

# A Call to Backsliders

by John Wesley

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*The sermon 'A Call to Backsliders' emphasizes the importance of hope and the mercy of God in the face of backsliding, and argues that even notorious backsliders can be renewed again to repentance.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 6:4

**Topics:** "Backsliding", "Hope and Restoration"

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## Description

John Wesley addresses the plight of backsliders, emphasizing the dangers of both presumption and despair in their spiritual journey. He warns that many presume upon God's mercy while neglecting His justice, believing they can live in sin without consequence. Conversely, others fall into despair, feeling hopeless and powerless to escape their sins, leading them to abandon their spiritual fight. Wesley reassures that even those who feel utterly lost can find hope and restoration through God's grace, urging them to return to Him with a sincere heart. He concludes by affirming that God's mercy is always available for those who genuinely seek it, regardless of their past failures.

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## Transcript

"Will the Lord absent himself for ever? And will he be no more entreated? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? And is his promise come utterly to an end for evermore?" Ps. 77:7, 8.

1. Presumption is one grand snare of the devil, in which many of the children of men are taken. They so presume upon the mercy of God as utterly to forget his justice. Although he has expressly declared, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," yet they flatter themselves, that in the end God will be better than his word. They imagine they may live and die in their sins, and nevertheless "escape the damnation of hell."

2. But although there are many that are destroyed by presumption, there are still more that perish by despair. I mean, by want of hope; by thinking it impossible that they should escape destruction. Having many times fought against their spiritual enemies, and always been overcome, they lay down their arms; they no more contend, as they have no hope of victory. Knowing, by melancholy experience that they have no power of themselves to help themselves, and having no expectation that God will help them, they lie down under their burden. They no longer strive; for they suppose it is impossible they should attain.

3. In this case, as in a thousand others, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness, but a stranger intermeddled not with his grief." It is not easy for those to know it who never felt it: For "who knoweth the things of a

man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?" Who knoweth, unless by his own experience, what this sort of wounded spirit means? Of consequence, there are few that know how to sympathize with them that are under this sore temptation. There are few that have duly considered the case; few that are not deceived by appearances. They see men go on in a course of sin, and take it for granted, it is out of mere presumption: Whereas, in reality, it is from the quite contrary principle; -- it is out of mere despair. Either they have no hope at all, -- and while that is the case, they do not strive at all, -- or they have some intervals of hope, and while that lasts, "strive for the mastery." But that hope soon fails: They then cease to strive, and "are taken captive of Satan at his will."

4. This is frequently the case with those that began to run well, but soon tired in the heavenly road; with those in particular who once "saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," but afterwards grieved his Holy Spirit, and made shipwreck of the faith. Indeed, many of these rush into sin, as a horse into the battle. They sin with so high an hand, as utterly to quench the Holy Spirit of God; so that he gives them up to their own heart's lusts, and lets them follow their own imaginations. And those who are thus given up may be quite stupid, without either fear, or sorrow, or care; utterly easy and unconcerned about God, or heaven, or hell; to which the god of this world contributes not a little, by blinding and hardening their hearts. But still even these would not be so careless, were it not for despair. The great reason why they have no sorrow or care is, because they have no hope. They verily believe they have so provoked God, that "he will be no more entreated."

5. And yet we need not utterly give up even these. We have known some even of the careless ones whom God has visited again, and restored to their first love. But we may have much more hope for those backsliders who are not careless, who are still uneasy; -- those who fain would escape out of the snare of the devil, but think it is impossible. They are fully convinced they cannot save themselves, and believe God will not save them. They believe he has irrevocably "shut up his lovingkindness in displeasure." They fortify themselves in believing this, by abundance of reasons; and unless those reasons are clearly removed, they cannot hope for any deliverance.

