HEBREWS SIX

What Does It Mean?

Admittedly, *Hebrews 6:4-6* is a difficult passage. It's a passage often misinterpreted and taken out of context by proponents of the satanic doctrine '*Once-Saved-Always-Saved*'. There are several *OSAS* views of *Hebrews 6:4-6*. The following are three of the most common...

1. Those described in *Hebrews 6:4-6* are *truly converted,* but the '*if"* proves that it is *hypothetical*. It could never happen in fact, because no believer can *forfeit their salvation by sin.*
2. Those described in *Hebrews 6:4-6* have a non-working work of grace in them. Their experience with God is real, but not saving; *they were never converted in the first place.*
3. Those described in *Hebrews 6:4-6* may appear to be converted, but if they *fall away,* one must conclude they were *not saved after all.*

A sound interpretation of this difficult passage will prove these views erroneous. *Hebrews 6:4-6* reads...

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." —Hebrews 6:4-6

There are several key questions that must be answered to arrive at a sound interpretation of *Hebrews 6:4-6*, namely...

1. Are the individuals spoken of in *Hebrews 6:4-6* truly converted?
2. Can a true believer *fall away*?
3. Is there any hope for the *backslider*?
4. Why is it *impossible* for those who *fall away* in *Hebrews 6:6* to *repent* and *who* are they?

The first question we must answer is...

ARE THE INDIVIDUALS IN *HEBREWS 6:4-6* TRULYCONVERTED?

First, the most obvious point from the text: how could these individuals mentioned in *Hebrews 6:4-6* be renewed '*again to repentance'* if they had not experienced *repentance* before? The word '*again*' means—*once more*; *another time; anew*—this obviously requires an occasion of *repentance* once before. It would be non-sensical to assume those who have *never repented* could *repent again*.

Moreover, notice there are *five spiritual characteristics* of those who *fall away* mentioned in this passage. Those *characteristics* are...

1. Have *once been enlightened*.
2. Have tasted of the heavenly gift.
3. Have been *made partakers of the Holy Ghost*.
4. Have *tasted the good Word of God*.
5. And, have (*tasted*) the *powers of the world to come.*

The descriptive language of these spiritual characteristics clearly establishes *New Testament salvation*. This is especially true for the phrase, '*have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost'* (*Heb 6:4*). This same *Greek* word μέτοχος, or '*metochos*', translated '*partakers',* is also found in the following verses...

"For we are made <u>partakers of Christ</u>, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end..." —Hebrews 3:14

"But if ye be without chastisement, <u>whereof all are partakers</u>, then are ye bastards, and not sons." —Hebrews 12:8

Strong's gives the following definition of this *Greek* word, '*A sharer; an associate: fellow, partaker, and partner*'.[1] We also see the same people were once '*enlightened',* translated from the *Greek* word*,* φωτίζω, or '*phōtizō*'. Again, this same word is used elsewhere in reference to *Christians*...

The eyes of your understanding being <u>enlightened</u>; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints..."
—Ephesians 1:18

[1] *Strong's* Hebrew & Greek Dictionary.

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions..." —Hebrews 10:32

So, when does a person become *enlightened* or *illuminated*? According to *John 1:4*, we read...

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men." —John 1:4

Notice, *spiritual life* is *the light*, which only a true believer has. Beyond these, we see those referred to in *Hebrews 6:4-6* have also '*tasted the good Word of God*'. That *Greek* word γεύομαι, or '*geuomai',* translated '*tasted'* means *experience*. This is clearly the meaning as is shown in the following verse...

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." —Hebrews 2:9

Thus, to deny that the individuals spoken of in *Hebrews 6:4-6* are converted is to willfully ignore the descriptive language *God's Spirit* repeatedly uses to define *Christians*. I cannot imagine *God* describing true believers and using any stronger language than demonstrated in *Hebrews 6:5*. In fact, I challenge anyone to find a more eloquent and precise depiction of *genuine Christians* in the *Scriptures*. Hence, *Hebrews 6:4-6* is speaking of those who are truly converted to *Christianity*.

CAN A TRUE BELIEVER FALL AWAY?

Contrary to what many assert, we believe *Hebrews 6:4-6* establishes that *falling away* can only happen to *Christians*, not the *unsaved*. The claim that *Hebrews 6:4-6* is nothing more than a hypothetical, makes little or no sense. The surrounding context unmistakably points to a *warning* rather than a proof text against *losing one's salvation*. Considering the immediate context, we see the *inspired writer* is exhorting the *Hebrew believers* to advance in their Christian walk. He reproves them for several things, namely...

