

## Canons of Dort–5<sup>th</sup> Head: 4-6 – The Backslider

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: As I was growing up, sometimes I heard that someone who was a Christian the week before wasn't a Christian any more. Is it possible for someone to be a Christian one week and not a Christian the next? According to what I was told, it was possible: A true believer could become a pagan 异教徒. Eternal life, according to that church, could cease to be eternal life 永生. But that was a lie, an awful lie, a serious lie. Today you will hear from God's Word that though a Christian may wander from God for a time, a true believer will never, and can never, lose his salvation.

Our headings are:

Believers Succumb 屈服于 to Serious Sins

Believers Suffer from Serious Sins

Believers Saved from Serious Sins

Our goals are: That you will not lose hope when you or someone you know backslides 倒退, but that you will submit to the Lord and call upon him for help to be restored if you or someone stray 迷路.

### Believers Succumb to Serious Sins

**Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins** -The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only is it possible for them to be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

**1. God has equipped you with his Word and Spirit and therefore you have the perfect means to prepare and fight the flesh, the world, and the Devil – and win every single time.**

**2. But the believer doesn't always fight against his nature because** he is not "activated and motivated" in his heart to stay close to God. He is not always drawing strength from God's Word and Spirit. **Sometimes he doesn't pray** as he should so he becomes exposed to danger in a weakened 减弱 state. Because of these weaknesses he falls into the trap his 3 enemies set for him. This is what Jesus said:

Matthew 26:41 "**Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.** The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Look another example:

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, **that he may sift you as wheat** 筛麦子一样. 32 "But **I have prayed for you**, that your faith should not fail..."

**3. When are careless and do not stay close to God you commit serious sins against your Savior.** Your

lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eye, and the pride of life lead you to violate God's holy decrees法令. Christians rebel against the authorities, murder, commit adultery – even the worst kind, steal, lie, and covet贪图. But worse than that, yes, worse than that are those who lust after other gods, make idols of things, care less about God's name, and ignore the Sabbath. Christians break all of God's laws – these greater ones and the lesser ones.

**Practically, look how this works:**

a. If you aren't close to God, when you work hard and get a lot of money you will forget to guard your soul against wealth and be lured away by others into sin. With wealth you can feel powerful so you don't love your wife as you ought to, and you end in divorce. With wealth you can choose creature comforts over kingdom work.

b. If you aren't close to God, when you choose a spouse, you don't pray for wisdom to make a good choice. You then marry a woman that doesn't meet God's standards and you end up worshipping her idols!

c. If you aren't close to God you can become a follower of wicked friends and find out that they pull you away from worshipping...or they change how you talk...and you stop caring for the fellowship of believers.

d. If you aren't close to God and his Word doesn't resonate in your hearts, and you sit in front of your computer, you are likely to wander into websites that you shouldn't.

**So do not think for a minute that you are beyond backsliding into serious sins.** Anyone can backslide. If you choose to dwell on sin for a long time, it will lead you down a backsliding path. Even ministers, elders, and deacons can be led down this path. The truth is, as our catechism says, we only have the beginning of obedience in this life.

**5. God permits the backslider to be carried away by his lusts and backslide.** But be careful! This is does not make the Lord the source or cause of sin. God simply leaves him to his own devices and he sins against him. Look at Scripture.

**2Samuel 24:1** Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and **He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."**

Surely this looks like God caused David to backslide and trust in his military might instead of God. But God simply left him to his own devices. Look at:

**1Chronicles 21:1** Now **Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.**

When God left David alone, the Devil lured him to trust in horses and chariots instead of God. So he numbered Israel. When God withdrew his support for David, he was exposed to an enemy he could not win. David lived in a backslidden state for a long time. Many men of the Bible fell into sin...even Peter and Moses.

**6. But at the same time, even when you backslide, remember that God is still in control and his hand is always on you.** He didn't lift you up to let you down.

## **Believers Suffer from Serious Sins**

**Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins:** By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, **deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend中止the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience良心,** and sometimes **lose the awareness of grace for a time**—until, after **they have returned to the right way by genuine repentance,** God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

**1. Because he knows better and have been taught better, if one backslides and offends His Holy Majesty in heaven,** he **deserves death in hell.** Look at an example of how God viewed backsliding...particularly, in idolatry.

**Exodus 32:9** And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked固执people! 10 "Now therefore, let Me alone, that **My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.** And I will make of you a great nation."

And look at the punishment God put on those who were backsliding gluttons贪婪的食客. God wasn't enough for them!

**Numbers 11:33** But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the **LORD struck the people with a very great plague瘟疫.**

And need I remind you of what God did to Jerusalem when the Romans surrounded in in AD70?

