

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

“Let’s not fall into the fallacy of thinking that unless we are big, we are going to be ineffective. One with God is a majority. So often God has done some of the most amazing things in the whole history of the church through remnants.” (Lloyd Jones)

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

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Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

Infamous Backsliders of the Bible

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present world and the temporal life we live in it. OR, if there is something more – that something is all good except perhaps for the Hitlers and Stalins and their kind.

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:1-9

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:18-39

Let me begin this morning with a “pre-sermon.” I need to preach more than one truth today, so this is my method. Here is the first:

The enemy wants us to believe that we are fools because we believe fiction. That the object of our faith and the truths we hold to are a fantasy. That what is real is this

The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (Joh 8:48)

The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.'" (Joh 8:52)

Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?" (Joh 10:20)

The same accusation was regularly made against Paul and the other apostles and has continued right down through history to our day. And consistently, many if not most of these kinds of accusations come from “religious” people. Satan’s servants appear as sons of righteousness.

In our experience here in this church, as you have heard me say before, these kinds of attacks have come with regularity. “If you don’t do what we say this church is going to have no one left in it.” Like the church at Smyrna, the enemy loves to tell us that we are poor and few in number and rejected. These are lies and in fact Jesus tells us that this is *blasphemy* coming from the synagogues of Satan filled with people who say they are Christians, but they are not. They are of their father the devil.

'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (Rev 2:9)

The Lord, in His kindness, inserts that little phrase, “*but you are rich.*” *Fools, weak, without honor.* But these words are lies.

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. (1Co 4:10)

Let’s turn then to the second subject for this morning – *Infamous Backsliders of the Bible.*

We believe the biblical doctrine called *the perseverance of the saints*. The “P” in TULIP. It is stated this way in our Confession-

Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, from which source he still begets and nourishes in them faith, repentance, love, joy,

hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality;¹ and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them,² yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraved upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity. [Chapter 17]

And it continues-

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election,⁴ flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and

union with him,⁵ the oath of God,⁶ the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them,⁷ and the nature of the covenant of grace;⁸ from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein,⁹ whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit,¹⁰ come to have their graces and comforts impaired,¹¹ have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded,¹² hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves,¹³ yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.¹⁴

This perseverance is not a lazy one. The Lord preserves the faith He has given us and always effects repentance when we sin, nevertheless we are called to “work

out our salvation,” diligently using the means of grace provided to us – prayer, the Word, fellowship in His church.

Furthermore, the Lord has called us to careful watchfulness, reminding us that there is such a thing as *backsliding* or, a better term – the *reprobate*. That condition of the person who seems to start out well in professing Christ and yet who, at some point, goes back to the world. You have it here in Matthew 13-

Mat 13:1-9 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. (2) And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. (3) And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; (4) and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. (5) **"Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. (6) "But when the sun had risen, they were**

scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. (7) "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. (8) "And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. (9) "He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus Himself explained it –

"The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. (Mat 13:20-21)

Unlike the seed sown which the birds (the devil) carried away, or the seed which was choked out by the thorns, the soils we want to consider in particular is that which is “rocky” with no depth of soil. This soil is “*the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.*” This is the person who hears the gospel and “*immediately*

springs up.” For all appearances this is the beginning of life. It looks like the new birth. And the man himself *receives it with joy*. He rejoices in his “salvation,” perhaps weeping and praising God.

But it is all a lie. False. There has been no new birth. Mere emotion is no evidence of the genuine. [NOTE: That is a widespread lie today which many are being deceived by. Look at the large crowds at so-called “Christian” concerts and gatherings. Typically it is the emotion which is emphasized and produced].

Initially then, and perhaps even for quite some time, the backslider or reprobate as he is better called, for all appearances is following Christ. But what is it that ultimately exposes this kind?

"But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."

"....yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution

arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."

This is why I so often ask all of us, including myself, this question – *has your profession of Christ ever cost you anything? When was the last time you suffered because of the Word?*

Notice this phrase very carefully. *Because of **the word***. We are not left to any uncertainty as to what this word is:

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom..."

It is the gospel which is the seed sown. The good news of the kingdom of God which Jesus preached and which is still being sown today by faithful preachers and true Christians.

There is a parallel account given by Luke:

Luk 8:11-15 "Now the parable is this: **the seed is the word of God.** (12) "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the

devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

(13) "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; **they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.**

(14) "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

(15) "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

See it? **“they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.”**

In other words, *there is such a thing as a false, counterfeit faith.* These false converts *believe* the gospel, even joyfully, but there has

been no new birth, no regenerating work of the Spirit. They are *pseudo-christians*.