- Being *dull of hearing* (*Heb 5:11*).
- Intolerant of *spiritual meat* (*Heb 5:12*).
- Spiritually *immature* (*Heb 5:13*).
- Without *discernment* (*Heb 5:14*).
- In need of *spiritual fruit* (*Heb 6:7-8*).

These areas of concern are not consistent with *spiritual steadiness*, but rather *instability*. It's certainly not the spiritual tone that would logically lead into an alleged denial of *conditional security*. Furthermore, the *Hebrew writer* then urges the *Hebrew believers* to *go on unto perfection* (*Heb 6:1*), warning them if they refuse to do so, *falling away* and even degenerating into a place of *no return* was a possibility. Thus, considering the *context*, the rational conclusion is the text is a *sober warning* of the possibility of *falling away*, not a refutation of *conditional security*. Therefore, a sound interpretation of this passage leaves us with no other option than to acknowledge, as the rest of the *Scriptures* confirm, that true believers can indeed *forfeit their salvation via sin.*

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR THE BACKSLIDER?

It's important to note, the *Greek* word, παραπίπτω, or '*parapiptō*', translated '*fall away'* in *Hebrews 6:6*, is found only once in the *Greek New Testament*. Though the *English* phrase '*fall away*' is found elsewhere, it's not the same *Greek* word used in *Hebrews 6:6*. Moreover, the Bible tells us in *Matthew 26:31-33*, that *Peter* and the other apostles '*fell away'* (σκανδαλίζω, or '*skandalizō*'), and perhaps multitudes like them throughout the centuries, but it's not the same *Greek* word as '*parapiptō*'. The *Scriptures* explicitly show it's possible to be '*saved'* more than once *(Lk 15:24,32; Rom 11:23, Jam 5:19-20, etc.)* and there is also the possibility of crossing a *spiritual line of no return* (*Matt 12:31-32; Rom 1:28-32; Heb 6:6*). Can these two truths be reconciled? Absolutely.

Backsliding and *apostatizing* are closely related, but one is considered more of the *beginning* of spiritual decline and the other the *end* (*Jer 3:6-22; Rom 11:17-24*). There is also a distinction between *individual apostasy* and *corporate apostasy* (*Lk 8:13; 2 Thes 2:3*). There are other dissimilarities between *backsliding* and *apostatizing*. *Backsliding* is more about neglect, losing intimacy with God, and growing spiritually cold, etc. (*Heb 2:3*). While *apostasy* is a more advanced form of *backsliding*, involving gross sin, increased deception, intellectually denying fundamental doctrines, and evidence of a darkened heart and mind. Finally, there is also a spiritual line of mercy where men can sin away the opportunity for grace. Just like *Christian* advancement and growth is a process, likewise, there is a process in first, *backsliding* then *apostatizing*, and advancing to a *point of no return*. In other words, there are stages to go through from *backsliding* to *apostasy* and finally to '*impossible to renew'*. The point is, no one goes from being born of God, abiding in *Christ* to '*impossible to renew*' in a day, a week, or a month. We also acknowledge there is a season of chastisement promised to any true believer should they fall into sin. *Hebrews 6*, among other things, is speaking of a dreadful, sobering final stage, where *backsliders* rejecting all of God's merciful chastisement finally, '*crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*'. *Backsliders* under divine chastisement are a

testimony to God's faithfulness to the covenant, not an indication that resistant *backsliders* are right with God. True, *Hebrews 12* teaches all who are *sons* are promised to be *chastened* should they *fall* or *stray*. However, the same passage teaches that *sons* are to *endure* that *chastening* with humility and fear, which certainly means they shouldn't resist *correction (Heb 12:1)*...

