

October 31, 2021

Return Ye Unto The Lord

There are numerous instances recorded in the Old Testament of people departing from God, and of their being admonished to return to the Lord. During the time of Samuel the Israelites were guilty of idolatry and were therefore oppressed by the Philistines. Hence, "*Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, 'If ye **return to the Lord** with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashoreths from among you and prepare our hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines'*" (I Sam. 7:3). Isaiah addressed the people of his own nation, saying, "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him **return to the Lord**, and He will have mercy on him*" (Isa. 55:7). At a time of complete apostasy, God, through Jeremiah, addressed the apostates of his day: saying, "***Return**, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings*" (Jer. 3:22). Hosea addressed the people of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), saying, "*Come, and let us **return to the Lord..***" (Hos. 6:1). Later, to the same people, Hosea pleaded, "*O Israel, **return to the Lord**, your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity*" (Hos. 14:1). In the last book of the Old Testament, through His prophet Malachi, God reminded Israel of her continued departures from His ordinances, and then pleaded, saying, "***Return to Me**, and I will return to you...*" (Mal. 3:7).

The preceding Scriptures are but a few among many which cite instances of people departing from God, and of their being admonished to "**return**" to the Lord. In each case the apostates were Israelites, God's chosen people, and in each instance God promised to bless His wayward children if they would "**return**" to Him.

Though we live under the New Testament, of which Jesus is the "*Mediator*" and which was put "*in force*" as a result of His death (Heb. 9:15-17), the principle is the same. In other words, God's people today can depart from God, and they, too, are encouraged to return. Hence, we read of the defection of Simon (Acts 8:20-22), of Hymenaeus and Alexander who made "*shipwreck*" the faith (I Tim. 2:19-20), of the defection of Demas who "*loved the present world*" (2 Tim. 4:10), etc. The apostle Peter likened the conduct of apostate Christians to the most disgusting habits of heretofore unclean animals, and described their latter condition as being "*worse*" than before they became Christians (2 Pet. 2:20-22)! Yes, God's children can depart from Him, and it is still imperative that they "**return!**"

When Christians Fall

The people who have **not** fallen have responsibilities. To the saints at Galatia, the apostle Paul admonished, "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual **restore** such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you be tempted*" (Gal. 6:1). "*James, a bondservant of God*" (Jas. 1:1), wrote, saying, "*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*" (Jas. 5:19-20). In fact, notwithstanding the difficulty and the sorrow involved, there are times (after all other scriptural efforts have failed) when a local church must "*withdraw*" from a brother who continues to walk "*disorderly*" (2 Thess. 3:6).

The people who have fallen are particularly obligated! They must "**repent**" of their "*wickedness*" and "**pray**" to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). They must turn "*from the error*" of their way (Jas. 5:20) They must "**confess**" their sins (I John 1:9). The Bible says "**confess** your trespasses to one another, and **pray** for one another, that you may be healed. The effective,

fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas. 5:16). Yes, there are times when an erring child of God, with a contrite heart, and an acknowledgement of sin, must (like Simon before Peter) come before his brethren, saying, "**Pray to the Lord for me**" (Acts 8:24).

Are You Departing From God?

Many today, like those of Jeremiah's time, are guilty of "*backsliding*" (Jer. 3:6,8,11,12,14,22). "Tell tale" signs of "**backsliding**" include a loss of interest in spiritual matters, forsaking the assemblies, attitudinal sins, improper conduct, etc. Unless correction is made, those people could easily "*grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*" (2 Tim. 3:13), even to the point of their "*being past feeling*" (Eph. 4:19), and beyond the likelihood of being "*renewed to repentance*" (Heb. 6:6). Yes, friend, it is a risky business to be careless in matters pertaining to God and the soul!

Have You Departed From God?

Whereas some are in the process of departing from God, others have **completed** the journey! Perhaps they have been withdrawn from by a local church. Perhaps some who read this bulletin are in this category!

There Is Still Hope!

Rest assured, **we** care! For your soul, we are ready to "*spend and be spent*" (2 Cor. 12:15). We pray for your return, and long for the day when "*godly sorrow*" on your part (2 Cor. 7:10) will enable us to "*comfort*" you and "*reaffirm*" our love for you (2 Cor. 2:8).

Most importantly **God** cares! This is why the apostle Peter said: "*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for **He** cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:6,7). Indeed, God "*is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all shall come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9). Do you remember the prodigal son — the young man who "*wasted his possessions with prodigal living,*" who was reduced to absolute poverty, and had disgraced himself even in his own mind? Do you recall his coming "*to himself,*" remembering what it was like before he left home, and then his noble resolve to "*rise and go to my father, and...say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you...'*" (Luke 15:13,17,18)? He acted on that noble resolve and began his homeward journey. Do you remember that boy's father? When the son was "*still a great way off his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*" (Lk. 15:20). The son was fully restored to grace and favor in his father's house. And the beauty of this parable is in the fact that the boy's father represents our **God**, and How **He** longs for the return of His wayward children, and the complete pardon His so lovingly offers!

Conclusion:

Tragically, the apostates of Jeremiah's day "*refused to return*" (Jer. 5:3), and they suffered the sad consequences. However, if you are among the spiritually departed, the fact that you have read this far gives us cause for hope in your case. We sincerely urge you to "**return to the Lord.**" We are praying for you. Please call upon us if we can be of help.
—B. Witherington
