

DOCTRINE. The Lord has much help and hope to offer both backslidden and sleepy Christians.

QUESTION 1. What does it look like if I am a backslidden Christian? ANSWER. Backsliding is when someone who has been redeemed and renewed by God, for a time slides back into their old way of thinking, feeling, or living. Backsliding is when a living saint, for a time, acts, feels, or thinks like a dead sinner.

QUESTION 2. What does it look like if I am a sleepy Christian? ANSWER. A sleepy Christian is someone who goes through most all of the external duties of the Christian life, but there is no life, no passion, no zeal for Christ or holiness or the glory of God. A sleepy Christian sleepwalks through the duties of the Christian with no delight.

QUESTION 3. Why should I care if I am backslidden or sleepy, rather than faithful or awake? ANSWER. We have a King to glorify, sins to mortify, families to protect and provide for, love and nurture; we have sinners to preach the gospel to, saints to build up in the faith; we have neighbors to love, temptations to resist, a merciful God to worship from the heart, and we have a Savior to enjoy. You cannot do any of these things from a pure heart in a backslidden or sleepy state. All you can do in a backslidden or sleepy state is waste your life.

I. WHAT DIRECTIONS THE LORD'S PEOPLE SHOULD TAKE WHEN THEY ARE IN A BACKSLIDDEN OR SLEEPY STATE (1 Samuel 7:2-3).

DIRECTION I. When you are in a backslidden or sleepy state, labor to lament after the Lord for your backslidings or drowsiness (1 Samuel 7:2). "From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." This is grieving over your backsliding sin. This is mourning over your spiritually sleep state. May God give the sleepy and backsliding a sense of their sin and lead them to lament after Him. We all need that when we are in such states.

DIRECTION II. When you are in a backslidden or sleepy state, labor to return to the Lord with all your heart (1 Samuel 7:3b). "And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart. . .'" This is repentance. This is returning to the Lord after being sleepy or backslidden. QUESTION. Why should I want to return to the Lord? ANSWER I. Because He deserves your devotion. ANSWER II. Because at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:10-11). No Christian will ever ask you to give up a pleasure without offering to you a greater pleasure. God gives more pleasure than sin, dear friends.

What does it look like to labor to return to the Lord with all your heart, and so be near him? Three answers we are given in this text:

(i) If you would be near the LORD, you must mortify your sins by the Spirit (1 Samuel 7:3b). “. . .then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you. . .” This is mortification. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). John Owen faithfully exhorts us to, “Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.”

You must continually mortify. “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified (active. i.e. “are crucifying”) the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). You must viciously mortify. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-31). “Withdraw the fuel that may make lust burn. Avoid all temptations. Take heed of that which nourishes sin. He who would suppress the gout or stone, avoids those meats which are noxious. Those who pray that they may not be led into temptation, must not lead themselves into temptation” (Thomas Watson). You must Spiritually mortify; that is, with the Sword of the Spirit and by the strength of the Holy Spirit. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). You must mindfully mortify; that is, with the eyes of your heart fixed on Christ Jesus (see Colossians 3:1-5).

(ii) If you would be near the LORD, you must enliven your soul by Christ (1 Samuel 7:3c). “...and direct your heart to the LORD..” This is vivification. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure” (Psalm 16:7-9).

“Before me still the Lord I set:  
sith it is so that he  
Doth ever stand at my right hand,  
I shall not moved be.  
Because of this my heart is glad,  
and joy shall be exprest

Ev'n by my glory; and my flesh  
in confidence shall rest." (Psalm 16:7-9, Scottish Psalter)

John Owen wrote, "On Christ's glory I would fix all my thoughts and desires, and the more I see of the glory of Christ, the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes and I will be more and more crucified to this world. It will become to me like something dead and putrid, impossible for me to enjoy."

(iii) If you would be near the LORD, you must set yourself apart for holy service to God (1 Samuel 7:3d). ". . .and serve him only. . ." This is consecration. "The Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments. . ." (Exodus 19:10). "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). Priests under the Old Covenant were set apart for service to God in the LORD's temple; Saints under the New Covenant are set apart for service to God as the Lord's Temple. If you are in Christ, you are far from ordinary! God Himself has purchased you with the blood of His own Son, and He has taken up residence in you. You are now to live a consecrated life, set apart, to glorify and enjoy Him. God has set you apart for holy service to Him. You are set apart for holy service to God in the church, in your home, in your vocation, and in society. Live like it!

Your vocation is where you spend a majority of your time, and you are meant to serve the Lord in that job. Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." Whether you are inside the home or outside the home, whatever duties your vocation requires, you are to consecrate yourself and do those duties as an act of worship for the Lord's glory.

Do you see why Mortification is necessary? Mortification of sin is necessary so you can have consecration of life. You cannot serve the Lord in holiness at the same time you are serving your lusts in wickedness. Do you see why Vivification is necessary? Vivification of your soul by looking to Christ is necessary so you can have consecration of life. You will not serve the Lord in delightfulness if you are looking to Christ in dreadfulness. Mortification of sin by the Spirit, and Vivification of soul by Christ, must happen to give way to Consecration for God and His great glory!

## II. THE PROMISE THAT COMES WITH BEING NEAR THE LORD (1 Samuel 7:3e).

PROMISE. If you will return to the LORD and so be near Him, He promises to defeat your enemies (1 Samuel 7:3e). ". . .and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the people did what Samuel told them to. "So the people of Israel

put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only" (1 Samuel 7:4). What will you do with these directions if and when you are in a backslidden or sleep state?

### III. THE BENEFITS OF BEING NEAR THE LORD (1 Samuel 7:5-6).

BENEFIT I. Those who are near the Lord have an Advocate to pray for them (1 Samuel 7:5). "Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." You who are weary and heavy laden, if you are in Christ you have an Advocate who ever lives to intercede for you. While you were sleeping last night, he was praying; while you were working, he was giving you strength; while you were last sinning, he was pleading his wounds before the throne.

BENEFIT II. Those who are near the Lord have freeness to confess their sins (1 Samuel 7:6a). "So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." You who are guilty and burdened with your sins, come unburden yourself at the foot of the cross by confessing your sins to God and looking to Christ in faith for mercy. 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

BENEFIT III. Those who are near the Lord have a Leader to rule them (1 Samuel 7:6b). "And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah." You who need wisdom or counsel, you have a Ruler who is also a Prophet, and He speaks to you in His word.

BENEFIT IV. Those who are near the Lord have a Deliverer to cry out to in times of trouble (1 Samuel 7:7-8). "Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." You who are suffering, if you are united to Christ by faith you have a King who dispels fears and defeats enemies. Cry out to him in faith!

BENEFIT V. Those who are near the Lord have a Lamb to forgive us and make us acceptable to God (1 Samuel 7:9). "So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the LORD answered him." All you who know that on your own you are sinners who deserve God's judgement and not his love, if you look to Christ you have a Lamb to forgive you and make you acceptable to God. Christ is now the Lamb standing as though it had been slain (Revelation 5), still bearing the marks of his crucifixion for you.

CONCLUSION. "We are never nearer Christ than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at His unspeakable love" (John Owen).