**2. Furthermore, on top of suffering, these sins cause the Holy Spirit in you to grieve,** and when he is grieved you can expect to live a life of discomfort不适! **He loves you; but he can't look at sin.** So he wounds 击伤your heart!

**Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupt word proceed继续out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification启迪, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,** by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

There is nothing more difficult to deal with that spiritual pain.

**Psalms 32:3** When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality生命力was turned into the drought干旱of summer.

**3. The one who is seriously suffering in his backsliding state shows it!** He will not sing like he ought to sing. He will not be as friendly as he ought to be. He won't look forward to celebrating the Lord's Supper. He may even deny knowing the Lord. Life becomes an exercise in just existing. Or, he may outwardly表面地do what God requires, but it is all a fake, like the Pharisees. They kept the Sabbath, but they saw it as a weariness疲劳...a headache.

**4. The backslider might face severe suffering so that he might even think that he is no longer a Christian.**

## 5. The backslider stay backslidden until he comes to his senses and cries for God's help.

### Believers Saved from Serious Sins

**Article 6: God's Saving Intervention** - For **God, who is rich in mercy**, according to the **unchangeable purpose of election**, does not take the Holy Spirit from the chosen completely, even when they fall grievously惨重. Neither does God let them fall down so far that they forfeit丧失 the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge跳进 themselves, entirely forsaken离弃 by God, into eternal ruin毁灭.

#### 1. The backsliding Christian is not saved by his own strength, but when God intervenes干预 and grants him aid and bends his will back to look to him.

**2Samuel 24:10** And **David's heart condemned him** after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done..."

**Psalm 32:5** **I acknowledged my sin to You**, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions罪行 to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

#### 2. God restores the backslider because God elected him to eternal salvation. He justified him. He adopted him as his child. God does not help the backslider because the backslider is good. He helps the backslider because he (God) is good. So God never lets the backslider fall so far that he cannot return.

**Exodus 34:6** And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding丰盛 in goodness and truth,

**Malachi 3:6** "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore **you are not consumed**耗损, O sons of Jacob.

**Philippians 1:6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you **will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ**;

#### 3. God will even protect the backslider to not blaspheme亵渎 against the Holy Spirit, which would have left him in eternal ruin and under the condemnation非难 of hell.

#### 4. The Arminians argue against this doctrine in 2 ways.

First, they believe a Christian can be lost completely; he could become a pagan again. Look at:

**1John 3:9** Whoever has been born of God does not sin (continue), for **His seed remains in him**; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

**John 10:28** "And I **give them eternal life**, and they shall never perish灭亡; neither shall anyone snatch抢夺 them out of My hand.

Second, they believe that if a Christian backslides and becomes a non-Christian, he can get up by myself. (The Reformed Christian says: How grateful I am because God picked me up after I fall down!) To try to prove his point, the Arminian uses passages like Luke 15, the Prodigal son, to

teach that man can come to his senses by himself. The trouble is, that was a parable 寓言, a parable that was not intended to teach the principles of restoring the loss, but a parable to teach how heaven rejoices when a sinner repents. Parables have only one meaning! And even so, there is nothing that proves that the Prodigal son was not a Christian when he lived wickedly. He was just a straying Christian...like David and Solomon!

**Here is one more passage that Arminians use to suggest a Christian can become a non-Christian.**

Hebrews 6:4 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 **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.

But this passage was not intended to teach that you could lose your salvation. You can't lose eternal life. This passage was teaching what God would do and could do: God would keep you and prevent you from losing your salvation. Look at the answer. There was no chance of this happening! He was simply emphasizing the greatness of our salvation.

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, **we are confident of better things concerning you**, yes, things that accompany salvation, **though we speak in this manner.**

Here is the kicker: If this verse meant that you could lose your salvation, then it is also teaching that one who loses his salvation could never get it back.

### **Conclusion:**

Believers succumb to very serious sins at times and can suffer serious spiritual and physical pain from them. They may even be away from the church of God for a long time. The only way a man can come back is when God works in him.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Praise God for his protecting power of his children. Though you or your loved ones stray, he brings you back. Praise God for his willingness to bring you back when you stray. He could have left you alone, but he didn't. You are his treasured possession. Love him. And stay close to him so that you don't stray from Christ's love.

Finally, while straying Christians will be returned to the fold of God, if you are not a Christian, you walk after your father the Devil and march right into hell, that is, unless you get God to be your Father. To get God to be your Father, your sins have to be paid for in Jesus Christ. He offers that payment to you.