



Backsliding!

by Mark Brunner

Walking On Jesus? (James 5:16-19)

The other day my wife waxed our hardwood floors. Waxed floors, not yet dry, are like a minefield to a man who often forgets what he wants to do as he walks from the bathroom to the bedroom. Remembering not to walk on the wet floors is important; especially when your wife has that expectation of you. Take one step with tiptoe into a wet room and the thought of leaving a large sock print is enough to force an instant recoil. When the floors are wet with wax, the stakes are high for any man wanting to keep peace on a cleaning day.

Here's a story: Disheartened by the dangers and difficulties of a battle, a Roman army lost courage, and decided to retreat. Their General appealed to their love of country, to their honor, and to their oaths. But his appeals were all in vain. They were not to be moved; and carried by panic, they turned round to retreat.

The road to retreat was through a mountain pass, but a footpath, broad enough for the step of a single man. As a last resort he laid himself down there, saying, "If you will retreat, it is over this body you go, trampling me to death beneath your feet." No foot advanced. His soldiers could face the foe, but could not mangle beneath their feet one who loved them, and had often led their ranks to victory, sharing like a common soldier all the hardships of

the campaign. Hesitating no longer, they wheeled round to resume their march, believing it better to meet sufferings, and endure even death itself, than trample under foot their devoted leader. Their hearts recoiled from such an outrage. (Dr. Guthrie)

An even more touching sight should bar our retreat into sin as well. Jesus, by His birth, perfect life, death and resurrection, lays Himself down on our path; how can we return to sin, its practice and pleasure, without trampling Him under our feet. Backsliding, willingly returning to a life of sin when we have already put that sin behind us, does just that. Literally, we trample the life and sacrifice of our Savior in our futile attempt to run away from the challenges God may have put before us. Walk on Jesus? The thought ought to make us recoil even faster than when our wife yells, “I just waxed that floor!” It would probably be a better idea to face the challenge than put one foot on our Savior’s back.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

When Our Hopes Can Destroy? (James 5:16-19)

“Don’t get your hopes up too much!” How often have you heard that phrase? I’ve heard it frequently in my life. I’m one of those people who could easily benefit from a frequent reality check. I was reminded of this recently when watching the movie “A Family Christmas” with Chevy Chase. Clark Griswald. Now, there’s someone whose hopes and plans really got him into trouble. He planned the best Christmas a family could have, and almost got the worst Christmas a family every had. Simply, his expectation of family, events and his own abilities were always just beyond what was possible. When Uncle Willis burns down his tree and his wife’s cousin kidnaps his boss, things get out-of-hand pretty fast. And, the “hap-hap-happiest Christmas since Bing Crosby tap-danced with Danny Kaye” is on the brink of disaster.

When our hopes become our focus rather than our guide, it's easy to become far too transfixed on the goal, missing precious objectives along the way.

Here's a story: Two artists were perched high up on a scaffold busily engaged in frescoing the lofty ceiling of a church. One the artists, in an attempt to get a better perspective on his work, gradually stepped back on the scaffolding to within inches of the scaffolds edge. He was so absorbed in his picture that he did not notice that he was about to step off the edge and fall to the pavement far below. Just as he was about to move his heel over the abyss, his brother artist, seeing his danger and knowing that a word would startle and, perhaps, hasten his fall, threw his brush directly at the portion of the fresco his friend had just painted and was so busily admiring. The painter, indignant, rushed forward toward his precious canvas, away from a certain fall, and was thereby saved. (Peloubet)

God sometimes destroys the pictured hopes of our hearts to startle us from sin and save our souls. Hope is a good thing and there is no denying that living without it would make for a much emptier life. But, when are earthly hopes become more important than our spiritual objectives, we run the risk of stepping backward into a life of sin that can and will kill us if given the chance. Reality check! Keeping your eye on heaven helps keeping your foot from hell.

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Rusty Christians! (James 5:16-19)

Over the years I've glued many a plastic plumbing pipe together. There is a process for making sure that the pipe will not leak once it has been assembled. And, I know it well. Clean the area to be glued; then apply a sealant to both surfaces. After that has dried, apply an even layer of cement, twist and allow it to set. It's that simple. That simple, of course, unless you mess up and don't follow these steps accurately. All it takes for a joint to leak is a pinpoint surface that hasn't been properly dried, sealed or cemented. It won't be long until a drip becomes a leak and a leak becomes a problem.

It's also that way with sin in our lives. Give sin even the smallest of cracks to dwell in and it isn't long before what seemed like a surface problem becomes something far deeper.

