

Warning Signs of Religious Declension

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Many are the warning signs of religious declension and spiritual back-sliding in a professing Christian. It is a mark of religious declension, or worse:

- when you are reluctant to have religious conversation, and the company of serious, heavenly-minded Christians, and when you enjoy yourself best with the men of the world;
- when from preference, you are absent from meetings for prayer, confine yourself to Sabbath meetings, are easily detained from them, and are ready to excuse such neglects;
- when you are afraid to consider certain duties seriously, in case your conscience should rebuke past neglect, and insist on fidelity now;
- when it is your object, in doing duty, more to pacify your conscience than to honour Christ, obtain spiritual profit, or do good to others;
- when you have an unduly critical spirit respecting the preaching of Christ's ministers; are dissatisfied with the manner as being inelegant, too plain, too intellectual, or not according to some favourite model; or dissatisfied with the matter, as being too doctrinal, or too preceptive, or when you complain of it as too close and direct;
- when you are more afraid of being thought of as strict, than of sinning against God by negligence in practice and unfaithfulness to Christ;
- when you have little fear of temptation, and can trifle with spiritual danger;
- when you thirst for the approval of the men of the world, and are more anxious to know what they think or say of you than whether you honour the Saviour in their sight.
- when scandals to religion are more the subject of your censure than of your secret grieving and prayer to God, and of faithful endeavours for their removal;
- when you are more afraid to encounter the scorn of an offending man by rebuking sin, than of offending God by silence;
- when you are more bent on being rich than holy;
- when you cannot receive reproof for faults, are unwilling to confess them, and justify yourself;
- when you are impatient and unforbearing towards the frailties, faults and misjudgements of others;
- when your reading of the Bible is formal, hasty, merely intellectual, and unattended with self-application; or when you read almost any other book with more interest than the Word of God;
- when you have more religion out and about than at home: are apparently fervent when "seen of men" but languid and careless when seen only in the family or by God alone;
- when your religious taste is more for the new things of men, than for the old things of the treasury of God's Word;
- when you call spiritual sloth and withdrawal from Christian activity by the names of prudence and peaceableness, while sinners are going to destruction, and the Church suffering declension; and are unmindful that prudence can be united with zealous fidelity, and peaceableness with the most anxious seeking of the salvation of souls;
- when, because there is false zeal abroad, you will neither trust yourself or others, nor seek to be 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord', as the Apostle Paul taught and practised;
- when you are secretly more gratified at the falls of some professor of religion, than grieved for the wounds he inflicts upon Christ;
- when, under the chastisement of God, you think more of your sufferings than your desserts, and look more or relief than purification of sin;
- when you confess, but do not forsake besetting sin;
- when you acknowledge, but still neglect duty;

If these warning signs be found in a believer, he or she is in great need of God's pardoning mercy and restoring grace. *"Have mercy upon me, O God ... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities, Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me ... Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."* Psalm 51:1,9,10,12. In any case, those who profess the name of Christ must constantly be relying on the Keeper of Israel for preservation.