

Hebrews 6:4-6

Warnings against Crucifying Christ Again

Let's suppose you died and stood before the Lord God and He said to you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" What would you say? What do you think you would say?

That question posed by Donald Barnhouse years ago probes to the depths of our relationship with God. Upon whom or what are you depending for salvation or eternal life?

The heart of Hebrews chapter six forces us to ask the question, do you have eternal life? Are you saved? You are either lost or saved. You either have eternal life or you do not. In whom or what are you trusting for eternal salvation?

The salvation Jesus procured for us is "eternal." We have "eternal redemption," "eternal inheritance," and "eternal covenant." What a great Savior!

The author of Hebrews will now stress the perseverance of the believer. We know a person is a true believer because he will persevere. The true believer will continue trusting Christ. He will go on to spiritual maturity in a growing relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:1-6 contains some of the severest language in the Bible. The author of Hebrews has a way of causing his readers to stop, look, and listen. He wants them to take a serious look and evaluate their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He warns against false security and all forms of religious deception, especially religious experiences that do not produce spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.

"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned" (Hebrews 6:1-8, NASB95). All Scriptures are from New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update unless otherwise noted).

Warning against consequences of apostasy (Heb. 6:4-8)

The context demonstrates that someone in the congregation had great religious experiences, and then the same person falls away and re-crucifies Christ by putting Him to open shame, and that results in the impossibility to renew that person to repentance. When is repentance impossible? That is a most serious situation.

This passage is not denying great blessings and highly religious experiences. And in spite of all these spiritual blessings and experiences this person falls away. He turns away from Christ, the Spirit and the powers of the age to come.

It is helpful to remember this is one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament. There is no perfect interpretation of this passage because we do not have all of the background on the first readers of this letter. Every interpreter is influenced by his theological background. I have tried to approach this passage in its context

without bias and in harmony with the teaching of the whole Bible. There are basically four different interpretations by Bible believing scholars.

1. Some scholars interpret this passage as saved persons who later lose their salvation. They view this passage as people who are born again, but lose their salvation by deliberate apostasy. This view fails to adequately consider the context of the book of Hebrews, and balance the Bible's teaching on election and eternal security (John 10:26-30; Rom. 8:28-30; Phil. 1:3-5). The author offers no hope to the apostate. It definitely does not teach that salvation can be lost and regained many times. You are either saved or lost. You are a child of God, or you are not.
2. Another group interprets this passage as saved persons who backslide. They describe them as saved, but fall into sin and lose their rewards in heaven. They suffer the "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16), and stand at the judgment seat of Christ without rewards. The problem is these people cannot be reclaimed according to this passage in Hebrews. They cannot start over. There is no such thing as being saved a second time. You are either saved, or lost.
3. Another popular view is a hypothetical case is being presented by the author to illustrate the recklessness of apostasy. These individuals are truly regenerated are under pressure to return to Judaism, but why would they ever want to give up their perfect standing with God in Christ? To turn from Christ would only provide the evidence that they had never been born again. B. F. Westcott observed, "There is nothing to show that the conditions of fatal apostasy had been fulfilled, still less that they had been fulfilled in the case of any of these addressed." W. H Griffith-Thomas said, "The passage is apparently a supposed case to correct their wrong ideas, and the argument seems to be that if it were possible for those who have had the experiences of verses 4-6 to fall away, it would be impossible to renew them unless Christ died a second time."
4. Other scholars see this passage as *professing* Christians who have never been saved. They are lost and unregenerate even though they have had great emotional religious experiences. They have been inoculated with a form of Christianity, but it is not the real thing. They have heard the message of Good News, they have observed miracles, seen the work of the Holy Spirit in the congregation, have had emotional experiences, but like the seed of the sower planted on rocky ground have never been regenerated. The apostasy referred to is the final rejection of Christ. They have rejected the substitutionary penal sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins. They were sympathizers to the Gospel, but never believed in their hearts and therefore never saved.

Can a person be a "partaker of the Holy Spirit" and not be justified? Was this person who falls away like this ever truly saved or justified or born again? Critical to this whole context in Hebrews six is can you be a partaker of the Holy Spirit and the word of God and the powers of the age to come and not be justified? Can you lose your eternal position before God as a truly justified person and then be lost? Or is this passage teaching that you can have these great religious emotional experiences as described in verses 4-5 and never be justified or saved or born again?

The Bible teaches unequivocally the Divine preservation and the human perseverance of the saints (Heb. 6:13-20; John 5:24; 10:26-30; Rom. 8:28-39; Phil. 1:3-5). How do we reconcile these clear teachings with this passage? How do we hold fast to the unerring integrity of the Scripture?

In Hebrews 6:1-3 the author has been encouraging his readers to go on to maturity. Clearly he is addressing believers in the opening verses of this chapter. Now we see him changing his focus to give a stern warning to those who have to turn away from Christ.

"For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt" (Hebrews 6:4-6, ESV).