It is in order to relieve these hopeless, helpless souls, that I propose, with God's assistance,

I. To inquire what the chief of those reasons are, some or other of which induce so many backsliders to cast away hope; to suppose that God hath forgotten to be gracious. And,

II. To give a clear and full answer to each of those reasons.

I. I am, First, to inquire, what the chief of those reasons are, which induce so many backsliders to think that God hath forgotten to be gracious. I do not say all the reasons; for innumerable are those which either their own evil hearts, or that old serpent, will suggest; but the chief of them; -- those that are most plausible, and therefore most common.

1. The first argument which induces many backsliders to believe that "the Lord will be no more entreated," is drawn from the very reason of the thing: "If," say they, "a man rebel against an earthly prince, many times he dies for the first offence; he pays his life for the first transgression. Yet, possibly, if the crime be extenuated by some favourable circumstance, or if strong intercession be made for him, his life may be given him. But if, after a full and free pardon he were guilty of rebelling a second time, who would dare to intercede for him? He must expect no farther mercy. Now, if one rebelling against an earthly king, after he has been freely pardoned once, cannot with any colour of reason hope to be forgiven a second time; what must be the case of him that, after having been freely pardoned for rebelling against the great King of

heaven and earth, rebels against him again? What can be expected, but that `vengeance will come upon him to the uttermost"

2. (1.) This argument, drawn from reason, they enforce by several passages of Scripture. One of the strongest of these is that which occurs in the First Epistle of St. John: (1 John 5:16.) "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and God shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it."

Hence they argue, "Certainly, I do not say that he shall pray for it, is equivalent with, I say he shall not pray for it. So the Apostle supposes him that has committed this sin, to be in a desperate state indeed! So desperate, that we may not even pray for his forgiveness; we may not ask life for him And what may we more reasonably suppose to be a sin unto death, than a wilful rebellion after a full and free pardon?"

(2). "Consider, Secondly," say they, "those terrible passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews; one of which occurs in the sixth chapter, the other in the tenth. To begin with the latter "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no other sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance is mine; I will recompense, saith the Lord. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Heb. 6:26-31.) Now, is it not here expressly declared by the Holy Ghost, that our case is desperate? Is it not declared, that `if, after we have received the knowledge of the truth,' after we have experimentally known it, `we sin wilfully,' -- which we have undoubtedly done, and that over and over, -- `there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin; but a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries?'

(3). "And is not that passage in the sixth chapter exactly parallel with this? `It is impossible for those that were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, -- if they fall away,' (literally, and have fallen away,) `to renew them again unto repentance: Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.' (Heb. 6:4-6.)

(4). "It is true, some are of opinion, that those words, it is impossible, are not to be taken literally as denoting absolute impossibility; but only a very great difficulty. But it does not appear that we have any sufficient reason to depart from the literal meaning; as it neither implies any absurdity, nor contradicts any other Scriptures. Does not this then," say they, "cut off all hope; seeing we have undoubtedly, `tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost?' How is it possible to `renew us again to repentance;' to an entire change both of heart and life? Seeing we have crucified to ourselves `the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.'

(5). "A yet more dreadful passage, if possible, than this, is that in the twelfth chapter of St. Matthew: `All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men: And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him. But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.' (Matt. 12:31, 32.) Exactly parallel to these are those words of our Lord, which are recited by St. Mark: `Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven, but is in danger of eternal damnation.' (Mark 3:28, 29.)

(6.) It has been the judgment of some, that all these passages point at one and the same sin; that not only the words of our Lord, but those of St. John, concerning the 'sin unto death,' and those of St. Paul concerning 'crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, treading underfoot the Son of God, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace, 'all refer to the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; the only sin that shall never be forgiven. Whether they do or no, it must be allowed that this blasphemy is absolutely unpardonable; and that, consequently, for those who have been guilty of this, God 'will be no more entreated.'