At some point, sooner or later when temptation comes, when a test of that faith through some persecution or affliction, their faith fails and they fall away.

Fall away from what? From Christ. From the Word of God. These kind sooner or later will deny Christ and offer incense to Caesar to avoid suffering.

The Bible shows us this very thing and names names. Demas is a classic example:

Col 4:12-14 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (13) For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. (14) Luke, the beloved

physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Paul particularly praises Epaphras and Luke, but simply adds – “and also Demas.” He also includes Demas in his letter to Philemon –

Phm 1:23-25 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, (24) as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. (25) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

We are not certain of the time frame in which Demas went with Paul, but later Paul gives this sad report in 2 Timothy which is generally considered to be Paul’s final letter:

2Ti 4:9-11 Make every effort to come to me soon; (10) **for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica;** Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. (11) Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

Demas turned out to be that rocky ground soil. Initially he set out *even with the Apostle Paul*, but eventually his false faith was revealed. He left Paul, and really he left Christ, *because he loved the world. Therefore he deserted Paul and his profession of the Word of God.*

Today it is very easy for the Demas’s to disguise their falling away. They simply say “well, I decided to go to another church.” But inevitably the “church” they run to will be a place where there is no persecution. No cost. No taking up one’s cross to follow Christ. A place where the pseudo-Christian can pretend and be readily accepted.

Notice Paul’s language in describing Demas’ action – *desertion*. Demas was a deserter. In fact, he was a traitor because he went over to the enemy’s side.

Demas is not the only rocky soil “Christian” in Scripture. Think of Lot’s wife –

Gen 19:26 But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Jesus Himself told us:

Luk 17:32 "Remember Lot's wife.

Remember Demas. Remember Lot's wife. Remember Esau –

Heb 12:15-17 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (16) that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

In this case, the backslide was one way – no return.

And notice the common denominator in each of these cases – *love for the world*. A craving for popularity, ease, wealth, and the

other trinkets the world has to offer. In so many of the cases of the Demas's we have seen, the lure has been popularity in this community. A refusal to be regarded as a fool. A craving to be esteemed – to be "citizen of the year" material.

And a lust for wealth certainly has come into play too. I have seen signs of backsliding in people who used to be in this church and I have challenged them (not as often as I should have) to give up the wealth and follow Christ. But in the end, they were Demas – they loved this present world and deserted.

The Lord Jesus saw signs of backsliding in the church at Ephesus –

Rev 2:2-5 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; (3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (4) 'But I have this

against you, that you have left your first love. (5) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

The Ephesians had some commendable qualities – signs of real faith. But they were in danger. The object of their love, the eyes of their faith was turning from Christ to the world in some way. And all of this warns us – we must be careful. The enemy is subtle. He brings his persecutions to us, he has his fake church and servants accuse us of being fools, of being unkind and judgmental – all to pressure us into deserting Christ.

Sometimes I go upstairs here in our church building and look at the big sanctuary – not often, but sometimes. Decades of preaching there. Years ago seeing many of those empty pews filled. And such times bring temptation to do what Lot's wife did – *look back*.

Let's take some time at this point to think very carefully about that. *Lot's wife **looked back***. Listen to our faithful preacher from old times, J.C. Ryle on this:

"There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than this. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

Lot's wife was a professor of religion: her husband was a "righteous man" (II Peter 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day when Sodom was destroyed; she looked back towards the city from behind her husband, against God's express command; she was struck dead at once, and turned into a pillar of salt. And the Lord Jesus Christ holds her up as a beacon to His church: He says, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No: He singles out one whose soul was lost

for ever. He cries to us, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world: He is describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind, when He says, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the Person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy, and compassion: He is One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem, and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to give this solemn warning and remind us of lost souls. Even He says, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the persons to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples: He was not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees who hated him, but Peter, James, and John, and many others

who loved Him: yet even to them He thinks good to address a caution. Even to them He says, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following-take heed of imitating-do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "***Remember.***" He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

I will speak of the religious privileges which Lot's wife enjoyed.

In the days of Abraham and Lot, true saving religion was scarce upon earth; there were no Bibles, no ministers, no churches, no tracts, no missionaries. The knowledge of God was confined to a few favoured families; the greater part of the inhabitants of the world were living in darkness, ignorance, superstition, and sin. Not one in a hundred perhaps had such good

example, such spiritual society, such clear knowledge, such plain warnings as Lot's wife. Compared with millions of her fellow-creatures in her time, Lot's wife was a favoured woman.

