

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 2:10:2011

Reading: Hosea 14:1-9

GRAPPLING WITH THE GIANTS

9. THE GIANT OF DEFECTION

It was a quiet house on a quiet street, in Houston, Texas, quiet because no one was there. The Lockshin family, father, mother, daughter, son had left for Russia. Recently filled prescription bottles still stood in bathroom cabinets on that day in 1986 when Arnold Lockshin's mother in law discovered the family's absence. Books on Marxism still occupied their place on bookshelves. Bicycles still leaned against the garage wall where Michael and Jennifer had hoped after a neighbourhood ride. Lauren and Arnold's wedding album was left behind too, along with the children's drawings and Arnold's old scientific publications. *This was defection, only it wasn't America's freedom that was being sought, but the Communist regime of Russia.* This was unfathomable to most Americans. As unfathomable as another kind of defection is too many Christians, defection from the Lord Jesus Christ. *How, after tasting the fruits of freedom in the United States, could anyone want to eat the butterless bread of a Communist government ?* And likewise, how, after experiencing the freedom of Christ's love, could anyone willingly hold out their wrists to sin's shackles ? Yet Christian defections and backsliding happen all the time. The words "*backslide*," or "*backsliding*," are

never used in the New Testament, but they appear 17 times in the Old Testament. The truth however is also in the New Testament. Indeed the Bible is replete with instances of those who have fallen into spiritual decline and apathy. (Jer 3:12-14) The Lord says in this very Book of Hosea, "*My people are bent to backsliding from me.*" (11:7) Do you recall the charge the Lord of the Lampstands brings against the church at Ephesus ? "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.*" (Rev 2:4) Spiritual decline and defection was evident in the nation of Israel (Ps 78 :10) it was evident in the disciples (Matt 26:56 Jn 6:66) in the churches in the New Testament (Gal 4:9) and it was also evident in individuals. People like Samson, David, Solomon, Jonah, Peter, and Demas. Indeed of how many of us can it be said, "*Gray hairs are here and there upon him yet he knoweth it not.*" (7:9) I wonder do William Cowper's lines sum up your spiritual condition this ?

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord,
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word*

Have you lost your spiritual grip ? Do the clouds of indifference and apathy hang over your soul ? How may have lost their edge spiritually. Once we measured our spiritual progress day by day, we came with eager expectation to the Word to hear what the Lord God would say unto us. Once our feet were jubilant to answer His commands, swift to run to the place of prayer to join in

praise and petition. Years ago our hearts ached with agony for the lost and we wept o'er the erring one, all because we were close to the Saviour, and the love of His heart possessed ours. *But then slowly, gradually, we drifted.* Sure we are going through the motions, but in our hearts we have defected. Is this you ? My are you personally, are we corporately a monument to the fact that there is such a thing as spiritual decline ? The Book of Hosea (755-714 BC) has much to say about this subject, indeed Hosea's message sprang from the depths of his own domestic tragedy. Like Gomer Hosea's wife, Israel had broken the covenant that they had with the Lord, they were unfaithful to him (8:1) and had become a backsliding people. That's why Hosea cries here in the opening verse, " *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.*" (14:1) This passage in (Ch 14) refers to Ephraim, meaning the whole kingdom of Israel of which Ephraim was the dominant tribe. It constitutes a divine diagnosis of,

(1) THE CAUSE OF THEIR SPIRITUAL DEFECTION

For this opening statement, presupposes that they had gone astray and so they had. The sins of the nation were many. (4:2) Why had these people gone astray ? What brought about this spiritual and moral decline ? There was,

(a) SUPERFICIAL CONSECRATION:

Look if you will at (6:4) Their love for the Lord was like

a morning cloud and dew. Early in the morning the dew looks like sparkling jewels, but as soon as the sun comes up, the dew is gone. Israel's devotion to the Lord was temporary, lovely but not lasting. Where we used to live in Belfast, was a place called the Rocky Road. It was a steep incline ascending up from the main carriage way that goes from Shaw's Bridge to Knock. *Our home was the last house on the way up, which meant we had a panoramic view over most of the city.* Often as I looked over the city, in the early morning I could not recognise one landmark for a blanket of fog, had come down. But you know, by noon, that fog had gone, and the city was lying before me, in all of its glory. God says that Israel's love was just like the morning fog, shallow, superficial, transient, temporary. Now they possessed all the trappings of a thriving religion, the sacrifices were regularly offered (4:15, 5:6, 6:15) But this was the outward cloak that hid infidelity, a religious veneer which only fools the undiscerning. Appearances were kept up, when actualities had ceased. Is superficial consecration the reason for your decline ?

