



SPIRITUAL BACKSLIDING

outward faithfulness but inward decay

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First Printed 2016 in the United Kingdom.

A catalogue record for this booklet is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-910013-07-6

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Published by Reformation Scotland Trust
Whiteside House,
Bathgate
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The Aim of the Trust is "to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland". The Second Reformation (1638-1662) was a period of radical reformation and rediscovery of Biblical truth in the Church of Scotland. It was also the period of greatest revival throughout the whole nation that Scotland has ever experienced.

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A glossary of unfamiliar terms is also available on this site which may be of help in studying this booklet.

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ wrote a challenging letter to Ephesus in the second chapter of Revelation. James Durham (1622-1658) says that we should consider this as if Christ were writing a letter to Scotland. In this letter Christ would say that despite much zeal and hard work in the kingdom of God, we have left our first love.

Durham felt that the message of this booklet was highly relevant for the Church in Scotland then. Many were guilty of defection. "Not an outward defection from the truth and purity of doctrine, nor from the external duties of religion, but an inward defection. Decline in the exercise of grace. We have not been so careful to keep up the exercise of grace before God, as to be seen of men".

It is easier to be consumed by outward activity rather than motivated by inward love and grace. Activity is highly visible; our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is largely invisible. But it is visible to Christ. Durham makes the solemn observation: "Backsliding and decline from what folk have been, either in profession or practice, is and will be foremost in Christ's charges against them."

He reminds us of Christ threatening to remove our candlestick. "This is the threatening applied to this sin of declining in love". Within only a few years, the Church in Scotland was sorely chastised. Our greatest threat may well be from within rather than without.

This booklet contains James Durham's comments on Revelation 2:4 in an updated form. Is it relevant to us today? Absolutely. We must also view this message as

Christ's message directed to Scotland today. Grace truly exercised is in decline. Spiritual backsliding is surely endemic amongst us. We must acknowledge that it is true of us as individuals, if we are honest with ourselves. As Durham put it:

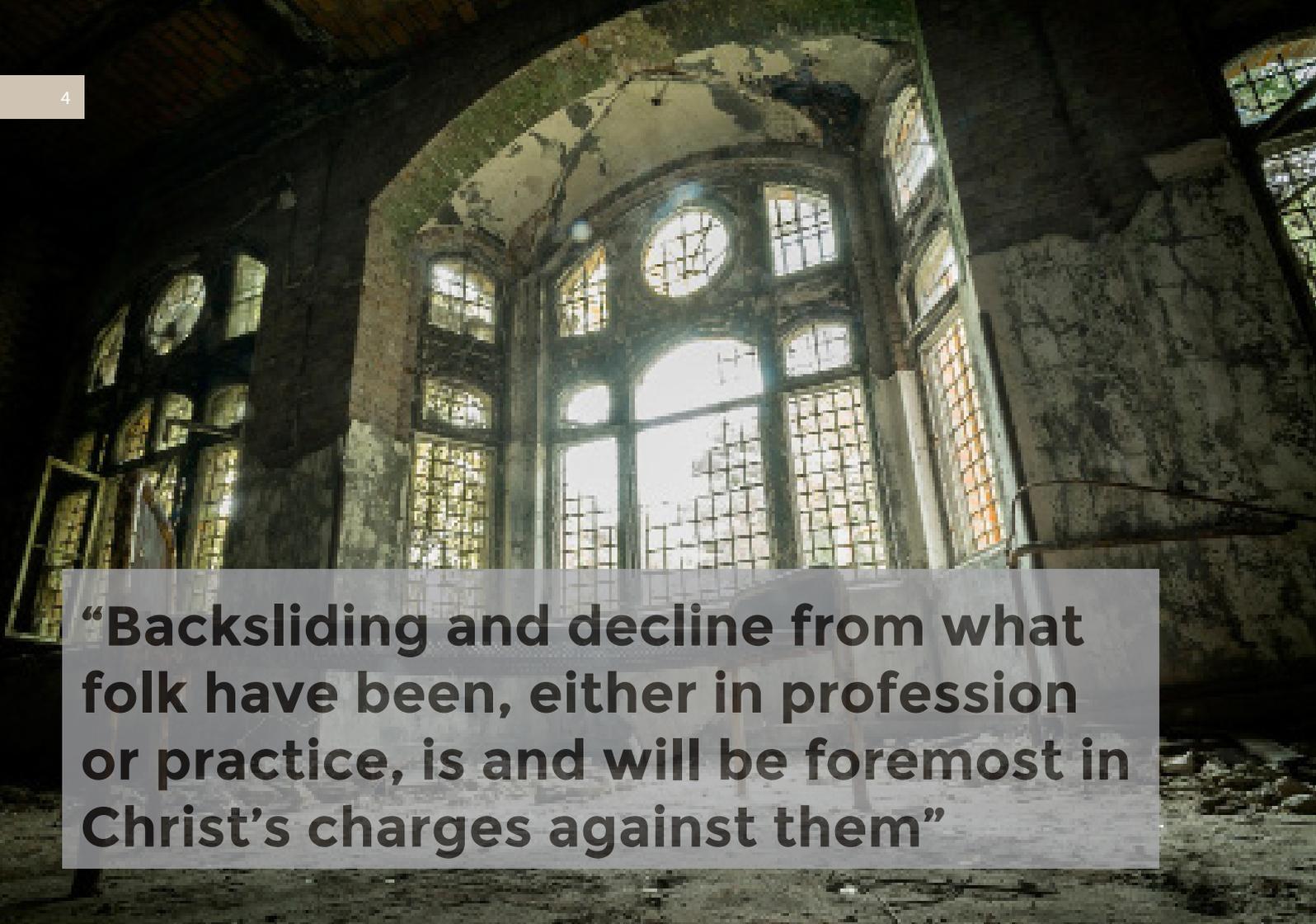
"the sin is ours, the duty is ours and the threatening also belongs to us"