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" —Hebrews 12:7-9

This plainly teaches that wayward '*sons*' who reject and spurn their *heavenly Father's* merciful correction, forfeit *divine life*. This means, though God in his mercy may continue to *chastise*, a son who rejects the reproof of God must be considered *spiritually dead* (*Lk 15:32*). As the passage teaches, *backsliders* without *chastisement* must be considered *bastards* and not *sons*. Likewise, *sons* who reject *divine chastisement* must also now be considered *spiritual bastards*. Again, we see that *divine life* is conditional. The point is—*backsliders* lose their standing with God long before a *Hebrews 6* experience. The moment they refuse *God's chastisement* they must be considered lost. Anyone living in unconfessed and unforsaken sin should be considered lost until they repent. To resist *God's chastisement* is rebellion and no rebel is right with God. However, if they have yet to *crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame*, *blaspheme the Holy Ghost*, and/or be utterly *turned over to a reprobate mind* (*all perhaps one in the same thing*), then they can turn from their sin and rebellion and be brought to repentance. Therefore, praise God, there is hope for the common *backslider*. The backslider can return in *sincere repentance* to God and be *reconciled back to God.* The ultimate proof of this is found in the words of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, when he taught about the *prodigal*. That younger son willfully departed into the world and wasted his substance on *riotous living*. After an unspecified period, he realized his folly and turned from all his wickedness and returned to the *father* to serve him. The Father *ran* to meet him and *kissed* him. The *father* describes his son's ordeal as...

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." —Luke 15:24

In other words, the *prodigal,* though he *fell away*, did not commit the *unpardonable sin.* He was able to repent, find forgiveness, and be reconciled to his *father* again even after *deliberately* living wicked. Yes, his evil choices rendered him *spiritually dead* and *lost*. However, the *Father* had mercy on him *because he sincerely repented* and desired to

both be reconciled and to serve. He is a prime example of a *backslider*, who God is *delighted* to forgive and have back in his presence again.

Besides the teaching of the *prodigal son*, we have the example of *Peter*, who lost his salvation by *disowning Jesus* (*Matt 10:33; 2 Tim 2:12*). He also *fell away* at that point, according to *Matthew 26:31*. Afterwards, *Peter* repented and was reconciled back to God again. He *turned back to the Lord or got converted* when he repented (*Lk 22:32*). Obviously, *Peter* didn't *fall away* to the point where he couldn't return. *Scripture* reveals *King David*, guilty of both adultery and murder, came back to the *Lord* with contrite repentance. Hence, with these examples, we see neither *backsliding* nor *falling away*, short of *blaspheming the Holy Ghost*, are beyond forgiveness.

WHY IS IT *IMPOSSIBLE* FOR THOSE WHO *FALL AWAY* IN *HEBREWS 6:6* TO *REPENT* AND *WHO* ARE THEY?

Unfortunately, some who believe in a *conditional security* interpret *Hebrews 6:4-6* to mean that *Christians* can indeed *fall away*, but if they do, they can never repent and come back to God. As we've pointed out, this cannot be an accurate interpretation because the *Scriptures* offer examples who have *backslidden* and *fallen away* yet have repented. Hence, *Hebrews 6:4-6* is speaking not merely of *falling away*, but a final, definite, and extreme condition of *falling away*.

We agree those spoken of in *Hebrews 6:4-6* cannot repent, but *who* are they and *why*?

*"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; **seeing they** crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." —Hebrews 6:4-6*

If a believer '*backslides*' and continues into '*apostasy'*, refusing the chastisement of the *Lord*, that individual may eventually reach the point where no new beginning is possible. That is, they will become so hardened (*Heb 3:7-11*) and their conscience so seared (*1 Tim 4:2*), they will not be able to *repent*. Moreover, '*they*' meaning the problem is with *them* and not with *God*. *God* is *immutable* and cannot change. Granted, His *promises of forgiveness* are conditional, but they are also universal. Meaning, they are open to *all* who meet the stated condition. Hence, if the conditions are met, He will always forgive. So, the *impossibility to renew them unto repentance* is a matter rooted in the *apostate*, not *God Himself*. According to the text, the reason for the *impossibility to renew them again to*

repentance is not necessarily the *apostasy,* but the advancing in *apostasy* until they *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to open shame.* This is the *final act of apostasy*. They so harden their heart by resisting God, that they can no longer be drawn and convicted by *God's Spirit* (*Jn 6:44*). This final *act of apostasy* is equivalent to *Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost* (*Matt 12:31-32*). It must be emphasized, while *backsliding* is a danger for all who drift from faith in *Christ,* ultimate *apostasy* and the hopeless condition of *crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to open shame,* does not occur without constant and deliberate resistance against *God's Spirit.*

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 6:4-6, is intended as a sober warning to believers to be sensitive to *God's Spirit* and *grow in grace*, lest they risk the terrible condition of *apostasy*. Consistent with the full counsel of *Scripture*, it teaches us that it's possible for *Christians* to *backslide* and *fall away*. It also teaches such *backsliders* can possibly *repent* and be *reconciled back to God* or advance in their rebellion and be hardened to a place of *no return.*

—B.W.

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