3. To confirm those arguments, drawn from reason and Scripture, they appeal to matter of fact. They ask, "Is it not a fact, that those who fall away from justifying grace, who make 'shipwreck of the faith,' that faith whereof cometh present salvation, perish without mercy? How much less can any of those escape, who fall away from sanctifying grace! who make shipwreck of that faith whereby they are cleansed from all pollution of flesh and spirit! Has there ever been an instance of one or the other of these being renewed again to repentance? If there be any instances of that, one would be inclined to believe that thought of our poet not to be extravagant: --

"E'en Judas struggles his despair to quell,

Hope almost blossoms in the shades of hell."

II. These are the principal arguments drawn from reason, from Scripture, and from fact, whereby backsliders are wont to justify themselves in casting away hope; in supposing that God hath utterly "shut up his lovingkindness in displeasure." I have proposed them in their full strength, that we may form the better judgment concerning them, and try whether each of them may not receive a clear, full, satisfactory answer.

1. I begin with that argument which is taken from the nature of the thing: "If a man rebel against an earthly prince, he may possibly be forgiven the first time. But if, after a full and free pardon, he should rebel again, there is no hope of obtaining a second pardon: He must expect to die without mercy. Now, if he that rebels again against an earthly king, can look for no second pardon, how can he look for mercy who rebels a second time against the great King of heaven and earth?"

2. I answer: This argument, drawn from the analogy between earthly and heavenly things, is plausible, but it is not solid; and that for this plain reason: Analogy has no place here: There can be no analogy or proportion between the mercy of any of the children of men, and that of the most high God. "Unto whom will ye liken me, saith the Lord?" Unto whom either in heaven or earth? Who, "what is he among the gods, that shall be compared unto the Lord?" "I have said, Ye are gods," saith the Psalmist, speaking to supreme magistrates. Such is your dignity and power compared to that of common men. But what are they to the God of heaven? As a bubble upon the wave. What is their power in comparison of his power? What is their mercy compared to his mercy? Hence that comfortable word, "I am God, and not man, therefore the house of Israel is not consumed." Because he is God, and not man, "therefore his compassions fail not." None then can infer, that because an earthly king will not pardon one that rebels against him a second time, therefore the King of heaven will not. Yea, he will; not until seven times only, or until seventy times seven. Nay, were your rebellions multiplied as the stars of heaven; were they more in number than the hairs of your head; yet "return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon."

3. "But does not St. John cut us off from this hope, by what he says of the 'sin unto death?' Is not, 'I do not say that he shall pray for it,' equivalent with, 'I say he shall not pray for it?' And does not this imply, that God has determined not to hear that prayer? that he will not give life to such a sinner, no, not through the prayer of a righteous man?"

4. I answer: "I do not say that he shall pray for it," certainly means, he shall not pray for it. And it doubtless implies that God will not give life unto them that have sinned this sin; that their sentence is passed, and God has determined it shall not be revoked. It cannot be altered even by that "effectual fervent prayer" which, in other cases, "availeth much."

5. But I ask, First, What is the sin unto death? And, Secondly, What is the death which is annexed to it?

(1) And, First, what is the sin unto death? It is now many years since, being among a people the most experienced in the things of God of any I had ever seen, I asked some of them, What do you understand by the "sin unto death," mentioned in the First Epistle of St. John? They answered, "If anyone is sick among us, he sends for the elders of the Church; and they pray over him, and the prayer of faith saves the sick, and the Lord raises him up. And if he hath committed sins, which God was punishing by that sickness, they are forgiven him. But sometimes none of us can pray that God would raise him up. And we are constrained to tell him, We are afraid that you have sinned a sin unto death;' a sin that God has determined to punish with death; we cannot pray for your recovery. And we have never yet known an instance of such a person recovering."

