hearts, true humiliation before God and an unwavering trust in his word, and then we can be healed of our sin!

II. First of all, lets heed the counsel of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (Lam. 3:40).

Lam 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

A. It is a needful work. We have turned away from God to the lusts of the flesh and the temptations of the world and we must “Turn again.”

B. It is a very personal work. The scriptures say, "Let us.", not “let them”. We need to practice some old-fashioned self-examination to see whether or not we are as close to God as we claim to be.

C. This must be a careful work. "Search." Search the motives and the condition of heart that has fostered them (Psa 51:6) we must not try to justify our actions.

III. Repentance takes humility. You need to admit you are out of god's will. Then, and only then, can the Lord revive you!

IV. The backslider has taken a number of downward steps: 1.He has trifled with sin; 2. Then he has yielded to sin; 3. Then he has become a servant to sin.

V. Now, in returning to the Lord he must take the opposite steps:

A. Instead of trifling with sin, he must see the seriousness and danger of sin.

B. Then, instead of yielding to sin, he must confess his sin before the Lord.

C. Finally, instead of being a servant to sin, he must become a master over his flesh and become a servant to righteousness!