Here's a story: During a tour of a large manufacturing plant, a visitor noticed a man using a fiery torch of high intensity to work on huge slabs of steel. Operating from a blueprint on a nearby table, a pointer traced the pattern and then by a clever system of levers enlarged the design as it was burned into the metal. There were times, however, when the flame would not make any impression. When this happened, a chemical substance was applied to the resisting patch, and immediately the cutting could be resumed. The worker explained that although the torch was able to go through clean steel 8 inches thick, if it encountered the slightest film of rust on the surface, the flame would not penetrate it. The Bible-believing visitor remarked, "It struck me forcefully that this is a picture of the Christian. The Holy Spirit is seeking to produce in us God's perfect design. If the life is unblemished, He is able to continue His efforts; but if we become carnal or backslidden, His work of shaping us is hindered until the area in question has been thoroughly cleansed."

It doesn't take a whole lot of sin, especially sin that we fall back into day after day, to create a film of impenitence and, eventually, unbelief in our lives. God often resorts to a chastening hand, sending hardship, even sorrow into our lives in order to cleanse away the film of sin we've allowed to spread. When we recognize the sin in our lives, confess it and ask forgiveness, we cement our connection with God and others and, thereby, keep sin from leaking back into our lives.

Only A Stomachache Away! (James 5:16-19)

Funny how life is sometimes--if it hadn't been for something bad happening, something good would not have happened either. Probably the most apparent example of this would be illness. I was recently attacked by a vicious virus. It reminded me in every way of the Hong Kong flue that struck me nearly forty years ago. I shook violently and every bone in my body ached. Nausea,

the works! It laid me low for nearly four days. But after it had passed, I found I had lost nearly ten pounds of excess weight. But for the bad, the good would not have happened.

Here's a story: Story: Mr. Whitefield, a preacher, had a brother, who had been like him, an earnest Christian; but he had backslidden; he went far from the ways of godliness; and one afternoon, after he had been recovered from his backsliding, he was sitting in a room in a chapel-house. He had heard his brother preach the day before, and his poor conscience had been cut to the very quick. Said Whitefield's brother, when he was at tea: "I am a lost man," and he groaned and cried, and could neither eat nor drink. Said Lady Huntingdon, who sat opposite: "What did you say, Mr. Whitefield?" "Madam," said he, "I said I am a lost man." "I'm glad of it," said she; "I'm glad of it." . . . "I am glad of it," said she, "because it is written, 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.'" With the tears rolling down his cheeks, he said: "What a precious Scripture; and how is it that it comes with such force to me? Oh Madam," said he, "Madam, I bless God for that; then he will save me; I trust my soul in his hands; he has forgiven me." (C. H. Spurgeon)

Jesus tells us in Scripture that it is the sinner that He had come to save and not the righteous man. This is a comfort to all of us who struggle with sin, especially that reoccurring sin that we have such a hard time overcoming. What a tremendous comfort it is to know that He came to seek the lost, pull them up out of their sin and restore them to himself, the Good Shepherd. If you are lost in a sin, one that you just can't pull away from, remember that Jesus saves the sinner. And that sin may need to shake us and make us sick before the good that God has planned for us will be revealed. Being lost is only a fever or a stomachache away from being found. But for the bad, the good may not be achieved.

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Backtracking! (James 5:16-19)

There is an art to backtracking, one that is invaluable to the hiker, hunter or backpacker. As a backpacker, I learned years ago that knowing how to get out of the wilderness was even more important than finding your way in. When I'm hiking in a wilderness area without, with the exception of game trails, a marked trail, it's very important to plan your route ahead of time using a topographic map of the area. Familiarizing yourself with the topography before going in is the essential element of planning and completing a successful hike into unfamiliar areas.

If each of us took the same care in mapping out our days as we pass through this present wilderness called life, back-tracking away from a life of sin would be far easier than not.

Here's a story: Clem the cat came home after eight years of being who knows where. A homeowner in Bancroft, Wisconsin, said he heard a cat meowing on the front porch. When he opened the door, a big, longhaired, gray male cat walked in, checked things out, began purring, and then jumped up on his favorite chair. Family members couldn't believe their eyes. It had been so long that the family had actually begun to forget Clem completely. Curious as to whether this was their long-lost pet, they pulled out a family picture album. When they compared the cat to pictures taken eight years earlier, the resemblance was convincing. They could only conclude that Clem the cat had come home and taken his sweet time in doing so. (Sermonspice.com)

What remarkable homing instincts God has given to some animals! On a spiritual level, why is it that the backslidden child of God seems to have less? Why do we in our rebellion show less sense than the animals? Extricating ourselves from the grasp of sin is not impossible even though there is no doubt that the power of sin to hold us is strong. When we refer frequently to our spiritual map, God's Word, there is always hope that we can find the path returning to a life of obedience. Backtracking the way we came in may be the only way out.

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