

ILLUSTRATED MESSAGE SERIES BY PASTOR RICHARD BASED ON
THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS BY C.S.LEWIS

The Screwtape Letters ~ Letter 12 ~ Backslidden?

January 10th, 2021

Before reading the following overview of this Letter, please click on the link above to read the book and for today's Illustrated Message, please read **Letter 12**. The wonderful thing about these Illustrated Messages, is that we're illustrating them with the Word of God. There's no better way to illustrate this story that C.S. Lewis has written other than with the Bible.

Let's start by reading **James 5:19-20** which is the heart of the Lord for this word today, for the sinner and for those who are born again, but are in need of repentance in their lives. It says; *"19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 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."*

This specifically refers to Christians who are sinning, who need to be turned back to the narrow path.

Screwtape says of the Patient; *"We know that we have introduced a change of direction in his course which is already carrying him out of his orbit around the Enemy; but he must be made to imagine that all the choices which have effected this change of course are trivial and revocable. He must not be allowed to suspect that he is now, however slowly, heading right away from the sun on a line which will carry him into the cold and dark of utmost space."*

The plan of the devil, if he gets away with it, is to change the Christian's course from their walk with Jesus, to a road of cold, dark destruction. If you were to honestly evaluate your life from the time of becoming a Christian till now, you would see areas where you may have backslid from the Lord either in heart or in action, in one way or another. Don't lie to yourself, be honest, and especially if you've been a Christian for 30-40 years. There has to be some area where the devil tripped you up and got you going down some bunny trail and distracted with the goal of getting you out of orbit with God.

Be it a great or small slide backwards, it usually is a gradual one that starts small and slowly gets bigger. It's like that great analogy about the frog that is put in a pot of warm water, the heat is turned up slowly without the frog even aware that it is being cooked until it is too late to jump out. You may be like that frog right now and you need to jump out of the sin you're in now before it cooks you without you even knowing it, and you find yourself at the Judgement seat of Christ and are cut off from entering heaven and are thrown into the fire of Hell for eternity.

Let's read from The Dake Bible commentary on backsliding, which as you can see, is today's theme. It says; *"The theory that God will not punish, judge, and condemn His people when they backslide and persist in sin and rebellion has no foundation in any attribute, act, promise, prophecy, covenant or revelation of God. He has been just and good to all in all ages, blessing men when in obedience and cursing the same men when in disobedience. He is impartial to men, and nothing can cause Him to be unlike what He is and has revealed Himself to be. God has given hundreds of warnings for men not to backslide lest they be cut off and die in their sin and rebellion, to suffer the fate of all sinners. He has given us many examples of angels, demons, and men who have actually suffered and will yet suffer such destiny. The facts are facts and must be accepted as such."*

Jesus says in **John 15:1-6**; *"15 'I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He [a]takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can*

do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

Now, you may believe that once your born again and that regardless of the sin you’re in, your name can’t be blotted out of the Book of Life and you have eternal security. But let’s see what **Revelation 3:1-6** says to that in reference to the dead Church; “*And to the [a]ngel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before [b]God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 [c]You have a few names [d]even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and **I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***”

Notice the condition is overcoming SIN, in order to **not** be blotted out of the Book of Life. As a Christian, you have to be holy, overcome sin, the trials, the persecutions and the temptations of the devil that want to get you off track in order to back slide. We see this church in Sardis was back slidden, Jesus was calling them dead and were not perfect, so it’s obvious that there was sin abounding in it.

In Letter 12, Screwtape is advising Wormwood how to cause the patient to backslide while attending Church without him even knowing it. Screwtape says of the patient: “*As long as he retains externally the habits of a Christian he can still be made to think of himself as one who has adopted a few new friends and amusements but whose spiritual state is much the same as it was six weeks ago. And while he thinks that, we do not have to contend with the explicit repentance of a definite, fully recognised, sin, but only with his vague, though uneasy, feeling that he hasn’t been doing very well lately.*”

You see this often in Church don’t you, when Christians say that they’re not doing very well. They’ve exchanged the word ‘sin’ for the name or label of the disfunction, i.e.; addiction, mental illness, sexual identity issues, etc., that they’re struggling with.

1 John 1:9 says; “*9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Notice the condition to be forgiven is confession of sin. It’s not about a person vaguely saying that they’re not doing well. It is about confession of sin and confession of sin to one another so you might be healed, saved, set free, delivered and forgiven. Going to the altar at church is a great place to do this. I’m not talking about going to the Catholic confession booth either.

The devil doesn’t mind that you going to Church, so long as you just maintain a religious facade and don’t participate in key areas that would bring conviction of sin, so that just like the frog in the pot, you will die in your sin thinking your going to heaven only to find yourself condemned to hell because of unrepented sin.

How many Christians are attending Church on a regular basis, but are not at the altar for prayer, are not singing the songs and are not participating in communion? Prayer, worship and participating in communion are key areas of Christian fellowship that require repentance of sin, and this is why so many Christians who once attended Church are not attending any more, simply because they want to continue in sin without any accountability to the church body of Christ. When there is sin in your life, you don’t want to worship, you don’t want to pray, you don’t want to confess your sin or have communion. Participating in communion is very

powerful, but the prerequisite is to examine your heart, to confess your sin, because if not, you bring judgment upon yourself as we read in [1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#).

