

Backsliders take note: We have a merciful and faithful high priest

For all those who need a second chance at life, (or perhaps you need a third or fourth chance—anyway, however many chances you need), Jesus, the Good Shepherd, grants you what you so desperately require. You need someone to completely obliterate all the penalty of your personal disaster and Jesus is the only one who can do it. Fortunately, He is perfectly able and completely willing to do so. Of course the consequences of sin must be played out, but they may be cheerfully borne when you are truly set free.

The Bible says that Jesus is a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34). He touched lepers and was not made unclean—rather the leper was made clean by His touch.

Michael Premo's book *Backslider*, the true story of his life, gives hope to anyone who has ever "crashed and burned." [Mountlake Terrace, WA, WinePress Publishing, 1995]. Mike



wrote in the flyleaf of the copy he gave to me, "It's all about grace." Indeed, I found that statement to be true in his life, not a dozen times but dozens of dozens of times. Mike was a rising-star evangelist and preacher and then, in chance after chance, he blew it, his star crashing to the earth, trailing flames and debris over the landscape and lives of those who know and love him. His life story

is one of magnificent restoration, justification by faith and peace with Christ. It is very difficult reading—painful and wrenching—but behind all the misery we know that his Redeemer lives. Mike's life is not over, so the final chapters have not been written, but we know this: Jesus' grace is sufficient. I know others have had even more despair, greater sorrow and heavier grief from their backsliding, but the degree of sin does not matter. What matters is God's answer to sin and unfaithfulness. He remains true, though all men are liars. [Illustration Credit: University of Texas]

And the good news about His faithfulness is this: We have a merciful and faithful high priest. He is merciful because He grants us life when we deserve to die. He is faithful because "He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered." Therefore "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." [Hebrews 2: 17-18]. In other words, we can trust Jesus—He is merciful to us and He has already been through every temptation and hurt that we have. Unlike our miserable state, when tempted, He never once sinned.

Christ's righteousness is imputed (transferred or attributed) to us on the basis of our faith in Him. We are therefore judged according to His righteousness and not our own. There is nothing we can do to improve on His righteousness. He is perfect. He lived the sinless life. We are saved from hell and death by His blood because He willingly provided Himself as a sacrifice for our sin. Instead of being covered in our own shame and

sinfulness, we are covered by the Blood of the Lamb. God looks upon us and finds us righteous because He no longer sees our sinfulness but His righteousness.

So consider the words of Hebrews chapter 2, verses 17 and 18 in the *New Living Translation*: “Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted.”

And if you don't mind reading those two verses again, here it is in the very useful and accurate New American Standard Updated Version: “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

Are you a backslider at heart? The Bible says “The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways.” [Proverbs 14:14]. Had enough of your own ways? Come to Jesus confessing your faith in Him as the only way to the Father and the sinless Redeemer. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and make them whiter than snow, covering you with His sacrifice. We have a merciful and faithful high priest, and you will find deliverance from your sin in no other name.

But you've done that before and then you've blown it again? So? There is no limit on his grace, no restriction on His mercy. Come back to Him, rededicate your life to Him and live. “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” Ezekiel 18:23.

The Apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put it another way when he said, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:1-10

God is still looking for backsliders today. Like the father of the prodigal son, He stands, looking down the road, waiting for the wayward one to return. He never gives up on us. Let everyone who is thirsty come to Him and drink. It just makes good sense.