Could the Risen Lord say to us, what He said to Sardis ? " *Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead ?*" (Rev 3:1) How much reality is behind your profession, how much life is behind your façade ? Are you living off yesterday's spiritual momentum ? Are you doctrinally sound but inwardly dead ? Isn't it so easy to come and sing His praise, and seek His face, and share His Word, so easy to go through all the mechanics of worship and our hearts are far from Him ? (a)

(b) PARTIAL SANCTIFICATION:

Look if will at (7:8) What housewife has not had the humiliating experience of a cake cooked on the outside, but half done inside ? The cake referred to here was cooked on a griddle, and not having been turned, it was burned on one side and uncooked on the other. *This spelt out Israel's condition, overdone on ritual, underdone on righteousness, overdone on sacrifices, underdone on sanctification, overdone on the external, underdone on the internal.* Is this not the same with us ? Overdeveloped in some respects, underdeveloped in others. All of us are only partially sanctified because we have not turned some parts of our lives to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Some are strong in Bible knowledge, but weak in spiritual grace. Some are generous in nature, but violent in temper. Some are strong for the fundamentals but weak in Christian love. One sided development is true of us all.

We tend to cultivate our strong points and neglect our weak points. The reassuring fact for us is that the fire under the cake still burns, and it's up to us to turn the unfinished, imperfect part of our characters to the fire of the Holy Spirit and allow him to bring balance into our lives. (Jn 1:14) (a) b)

(c) **INCOMPLETE SEPERATION:**

Look at (4:17) It was not that the Lord proposed to leave Ephraim alone, but He was warning Judah not to follow this evil example of idolatry. “ *If he will go after his idols don't you follow him.* ” Israel's privilege had been to dwell alone (Deut 33:28) but she snatched at every opportunity to make alliances with the surrounding nations, imbibing

in ever increasing manner, the spirit and worship of their gods (4:17) “ *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.* ” The warning is plain, the examples are numerous. Do you remember Lot who “ *pitched his tent toward Sodom ?* ” (Gen 13:12) Do you recall Solomon who “ *loved many strange women,* ” who “ *turned away his heart after other gods.* ” (1 Kings 11:1) What about Peter, warming his hands with the enemies of Christ ? (Lk 22:54) What about Demas ? Who “ *loved this present world.* ” (2 Tim 4:10) Oh, the danger of incomplete separation. You see, Satan wants us to become “ *conformed to this world.* ” (Rom 12:2) He tells us “ ***when in Rome do as the Romans do.*** ” My the world wants us all to have the same standards, its standards, to accept the same beliefs, its beliefs, to do the same things its things, to visit the same places its places. Sad to say, many believers give in to the world, flesh, and devil and lose their power, joy, and testimony. Young folk, watch the relationships that you form, the places that you frequent, the habits that you commence, for it's all too easy to follow others into the world and lower your standards. (Jn 17:14) I wonder, could this be the cause of your spiritual defection ? (c)

(d) **UNCONSCIOUS DETERIORATION:**

Look if you will at (7:9) Ephraim's deterioration began with an unholy alliance (7:8) that led to idolatry (4:12) that in turn led to immorality (4:2) Do you see what was happening ? The whole fabric of the nation was weakening. Israel was becoming senile and the tragedy was they did not know it. (7:9) What do “ *grey hairs,* ” speak of ? Do they not speak of the decline of life ? I

heard about a lady one time and one day her husband came home from work she was sitting crying. He said, “*Dear, what’s wrong, why are you so upset.*” She said, “*I found a grey hair today. I am going grey. Will you still love me ?*” “*Oh,*” he said “*Darling don’t worry about that. I loved you when you were black-headed, and I loved when you were blonde-headed, and I loved when you were red-headed, and I will love you now you are grey-headed.*” Those grey hairs come unfelt, unknown. Few go grey overnight. Is it not the same spiritually ? Dr. George Sweeting says, “*Collapse in the Christian life is rarely a blow out, it’s usually a slow leak.*” Theodore Epp of Back to the Bible says, “*Backsliding starts in such a subtle way that most of us, are not aware of it, many of us may be backslidden and may not realize it.*” My are you taking it for granted that you’re still walking with God ? Joseph and Mary lost a whole day of fellowship with Jesus because they “*supposed him to be in the company.*” (Lk 2:44) They took for granted something of which they should have made sure. Do you recall the downfall of Peter ? It was gradual not sudden. Peter failed,

1. To Watch and Pray:

You see, if I have adequate resources why pray ? *For prayer is the recognition that your need is not partial but total.* With Peter it happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord Jesus poured out his heart in ardent prayer to the Father. (Matt 26:38) But when He returned to the disciples, what did He find ? Where was the self sufficient Peter ? Fast asleep. Christ said, “*what could ye not watch with me one hour ?*” (Matt 26:40)

Peter’s failure began in the place of prayer, and if you sleep in the place of prayer, a landslide will desolate you.

