

Can God Renew My Backsliding?

Psalm 30; Canons of Dort 5.6–7

Studies in the Canons of Dort #31

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As we have been focusing our hearts and minds in these evening sermons on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, I think a good little summary would be helpful. Here it is: *the born again child of God cannot fall out of grace, although he or she can fall into sin.*

We've seen in several ways that there are struggles in the Christian life. And as these struggles lead to a lack of faith, which leads into sin, which may lead to even worse sins, which leads to an interruption of the exercise of faith, and the vicious cycle continues. Yet in it all, we still have faith. To give a couple of illustrations, in these times our faith is like a smoldering piece of charcoal that is buried under the ashes. In these times our faith is like the sun when it is concealed by dark storm clouds. In these times our faith runs to the corner of our hearts and is ashamed to come out. And so the question is, in these times of backsliding to Egypt instead of moving forward to the Promised Land of the pilgrimage of faith, *can God renew my backsliding?*

A Renewing God

Can God renew my backsliding? Yes! We have a renewing God. Nine times David invokes the name of the Lord here in Psalm 30 (vv. 1; 2; 3; 4; 7; 8 [2x]; 10 [2x]; 12). Whenever you see the word “LORD” in all caps in your Bible, this is his name he revealed to Moses in Exodus 3: “I AM WHO I AM.” It expresses his faithfulness to his covenant. Listen to how Matthew Henry expressed the ability of God to renew us:

If weeping endureth for a night, and it be a wearisome night, yet as sure as the light of the morning returns after the darkness of the night, so sure will joy and comfort return in a short time, in due time, to the people of God; for the covenant of grace is as firm as the covenant of the day.¹

Look also with me at Jeremiah 31. Here the Lord promises renewal to his people out of their exile. Notice that this promise comes to “the people who survived the sword” and who were “in the wilderness” (Jer. 31:2). Then we read, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3).

So why *can God renew my backsliding*? The answer is that he is faithful to his promises. Look at how the Canons of Dort expresses this in 5.6:

But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own

¹ *Commentary*, 782.

people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers [permits] them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto to death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

And the Canons go on to express two promises that God makes and keeps: he preserves regeneration and he provides repentance.

He preserves regeneration: “For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost” (5.7).

He provides repentance: “by His Word and Spirit He certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins” (5.7). When the Lord brought back his people, he said this through Jeremiah:

Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn (Jer. 31:8–9).

A Renewed People

Can God renew my backsliding? Yes, because we have a renewing God!

And second, we are *a renewed people*. And there are several characteristics of a renewed people according to Canons 5.7:

A renewed people *seek remission*: “that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator.” David’s says in Psalm 30: **O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me** (v. 2); **To you, O LORD, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy** (v. 8); **Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper!** (v. 10)

A renewed people *experience God’s favor*: “that they...may again experience the favor of a reconciled God.” Listen again to the amazing words of our Psalm: **For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping my tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning** (v. 5). This anger and weeping only lasted a moment in the night, but even this is so horrific that David likened it to death itself: **you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit** (v. 3). Listen to what John Calvin said about this phrase:

...He reckoned that he could not sufficiently express in words the magnitude of the favor which God had conferred upon him, unless he compared the darkness of that period to a grave and pit, into which he

had been forced to throw himself hastily, to protect his life by hiding, until the flame of insurrection was quenched.²

A renewed people *adore God's mercies*: “that they may...through faith adore His mercies.” **I will extol you, O LORD (v. 1); Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name (v. 4); You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever! (vv. 11–12)**

A renewed people *work out their salvation*: “that they may . . . henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling,” quoting Philippians 2:12. That’s what David is doing here as he **cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord healed him**, therefore he praises the Lord (v. 2). And he asks in verse 9, “**What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?**” “No, but I will,” is what he is saying!

Brothers and sisters, while you can fall into sin, you cannot fall out of grace. God is a renewing God; God promises to make you a renewed people.

² *Psalms*, 4:486.