Screwtape says of the patient; *“A few weeks ago you had to tempt him to unreality and inattention in his prayers: but now you will find him opening his arms to you and almost begging you to distract his purpose and benumb his heart. He will want his prayers to be unreal, for he will dread nothing so much as effective contact with the Enemy.”*

Hebrews 6:4-6 says; *“4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 [a]if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”*

This explains why those you might know who have backslid, have not come back into the Church. After a person who has fallen away from Christ and hardened their heart so much, it can become impossible to renew them to repentance. God holds the backslider in His bosom, in His heart, but the devil will make sure that the greater the delay in repentance, the harder it will be to repent and return to Christ. Under the assault of the devil, it gets darker and darker. Where once a Christian could see in the Spirit, they can't see any longer, where they could hear in the Spirit, they can't hear any more. It all starts with that little bit of leaven, the little sin that you never cut off at the root, the one you kept meditating on and didn't take it captive to the obedience of Christ; whatever it may be, it's taken seed in your heart and has started to grow and now you're acting it out in your mind and eventually in your actions.

This is why it's so important to not allow sin to remain unconfessed, because it will ultimately separate you from God.

Hebrews 12:12-17 says; *“12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or [a]profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”*

How many backslidden Christians can't find that place of repentance, even though there are tears? However, it's not truly a prayer of repentance but one of that they got caught.

A good example of someone falling from grace and backsliding is Judas Iscariot, although there are those that would disagree. But as we read these scriptures, we'll see the truth of the matter.

Referencing The Dake Bible again, we read some of the following points about Judas:

#1 He was a familiar friend of Christ (Ps. 41:9). Would Christ call any unsaved man or the devil (as some suppose Judas to be) “My own familiar friend?”

#2 Christ trusted Judas at one time or He would not have said “in whom I trusted” (Ps 41:9; Heb. Batah, to confide in, as to be secure without fear; used in this sense 107 times) Would He have confided in such a man if he had always been this way?

#3 Judas ate of Christ's bread (Ps 41:9). This always assures Eastern people of very personal and intimate friendship.

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#4 He had his name written in the Book of Life with the righteous (Acts 1:20, Ps. 69:25-28).

#5 He was a bishop of the church Christ is building (Acts 1:20, Ps. 109:8).

#6 He had part of the apostolic ministry (Acts 1:17,25).

#7 Christ gave him power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and disease. This was true of the twelve, Judas included (Mt. 10:1-4).

#8 He was sent forth as one of the twelve to represent Christ among Israel (Mt. 10:5-6).

#9 He was called to preach (Mt. 10:7).

#10 He was commanded to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons (Mt. 10:8, Mk 3:14-15).

#11 He freely received power to heal and it was commanded that he freely give it (Mt. 10:8). If Judas could preach, heal, cast out demons and have other experiences mentioned and yet be unsaved and never in grace, should not those who are saved and in grace be able to do as much?

#12 He had the pace of god to give to a home as did all the others of the twelve (Mt. 12: 10:13).

#13 he was a sheep in the midst of wolves like others of the twelve (Mt. 10:16).

#14 He had the Holy Spirit in him (Mt. 10:19-20).

#15 He was ordained by Christ to the ministry as much as the others (Mk. 3:14).

#16 He was just as successful in preaching and healing as others (Mk.6:12-13).

#17 He was an apostle, meaning he was one divinely called and sent to do the work of God (Lk. 6:13, Acts 15:33).

#18 Judas fell by sin from the ministry and apostleship (Acts 1:25). How could he do this if he was always a sinner and always a devil as some say?

#19 Satan entered into Judas at the close of Christ's ministry, proving that he was not always an agent of the devil much less a devil from the beginning (Lk. 22:3). He backslid therefore, and became a thief (Lk 22:3; "Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve." Jh. 12:6; "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.), a devil (Jh. 6:70; "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?") and the betrayer. To make Judas the very devil, a devil from the beginning and an unsaved man never in grace is to ignore the plain facts of Scripture.

#20 He had eternal life at one time, as proved from Jh. 17:1-2; "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He [a]should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him." Then in Jh. 17:12; "While I was with them [a]in the world, I kept them in [b]Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is [c]lost except the son of [d]perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.) is lost, except the son of perdition." What could be more clear than this – that Judas was given to Jesus and Jesus had once given him eternal life?

Backsliding starts with unconfessed sin and this is why it's so important to confess your sins committed, be it in heart or in action, be it great or small, sin is sin and it must be confessed to God to be forgiven.

Screwtape says of the patient; *“You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy.”*

All sin starts the heart and if not confessed and repented of will lead to being acted out in one way or another.

1 John 3:15 says; *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”*

Sounds like a small sin to hate someone but apparently, it’s murder, whether acted out or not, it’s acted out in the heart.

In **Matthew 5:27-28**, Jesus talks about adultery in the heart; *“27 ‘You have heard that it was said [a]to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

The sin of adultery does not have to be acted out is the point that Jesus is making, but is the same sin when it is in the heart of a man or women to commit it. All sin starts in the heart of a man or women, and this is where the devil plants the seed to sin, and if yielded to, and is not confessed and repented of, it will grow and eventually be acted out in one way or another, it’s just a matter of time.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 says; *“12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to [a]bear it.”*

What it comes down to is that we are without excuse to sin, being that with the temptation is also provided the guarantee that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

James 1:12-15 says; *“12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

The tendency is to blame God or the devil or someone else for our sin, instead of taking ownership of it for having allowed the seed that the devil plants to grow in our hearts and minds instead of resisting it before it takes root. Didn’t Adam do the same thing? He never took ownership for his sin but blamed Eve.

James 4:7-10 says; *“7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”*

Screwtape says; *“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”*

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I believe a day will come when it will be outlawed to use the term sin to address moral failures, and it will be classed as a hate crime, but until then the wages of sin is still death and eternal separation from God in a place called hell, where the fire does not go out and the worm does not die.

Romans 6:23; *“for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of god is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

For teaching on the Holy Spirit, please go to the [Holy Spirit Power Series](#) on our website.