2. To Walk by Faith:

Now does the one thing not follow the other ? I mean it’s when we are out of touch with God that we resort to carnality. We say and do things that grieve the Holy Spirit. (Eph 4:30) Do you see Peter now ? *In the Garden we see Peter Sleeping in the Flesh, with the Sword we see Peter Fighting in the Flesh,* (Jn 18:10) *before the Multitude we see Peter Cursing in the Flesh.* He failed, 1, 2,

3. To Witness for Christ:

For wanting to save his own skin, he becomes ashamed of his Saviour. The lesson is clear. We should be at pains to discover whether we are going grey spiritually.

My when was the last time you had a spiritual check up ? When last did you look searchingly at yourself in the mirror of the Word of God ? When last did you measure yourself by the divine standard ? The tragedy of your condition might be that you might be grey spiritually and not know it. Do you recall what was said of Samson ? “*And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.*” (Jud 16:20) The tragedy of Ephraim’s condition was “*grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.*” (7:9) (1)

(2) THE CURE FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL CORRECTION

Look at the opening verses of (14:1-2) ? Why are to return unto the Lord ? Because we are still in the family of God, because the love and grace of God is still reaching out to restore you. (11:8) You see, Gomer, Hosea's wife and Israel God's nation, had been the cause of much sorrow, but the fact still remains that Gomer is still Hosea's wife, Israel is still God's nation, and the backsliding believer is still God's child. Do you recall what the Lord says in the prophecy of Jeremiah ? “ *Turn O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.* ” (3:14) You see, God does not stop with a diagnosis of the illness, but He graciously prescribes the cure, which is the same for us as for Israel. Practically speaking here is how again we draw close to the Lord.

(a) **RETURN:**

“ *O Israel, return unto the Lord,* ” (14:1) The way forward is the road back home. Did the Prodigal not discover that ? “ *Return,* ” does that not assume that we have wandered ? Have you been tempted by secular society ? Have you become a victim of materialism ? A prey to worldly pressure ? My we must return to the Lord and when we do that a gracious welcome awaits us from our forgiving God, for the Lord says, “ *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him.* ” (14:4) Recognizing that as a believer you've wandered from God, will you return to God ? Will you return to the Lord from your idols ? Will you return to the Lord from your playacting, from your pretence, from your hypocrisy ? Will you take this first step on the road to recovery ? Robert Robinson, author of

the hymn, “ *Come Thou fount of every blessing,* ” lost the happy communion with the Saviour he had once enjoyed, and in his declining years, he wandered into the bypaths of sin. As a result he became deeply troubled in spirit. Hoping to relieve his mind, he decided to travel. In the course of his journeys, he became with a young lady on spiritual matters, and so she asked him what he thought of a hymn she had just been reading. To his astonishment, he found it to be none other than his own hymn. He tried to evade her question, but she continued to press him for a response. Suddenly he began to weep. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he said, “ *I am the man who wrote that hymn many years ago. I'd give anything to experience again the joy I knew then.* ” Although greatly surprised, she reassured him that the “ *streams of mercy,* ” in his song still flowed. Robert Robinson was deeply touched. Turning “ *his wandering heart,* ” to the Lord he was restored to full fellowship. Is this what you need to do ? (a)

(b) **REPENT:**

This was not to be a vague and general confession but a specific and personal outpouring of a broken heart. Look at (14:2) It's the sin of God's people that not only breaks his law, but breaks his heart. *You see, God is not impassive, without feelings.* For Hosea time and again speaks of the emotions of God. (6:4 11:8) “ *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee Israel ?* ” Israel, like Gomer had played the harlot and the Lord like Hosea, but infinitely more was deeply distressed. Did you ever think of the grief and hurt than an unfaithful wife or

husband brings to their partner ? How hurt would you be if your spouse was having a relationship with someone else ? Then you have a tiny glimpse of the sorrow that our sin brings to God. Repentance is necessary. There must be a turning round and coming back to the Lord. We must say with the Psalmist, “ *For I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin..* ” (Ps 38:18) (a) (b)