(2.) I see no absurdity at all in this interpretation of the word. It seems to be one meaning (at least) of the expression, "a sin unto death;" a sin which God has determined to punish by the death of the sinner. If, therefore, you have sinned a sin of this kind, and your sin has overtaken you; if God is chastising you by some severe disease, it will not avail to pray for your life; you are irrevocably sentenced to die. But observe! This has no reference to eternal death. It does by no means imply that you are condemned to die the second death. No; it rather implies the contrary: The body is destroyed, that the soul may escape destruction. I have myself, during the course of many years, seen numerous instances of this. I have known many sinners (chiefly notorious backsliders from high degrees of holiness, and such as had given great occasion to the enemies of religion to blaspheme) whom God has cut short in the midst of their journey; yea, before they had lived out half their days: These, I apprehend, had sinned "a sin unto death;" in consequence of which they were cut off, sometimes more swiftly, sometimes more slowly, by an unexpected stroke. But in most of these cases it has been observed that "mercy rejoiced over judgment." And the persons themselves were fully convinced of the goodness as well as justice of God. They acknowledged that he destroyed the body in order to save the soul. Before they went hence, he healed their backsliding. So they died that they might live for ever.

(3.) A very remarkable instance of this occurred many years ago. young collier [coal miner] in Kingswood, near Bristol, was an eminent sinner, and afterwards an eminent saint. But, by little and little, he renewed his acquaintance with his old companions, who by degrees wrought upon him, till he dropped all his religion, and was two-fold more a child of hell than before. One day he was working in the pit with a serious young man, who suddenly stopped and cried out, "O Tommy, what a man was you once! How did your words and example provoke many to love and to good works! And what are you now? What would become of you, if you were to die as you are?" "Nay, God forbid," said Thomas, "for then I should fall into hell headlong! O let us cry to God!" They did so for a considerable time, first the one, and then the other. They called upon God with strong cries and tears, wrestling with him in mighty prayer. After some time,

Thomas broke out, "Now I know God hath healed my backsliding. I know again, that my Redeemer liveth, and that he hath washed me from my sins with his own blood. I am willing to go to him." Instantly part of the pit calved in, and crushed him to death in a moment. Whoever thou art that hast sinned "a sin unto death," lay this to heart! It may be, God will require thy soul of thee in an hour when thou lookest not for it! But if he doth, there is mercy in the midst of judgment: Thou shalt not die eternally.

6. "But what say you to that other scripture, namely, the tenth of the Hebrews? Does that leave any hope to notorious backsliders, that they shall not die eternally; that they can ever recover the favour of God, or escape the damnation of hell? "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no other sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

7. "And is not the same thing, namely, the desperate, irrecoverable state of wilful backsliders, fully confirmed by that parallel passage in the sixth chapter? "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and partakers of the Holy Ghost, -- and have fallen away," -- so it is in the original, -- "to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

8. These passages do seem to me parallel to each other, and deserve our deepest consideration. And in order to understand them it will be necessary to know, (1.) Who are the persons here spoken of; and (2.) What is the sin they had committed, which made their case nearly, if not quite, desperate.

(1.) As to the First, it will be clear to all who impartially consider and compare both these passages, that the persons spoken of herein are those, and those only, that have been justified; that the eyes of their understanding were opened and "enlightened," to see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. These only "have tasted of the heavenly gift," remission of sins, eminently so called. These "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," both of the witness and the fruit of the Spirit. This character cannot, with any propriety, be applied to any but those that have been justified.

And they had been sanctified too; at least, in the first degree, as far as all are who receive remission of sins. So the second passage expressly, "Who hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing."

Hence it follows, that this Scripture concerns those alone who have been justified, and at least in part, sanctified. Therefore all of you, who never were thus "enlightened" with the light of the glory of God; all who never did "taste of the heavenly gift," who never received remission of sins; all who never "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," of the witness and fruit of the Spirit; -- in a word, all you who never were sanctified by the blood of the everlasting covenant, you are not concerned here. Whatever other passages of Scripture may condemn you, it is certain, you are not condemned either by the sixth or the tenth of the Hebrews. For both those passages speak wholly and solely of apostates from the faith which you never had. Therefore, it was not possible that you should lose it, for you could not lose what you had not. Therefore whatever judgments are denounced in these scriptures, they are not denounced against you. You are not the persons here described, against whom only they are denounced.