The New American Standard Bible reads: "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

To whom is the author addressing when he says, "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who were once enlightened"? The writer does not say, "us who were once enlightened," nor "you," but "those who have once been enlightened." He draws a sharp contrast between "Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you," and this passage. It is true they enjoyed great privileges under Judaism, but they were not true Christians. They are not spoken of as God's elect, for whom Christ died, or as those born of the Spirit of God. The passage does not speak of their being justified, forgiven, cleansed and accepted in the Beloved. Neither is anything said of their faith in Christ, nor obedience to Him. There is no indication that they were children of God.

A critical word in the interpretation of this passage is *adunatos* translated "impossible" in all of our accurate English translations. It is also used in Hebrews 6:18 where the author tells us it is impossible for God to lie, In Hebrews 10:4 it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, and in Hebrews 11:6 we are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. Here it reads, "For it is impossible . . . to renew them again to repentance." The word "renew" must also be taken with its full meaning. Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the individual. The Holy Spirit brings about this change in the mind that affects the whole person.

They had "once been enlightened"

"Enlightened" (*photizo*) "to give light, to shine;" metaphorically means spiritual enlightenment. They had received spiritual light or knowledge by teaching. They had been instructed in the teachings of the gospel to some extent. Does it fall short of the spiritual enlightenment which transforms and regenerates? "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). There is a big difference between being enlighten and regenerated. Where is the submission to the enlightenment they had received?

"Tasted of the heavenly gift"

They have to a certain degree understood the truths, but not gone on to appropriate them. Jesus said, "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:50-56). His Jewish listeners took offense at Him. They refused to appropriate Christ.

The “heavenly gift” refers either to Christ or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is ministering on the earth and in our hearts to glorify Christ and exalt Him. The Divine gift comes from heaven and leads us to heaven. Therefore, I am inclined to think of this gift as Christ. He is the Father’s gift from heaven and His goal is to take us to heaven to be with Him. The individuals in view had an acquaintance with Christ, but had never made a commitment once and for all to Him. Jesus said, “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:20-21).

“Have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”

The word for “partakers” or “have shared” here is *metochos* and means “to have a share in” or simply “companions.” John Brown wrote: “It is highly probable that the inspired writer refers primarily to the miraculous gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit by which the primitive dispensation of Christianity was administered. These gifts were by no means confined to those who were ‘transformed by the renewing of their minds.’ At any rate they plainly show that their possession and an unregenerate state were by no means incompatible.” Several scholars note the word “partakers” does not mean to possess the Holy Spirit in the sense of His indwelling the believer. The idea of the permanent abiding presence of the Spirit is not included in the word for partake.

Simon Magus in Acts 8:8-18 is a good example of someone who “partakers” but in the following decades became detrimental to Biblical Christianity. He was not a true believer; he only used Christianity for his own personal gain.

“Have tasted the good word of God”

They understood the promises regarding the coming of the Messiah. God has been faithful to His promise and they have enjoyed, so far as an unconverted person can enjoy the blessings and advantages that come from these promises being fulfilled. A. W. Pink observed, these readers “could not say with Jeremiah, ‘Your words were found and I did eat them’ (Jeremiah 15:16).” Of Herod it is written that he heard John the Baptist and “enjoyed listening to him” (Mark 6:20), but he did not repent and even had John murdered.

“Powers of the age to come”

The new dispensation ushered in by the Messiah according to the Old Testament prophecies has now arrived. They saw the miraculous power of the mighty God at work in the person of Jesus Christ. The “age to come” was already upon them because Christ has come. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). Not only has God spoken “in these last days” to us in His Son, but He has acted (Heb. 1:2). The principles of this new age are active at the present time through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Christian enjoys a genuine foretaste of the powers of the age to come, and will to a more glorious magnitude at the consummation when Christ returns a second time. However, these unbelievers had witnessed personally the miracles of Christ, and the wonders of Pentecost. They were now without excuse. They saw all the evidence that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God and refused to fully commit themselves to Him.

“And then fallen away”

This is a very strong emphatic statement made by the author of Hebrews. The word used here is different from *apostasia* which was used earlier. It is *parapipto* and it means literally “to fall alongside.” It is a deliberate, complete and final repudiation of Christ. There is no forgiveness for this sin. It is a final rejection of Christ. So it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Their condition is beyond recovery. Since they have rejected

the atoning sacrifice of Christ there is no other gospel to be preached. They have rejected the one sacrifice that can save from sin. It is a total abandonment of Christianity. Therefore, it is “impossible to renew them again unto repentance” those who have totally abandoned the gospel of Jesus Christ. The “impossibility” is used absolutely here, without any qualification. It is impossible to water it down. F. F. Bruce notes, “to say that they cannot be brought to repentance so long as they persist in their renunciation of Christ would be a truism hardly worth putting into words.” There is no possibility of their restoration “since they again crucify to themselves the son of God and put Him to open shame” (v. 7).

This is how serious this apostasy is. The effect of falling away is to re-crucify Christ and put Him to open shame. When Christ went to the cross and died as our substitute He died to make us right with God. When we turn our backs on Him and return to the world we are saying the world is more worthy than the love of Christ. We are saying in effect that we agree with those who crucified Christ.