(c) **RENOUNCE:**

You see, Israel’s plight was due to compromise. Association with the ruthless Assyrians (13:16) and dependence on Egyptian horses had been their downfall. (7:11 1 Kings 10:28 Deut 17:16) Israel’s theology was not God only, but God plus. God plus Assyrian help, God plus Egyptian aid, but God’s people do not need pluses. That’s why we read in (14:3) “ *Asshur shall not save us* ” You see, the road to spiritual recovery involves the renunciation of entangling alliances. ***Are you willing for that ?*** What about that relationship that you have formed that is outside the will of God ? What about that business alliance that you have established that is outside the will of God ? What about the idol in your life, which is challenging the Lord’s place ? ***You see, God will not tolerate anything in our lives that takes His supreme place.*** Are you prepared to say and mean it,

***The dearest idol I have known,
What’re that idol be
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee***

You say, “ *How will the Lord respond to my return ? And what are the blessings of restored communion ?* ” (1) (2)

(3) **THE CHANGE IN THEIR SPIRITUAL AFFECTION**

Now while the ultimate fulfillment of these blessings must be millennial, since Israel has not, nor will repent in the manner of (14:2-3) until after the Tribulation (Zech 12:10-13) we nonetheless notice spiritual principles for a penitent people. Look at the blessings that God wants to pour out on the soul that loves Him.

(a) **FRESHNESS:**

“ *I will be as the dew unto Israel,* ” (14:5) Superficial goodness is replaced by the refreshing dew of God. Now in the East dew is the main source of renewal and without it vegetation would die. It is not a luxury but a necessity. Do you know something ? The life which is restored becomes fresh by the continual overflow of God’s blessing. And the dew received will become the dew imparted. For Micah says, “ *the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.* ” (Micah 5:7) Do you see the picture ? God refreshing us, then we refreshing others. Is this not exactly what the Saviour said ? “ *He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* ” (Jn 7:38) Do you remember when you really loved the Saviour ? Remember when it was spring time in your soul. Remember the freshness of your first love. My are those things just memories ? Have other things

crowded out His place in your heart ? Listen, if you return, repent, renounce, the Lord will bless you anew and make you a blessing to others. (a)

(b) FRAGRANCE:

Freshness and fragrance belong together. For when drought sets in, the scent of the flower departs. But the promise through Hosea is, “ *they shall revive the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.* ” (14:7) Dr. F. W. Boreham tells of a visit he made to a town in the south of France. A number of women passed him, evidently returning home after a days work in the factory. As they passed, he noticed that their clothes were fragrant. He soon discovered the reason. Their job was to prepare scent from the flowers. Of course, this scent distilled on their clothes and was being transmitted to others. My is something of the fragrance of Jesus Christ being transmitted from our lives to others ? (a) (b)

(c) FRUITFULNESS:

For freshness and fragrance, delightful though they are, are not ends in themselves. Fruitfulness is the end of all nature. And Hosea tells us that the same Lord who sends the dew and produces the fragrance, causes fruitfulness to spring forth. (14:8) Does this not remind you of the Lord's words ? “ *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.* ” (Jn 15:4) Are you fulfilling the Lord's purpose for your life and bringing forth fruit to His glory ? (1) (2) (3)

The Giant of Spiritual Defection is serious yet common. Have you defected ? Not externally but in your heart ? Please, will you come to your senses, and come home to your Father. He's been there waiting for you, aching for you. All you have to do is turn your steps toward home, and He'll come running to embrace you with open arms. I remember well the first time I preached indoors. It was in Tommy Ryan's little Mission Hall in Scarva. Now the reason I was there that night, was because a friend of mine had taken ill and I was asked to go in his place. *That friend had been a great blessing to me spiritually.* A Christian who was consistent in his walk with God, in his interest in the meetings. Someone who had a genuine concern for the lost. Someone to whom I often turned for spiritual counsel and guidance. A preacher and singer of the Cross.

Then he defected and lost interest in the things of God. His paths and mine never seemed to cross until a few years ago. At his godly father's funeral, I gently prodded him spiritually. I encouraged him to “ *return unto the Lord.* ” As I walked to my car, his response brought an ache to my heart and a tear to my eye. “ *Oh, the years of sinning wasted.* ” Tell me, in all honesty, before the Lord, are you where he is ? Whatever the reason have you left your “ *first love* ? ” Do you need to take decisive steps to be alone with the Lord ? Will you take those steps right now ? (Matt 10:37-38)