(2.) Inquire we next, What was the sin which the persons here described were guilty of? In order to understand this, we should remember, that whenever the Jews prevailed on a Christian to apostatize, they required him to declare, in express terms, and that in the public assembly, that Jesus of Nazareth was a deceiver of the people; and that he had suffered no more punishment than his crimes justly deserved. This is the sin which St. Paul, in the first passage, terms emphatically "falling away;" "crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame." This is that which he terms in the second, "counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, treading under foot the Son of God, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace." Now, which of you has thus fallen away? Which of you has thus "crucified the Son of God afresh?" Not one: Nor has one of you thus "put him to an open shame." If you had thus formally renounced that "only sacrifice for sin," there had no other sacrifice remained; so that you must have perished without mercy. But this is not your case. Not one of you has thus renounced that sacrifice, by which the Son of God made a full and perfect satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Bad as you are, you shudder at the thought: there fore that sacrifice still remains for you. Come then, cast away your needless fears! "Come boldly to the throne of grace." The way is still open. You shall again "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

9. "But do not the well-known words of our Lord himself cut us off from all hope of mercy? Does he not say, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: But whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him; neither in this world, nor in the world to come?' Therefore, it is plain, if we have been guilty of this sin, there is no room for mercy. And is not the same thing repeated by St. Mark, almost in the same words? 'Verily I say unto you,' (a solemn preface! always denoting the great importance of that which follows,) 'All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is under the sentence of eternal damnation.'"

(1.) How immense is the number in every nation throughout the Christian world of those who have been more or less distressed on account of this Scripture! What multitudes in this kingdom have been perplexed above measure upon this very account! Nay, there are few that are truly convinced of sin, and seriously endeavour to save their souls, who have not felt some uneasiness for fear they had committed, or should commit, this unpardonable sin. What has frequently increased their uneasiness was, that they could hardly find any to comfort them. For their acquaintances, even the most religious of them, understood no more of the matter than themselves; and they could not find any writer who had published anything satisfactory upon the subject. Indeed, in the "Seven Sermons" of Mr. Russell, which are common among us, there is one expressly written upon it; but it will give little satisfaction to a troubled spirit. He talks about it, and about it, but makes nothing out: He takes much pains, but misses the mark at last.

(2.) But was there ever in the world a more deplorable proof of the littleness of human understanding, even in those that have honest hearts, and are desirous of knowing the truth! How is it possible that any one who reads his Bible, can one hour remain in doubt concerning it, when our Lord himself, in the very passage cited above, has so clearly told us what that blasphemy is? "He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." (Mark 3:29-30.) This then, and this alone, (if we allow our Lord to understand his own meaning,) is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: The saying, He had an unclean spirit; the affirming that Christ wrought his miracles by the power of an evil spirit; or, more particularly, that "he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."

Now, have you been guilty of this? have you affirmed, that he cast out devils by the prince of devils? No more than you have cut your neighbour's throat, and set his house on fire. How marvellously then have you been afraid, where no fear is! Dismiss that vain terror; let your fear be more rational for the time to come. Be afraid of giving way to pride; be afraid of yielding to anger; be afraid of loving the world or the things of the world; be afraid of foolish and hurtful desires; but never more be afraid of committing the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost! You are in no more danger of doing this, than of pulling the sun out of the firmament.

10. Ye have then no reason from Scripture for imagining that "the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious." The arguments drawn from thence, you see, are of no weight, are utterly inconclusive. Is there any more weight in that which has been drawn from experience or matter of fact?