She had a godly man for her husband: she had Abraham, the father of the faithful for her uncle by marriage. The faith, the knowledge, and the prayers of these two righteous men could have been no secret to her. It is impossible that she could have dwelt in tents with them for any length of time, without knowing whose they were and whom they served. Religion with them was no formal business; it was the ruling principle of their lives and the mainspring of their actions. All this Lot's wife must have seen and known. This was no small privilege.

When Abraham first received the promises, it is probable Lot's wife was there. when he built his tent between Ai and Bethel, it is probable she was there...when the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them;

when they took them by the hand and led them out of the city, she was one of those whom they helped to escape. Once more, I say, these were no small privileges.

Yet what good effect had all these privileges on the heart of Lot's wife? None at all.

Notwithstanding all her opportunities and means of grace-notwithstanding all her special warnings and messages from heaven-she lived and died graceless, godless, impenitent, and unbelieving. The eyes of her understanding were never opened; her conscience was never really aroused and quickened; her will was never really brought into a state of obedience to God; her affections were never really set on things above.

The form of religion which she had was kept up for fashion's sake and not from feeling: it was a cloak worn for the sake of pleasing her company, but not from any sense of its value. She did as others around her in Lot's house: she conformed to her husband's ways: she made no

opposition to his religion: she allowed herself to be passively towed along in his wake: but all this time her heart was wrong in the sight of God. The world was in her heart, and her heart was in the world. In this state she lived, and in this state she died.

In all this there is much to be learned: I see a lesson here which is of the greatest importance in the present day. You live in times when there are many persons just like Lot's wife: Come and hear the lesson which her case is meant to teach.

Learn, then, that the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul.

You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness, and good company. All this may be, and yet you yourself

may remain unconverted, and at last be lost forever.

I dare say this doctrine sounds hard to some readers. I know that many fancy they want nothing but religious privileges in order to become decided Christians. They are not what they ought to be at present, they allow; but their position is so hard, they plead, and their difficulties are so many. Give them a godly husband, or a godly wife-give them godly companions, or a godly master-give them the preaching of the gospel-give them privileges, and then they would walk with God.

It is all a mistake. It is an entire delusion. It requires something more than privileges to save souls. Joab was David's captain; Gehazi was Elisha's servant; Demas was Paul's companion; Judas Iscariot was Christ's disciple; and Lot had a worldly, unbelieving wife. These all died in their sins. They went down to the pit in spite of knowledge, warnings, and opportunities; and they all teach us that it is not privileges alone that men need. *They need the grace of the Holy Ghost.*

Let us value our religious privileges, but let us not rest entirely upon them. Let us desire to have the benefit of them in all our movements in life, but let us not put them in the place of Christ. Let us use them thankfully, if God gives them to us, but let us take care they produce some fruit in our heart and life. If they do not do good, they often do positive harm; they sear the conscience, they increase responsibility, they aggravate condemnation.

The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay; the same sun which makes the living tree grow, dries up the dead tree, and prepares it for burning. Nothing so hardens the heart of man as a barren familiarity with sacred things. Once more I say, it is not privileges alone which make people Christians, but *the grace of the Holy Ghost* Without that no man will ever be saved.

I ask those who attend a sound ministry in the present day to mark well what I am saying. You go to Mr. A's, or Mr. B's church: you

think him an excellent preacher; you delight in his sermons; you cannot hear anyone else with the same comfort; you have learned many things since you attended his ministry; you consider it a privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I should be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousandfold. But, after all, what have you got in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Ghost? if *not, you are no better than Lot's wife.*

I ask the children of religious parents to mark well what I am saying. It is the highest privilege to be the child of a godly father and mother, and to be brought up in the midst of many prayers. It is a blessed thing indeed to be taught the gospel from our earliest infancy, and to hear of sin, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and holiness, and heaven, from the first moment we can remember anything. But, O, take heed that you do not remain barren and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges: beware lest your hearts remain hard, impenitent, and worldly, not-

withstanding the many advantages you enjoy.

You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' religion. You must eat the bread of life for yourself, and have the witness of the Spirit in your own heart. You must have repentance of your own, faith of your own, and sanctification of your own. *If not' you are no better than Lot's wife.*

I pray God that all professing Christians in these days may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge, and faithful preaching, and abundant means of grace, and the company of holy people are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are they that have them! But after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is *the grace of the Holy Ghost*. Lot's wife had many privileges; but Lot's wife had not grace.”