The author is not describing backsliding Christians or believers who have fallen into sin. Even Peter who denied Christ three times was “renewed unto repentance.” The sin described in this passage is not the sin of a believer, but the open total renunciation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Peter experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart because he was a true believer. The unbeliever does not experience this kind of change in the heart.

The Bible is emphatic that the grace and forgiveness of sins and cleansing in the blood of Christ is freely available to every believer who sins and comes to Him confessing them (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22; 1 John 1:7-10; 2:1-2).

John Brown said: it is “in open, total, determined renunciation of all the constituent principles of Christianity, and a return to a false religion, such as that of unbelieving Jews or heathens, or to open infidelity and open godlessness.”

The context of this passage of Scripture shows the willful sin described here is deliberate apostasy. These individuals are in danger of renouncing Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and are ready to openly expose Him to public scandal of the cross. They are willing to stand in judgment of Christ and with the crowd shaking their fists and shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” If they had their chance, they would crucify Him again. They have reached a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy. It is a point of no return. They have reached the point where they keep on crucifying the Son of God and holding Him in contempt. There is no possible return.

John Calvin said, “The apostle is not here talking about theft or perjury or murder or drunkenness or adultery. He is referring to a complete falling away from the gospel, in which the sinner has offended God not in some one respect only but has utterly renounced His grace.”

To so reject Jesus Christ is to be eternally damned. They arrive at a spiritual state where they can no longer repent “since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” There is no one else to turn to for salvation.

“It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” This is a real warning against a real danger. It is true anytime there is a hardened heart of unbelief.

It is possible for those who are described in the language of verses 4 and 5 to “fall away and not be renewed.” The critical question is were they ever born again? Were they ever saved?

They are not true Christians because they have never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are like land that has received its rain, but bears no good fruit. It is a land full of thorns and weeds. They have participated in worship services, the fellowship in the Christian community, but they are like seed sown on rocky ground. There was no spiritual root and they fell away. They sound like Christians, but something is severely missing. They are not saved, and if they are saved the author is presenting a hypothetical case for them to not return to the temple worship and therefore crucify Christ again.

Some scholars suggest if these Hebrews renounced their professed faith in Christ they would be going back to the old covenant and would be irrevocably lost. Since there is no temple in Jerusalem today this sin cannot be committed today. There are no sacrifices or a system in which to return so the sin involves abandoning the type for the fulfilled reality in Christ.

I return to my opening questions. If you died today and stood before the Lord God and He asked you, "Why should I allow you into My heaven? What would you say? How would you respond to Him? This whole passage of Scripture we are studying zeros in on this reality. What is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? When the Holy Spirit applies the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ to depraved sinner the work of salvation cannot fail. Those who are genuinely saved do not fall away; they grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Salvation is God's work; it is not man's work. God's work cannot fail to achieve its intended purpose. God never fails to complete His project. Your salvation is His project and He will bring it to its completion at the day of Christ (Phil. 1:3-6).

Perseverance in faith in Christ proves that you have become a partaker in Christ. If you do not persevere in faith in Christ it proves you never became a partaker in Christ. You may be very religious, but are still lost. You may have had great religious experiences, but have never been justified.

Ultimately only the Lord knows who is saved.

There are individuals who distort this passage to teach that there is no repentance after baptism and no forgiveness for Christian sinners. This false teaching completely distorts the rest of the Scriptures such as 1 John 1:7-10. There is grace and forgiveness for every Christian who sins. Stop and read carefully the following verses.

"If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:7-10).

All who profess to receive the Gospel are not born again.

Judas Iscariot is an excellent example of a person who was in the presence of Christ, observed and experienced the great advantages of the Gospel, but never was regenerated. He had all the evidence, but obviously was never saved.

In our day we would say they had their names on the church rolls, but were never saved. They partook of the Lord's Supper, were baptized, enjoyed fellowship dinners at church, enjoyed the social benefits and trappings of religion, but were never regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said: "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and

immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. And He was saying, He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:3-9).

What kind of soil is represented in the heart of the true believer? What kind of soil is being described in our passage in Hebrews? Only time reveals into what kind of soil the seed was planted. If it is good soil it will have an abundant harvest of good fruit. It will bear Christ's likeness.

Some of the readers of the letter to the Hebrews never did belong to Christ; they were never spiritually regenerated. However, those who were true believers went on to spiritual maturity.

The Scriptures teach the perseverance of the saints.

Note carefully, it is the perseverance of the saints, not unregenerate professors. Jesus said, All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). The apostle Paul wrote, "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). Our salvation is guaranteed through all eternity by the mystery of the divine election.

We are kept by the power of God through faith in Christ Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit energizing the true Christian. Abiding in Christ maintains us in the presence of God. Jesus said, "I in you, and you in Me." Christ did not die in vain; He rose from the dead to prove it.

They have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partaken of the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and seen the mighty works of the coming age. Where is the evidence that they have been regenerated? It is the continuance in Christ's word which proves that we are His disciples. It is continuing in the faith which demonstrates the reality of our profession.

Faith dies when it is separated from its object.

The sole object of our faith is Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our salvation.

What is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

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