(1.) This is a point which may exactly be determined, and that with the utmost certainty. If it be asked, "Do any real apostates find mercy from God? Do any that have 'made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,' recover what they have lost? Do you know, have you seen, any instance of persons who found redemption in the blood of Jesus, and afterwards fell away, and yet were restored, -- 'renewed again to repentance?'" Yea, verily; and not one, or an hundred only, but, I am persuaded, several thousands. In every place where the arm of the Lord has been revealed, and many sinners converted to God, there are several found who "turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." For a great part of these "it had been better never to have known the way of righteousness." It only increases their damnation, seeing they die in their sins. But others there are who "look unto him they have pierced, and mourn," refusing to be comforted. And, sooner or later, he surely lifts up the light of his countenance upon them; he strengthens the hands that hang down, and confirms the feeble knees; he teaches them again to say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour." Innumerable are the instances of this kind, of those who had fallen, but now stand upright. Indeed, it is so far from being an uncommon thing for a believer to fall and be restored, that it is rather uncommon to find any believers who are not conscious of having been backsliders from God, in a higher or lower degree, and perhaps more than once, before they were established in faith.

(2.) "But have any that had fallen from sanctifying grace been restored to the blessing they had lost?" This also is a point of experience; and we have had the opportunity of repeating our observations, during a considerable course of years, and from the one end of the kingdom to the other.

(3.) And, First, we have known a large number of persons, of every age and sex, from early childhood to extreme old age, who have given all the proofs which the nature of the thing admits, that they were "sanctified throughout;" "cleansed from all pollution of the flesh and spirit;" that they "loved the Lord their God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" that they continually "presented" their souls and bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God;" in consequence of which, they "rejoiced evermore, prayed without ceasing, and in every thing gave thanks." And this, and no other, is what we believe to be true, scriptural sanctification.

(4.) Secondly. It is a common thing for those who are thus sanctified, to believe they cannot fall; to suppose themselves "pillars in the temple of God, that shall go out no more." Nevertheless, we have seen some of the strongest of them, after a time, moved from their steadfastness. Sometimes suddenly, but oftener by slow degrees, they have yielded to temptation; and pride, or anger, or foolish desires have again sprung up in their hearts. Nay, sometimes they have utterly lost the life of God, and sin hath regained dominion over them.

(5.) Yet, Thirdly, several of these, after being thoroughly sensible of their fall, and deeply ashamed before God, have been again filled with his love, and not only perfected therein, but stablished, strengthened, and settled. They have received the blessing they had before with abundant increase. Nay, it is remarkable, that many who had fallen either from justifying or from sanctifying grace, and so deeply fallen that they could hardly be ranked among the servants of God, have been restored, (but seldom till they had been shaken, as it were, over the mouth of hell,) and that very frequently in an instant, to all that they had lost. They have, at once, recovered both a consciousness of his favour, and the experience of the pure love of God. In one moment they received anew both remission of sins, and a lot among them that were sanctified.

(6.) But let not any man infer from this longsuffering of God, that he hath given any one a license to sin. Neither let any dare to continue in sin, because of these extraordinary instances of divine mercy. This is the most desperate, the most irrational presumption, and leads to utter, irrecoverable destruction. In all my experience, I have not known one who fortified himself in sin by a presumption that God would save him at the last, that was not miserably disappointed, and suffered to die in his sins. To turn the grace of God into an encouragement to sin is the sure way to the nethermost hell!

(7.) It is not for these desperate children of perdition that the preceding considerations are designed; but for those who feel "the remembrance of their sins is grievous unto them, the burden of them intolerable." We set before these an open door of hope: Let them go in and give thanks unto the Lord; let them know that "the Lord is gracious and merciful, longsuffering, and of great goodness." "Look how high the heavens are from the earth! so far will he set their sins from them." "He will not always be chiding; neither keepeth he his anger for ever." Only settle it in your heart, I will give all for all, and the offering shall be accepted. Give him all your heart! Let all that is within you continually cry out, "Thou art my God, and I will thank thee; thou art my God, and I will praise thee." "This God is my God for ever and ever! He shall be my guide even unto death."

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