These few pages are as challenging to us individually as perhaps could be. This is what the Spirit is saying to the Churches today. We must lend our ears to this message.

Durham was a diligent minister who was searching but careful in his sermons. Renowned for eminent godliness and humility, he was also able to resolve complex questions and issues.

He was a minister for only eleven years but left a considerable number of writings. While expounding the Book of Revelation from the pulpit he devoted two days each week to fasting and prayer. This was to seek divine help for a correct understanding of its meaning.

He expressed simple trust on his deathbed: "for all that I have preached and written, there is but one scripture I can remember or dare grasp... 'whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out'".



“Backsliding and decline from what folk have been, either in profession or practice, is and will be foremost in Christ’s charges against them”

Remember and repent

There are three steps to the command prescribed by our Lord. Each one of them makes way for another.

They are: “remember”, “repent” and “do the first works”. We are also taught the following:

Remember

This means: “consider how it is with you and how it was at the beginning”. They might understand their case by reflecting upon themselves and comparing their present condition with the past.

“Remember” implies that for a time they had disregarded and forgotten their condition. This had made them slip into and continue in that backslidden condition without being challenged. Such neglect is the opposite of remembering.

Remembering is not simply an act of the memory. It is also a conscious exercise of the conscience and affections after self-reflection. This is the same as the call to

remember our ways in Ezekiel 16:61.

We are also taught the following:

1. Forgetfulness of our condition and lack of self-reflection is the great cause of much decline and backsliding in heart. It also keeps us in that state. Self-examination, remembering our own way and reflecting on ourselves are essential. They are notable ways to prevent decline and to maintain a good condition. They are also ways to advance repentance and recover a good condition that has been lost.
2. Believers can fall into this neglect.
3. When believers become negligent they decline in part though not entirely.
4. When believers fall they must follow the same way

in which they first repented and believed in order to recover.

5. Believers may decline greatly and yet be unaware of this and of how far they have fallen. It is difficult to convince people of this when the decline is within and their outward behaviour is satisfactory.

“consider how it is with you and how it was at the beginning”



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