

“Impossible... once enlightened, if fallen away, to renew them again”

Hebrews 6:4-6

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Views:

1. It is a warning that a Christian can be in danger of losing his salvation, (Jacob Arminius, Adam Clarke, Ralph Earle). However, this view is rejected because the assurance and security of salvation is a work of God, not of man, (Jn. 10:27-28; Rom. 8:35-39; Phil. 1:26; 1 Pt. 1:4-5). If this were true, one could never get his or her salvation back again, once lost.

2. It is warning that the danger of “apostasy” or “falling away” was real (Ellingworth, Lane, Kistemaker, Lenski). They were saved, but they were weary and being tempted to repudiate Christ. This warning was a call to renewal and not to succumb to disobedience. These Christians were chided for being (1.) slow to learn (5:11) and (2.) lazy (6:12). If their faith continues to weaken, they will fall prey to unbelief that leads to disobedience and apostasy. If that would happen it is impossible to bring them back.

3. It is warning of false teaching, if (hypothetically) a Christian could lose his salvation, there would be no provision for repentance, (The Ryrie Study Bible).

4. It is a warning of the danger of a Christian moving from a position of true faith to the extent of becoming disqualified for further service (1 Cor. 9:27), (Zane Hodges).

5. It is a warning against a profession of faith that falls short of true salvation, (John Calvin, The New Scofield Reference Bible, The MacArthur Study Bible, Phillips, Hughes). This was a warning to unbelievers who were attracted to the gospel and Christ, but reached no conviction and conversion in Him. They have tasted but did not actually partake. “You had better come to Christ now, for if you fall away it will be impossible for you to come again to the point of repentance. ...It is unbelievers who are in danger of losing salvation.” (MacArthur)

6. It is a “hypothetical” warning designed to cause the reader to re-examine his life to see if he is really saved and then challenge or shock the Christian reader into diligence and growth, and not backsliding (Barnes, Bruce, Morris, Ryrie, Kent, Hewitt). “The object was not to keep those who were awakened and enlightened from apostasy, but it was to preserve those who were already in the church of Christ from losing any more spiritual ground.” (Barnes) “Peter is not questioning the perseverance of the saints, but rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.” (Bruce)

Insights:

1. This section is the most controversial passage within the book of Hebrews and the most popular problem passage of the New Testament.

2. The greater context of this passage is Hebrews 5:11-10:39 dealing with the high priestly office of the Son and the immediate context is Hebrews 5:11-6:20 dealing with a third warning and a key theme on “sluggishness” (Greek “nothroi” 5:11, 6:12).

3. This passage is one of a few passages people have misunderstood to mean that a Christian can lose his salvation. Whatever it says must not contradict the Scriptures. “The important hermeneutical principle known as ‘analogia Scriptura’ (the analogy of Scripture) states that no passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture.” (MacArthur) Scripture teaches that once saved always saved, (Jn. 10:27-29; Romans 8:31-39).

4. The writer is addressing Christians who were “babies” (Gk. “pios”) in Christ. The word “baby” is referring to someone who is “untaught, unskilled, and immature,” (Heb. 5:13-14). These baby Christians failed to grow in the things of the Lord and could not handle the deeper things of the Lord. They had four major spiritual problems that indicated they were spiritually immature: (1.) they could not handle the hard sayings of God's revelation, (Heb. 5:11); (2.) they were dull of hearing, (Heb. 5:11); (3.) they have not been able to teach the deeper things of Christ yet and were in need of someone re-teaching them the basics of Christianity, (Heb. 5:12); and (4.) they had

not moved-on from "the elementary principles of Christ" and "the foundational things of the Old Testament," (Heb. 6:1); to the more mature ("perfect") things of the Christian life, (Heb. 6:1).

5. There is a change in personal pronouns from "you" (Heb. 5:11-12), "us," and "we," (Heb. 6:1-3); to "those" and "they," (Heb. 6:4-8), and then back to "you" (Heb. 6:9). This shows the writer was addressing two different groups of people: (1.) one group of people who are saved, but very immature; and (2.) another group of people who were not saved, having made a false profession, they were not able to continue with the Christian life because they did not possess Christ.

6. The word "if" (taken from the participle aspect of the verb "fall away," Gk "parapesontes") in Hebrews 6:6 may have two possible meanings: (1.) the word "if" should not be translated and the verb added to the preceding five descriptive phrases, "...who have fallen away..." showing that the writer knew of such real existing situations; or (2.) the word "if" (Gk. "parapesontes") is a conditional participle which represents "a hypothetical case." "If" the readers followed their present course that they were on, either they would reveal they were not truly saved or they could end up living a powerless life as one who is not saved.

7. The words "falling away" (Gk "parapesontes" from "parapipto" Heb. 6:6) mean "to fall by the way side, to stumble to the side, to drift away, or to fall away from." This Greek word has to do with "unfaithfulness" and involves a "trespass, a fault, or an offense," which in a sense all Christians "fall away" when they sin. It is not the same word for "defection" from the faith like the Greek word "apostasy" (Gk. "apostasia") which has the idea of "rebellion and separation," (Gr. "apostasion" used of divorce) which has the idea of permanent severing.

8. The word "repentance" (Gk. "metanoian" Heb. 6:6) has to do with "changing one's way" and usually refers to "turning someone away from" sin, (Acts 8:22; 17:30; 11:18; 5:31). It is not the Greek word "repentance" (Gk. "epistrepho") used of "turning toward the Lord" in conversion, (Acts 3:19; 15:3; 28:27; 26:18,20), and has the idea of "changing one's Lord."

9. The word "impossible" (Gk."adunaton" Heb. 6:4) literally means "no power or impotent," thus showing "no ability or inability" to change, and is not the Greek word "impossible" (Gk. "anendekton" Lk. 17:1) meaning "what could never be."

10. Hebrews 6:4-6 gives only two possibilities: (1.) Some were not saved to start with, having made a false profession in Christ, they had no possession of Christ, and did not last very long; thus the writer is warning the readers to examine if they are also like this, since they are so spiritually immature; or (2.) "When people have entered into the Christian experience far enough to know what it is all about and have then turned away, then, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are crucifying Christ. In that state they cannot repent." Thus, the writer was trying to appeal to the readers to start growing and show the writer that they are really saved and not like those who may have made a false profession.

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