

Warning - Part 1

DURING COUNSELING SESSIONS, it is common for someone to say to me, “I am not sure I am a Christian.” When I ask why they feel this way, they usually start talking about habits of sin in their lives. They feel this way because they know that Christians are supposed to become spiritually mature. Most are not sure how, but they see their sin and are doubting their salvation. The apostle Peter reveals that this is a spiritual law or truth. When we are growing spiritually, we are confident that we are Christians (2 Peter 1:5-8). When we do not see spiritual growth, there are reasons to doubt. These Hebrews were going backward spiritually and so there was real reason to doubt they were Christians. It is a warning to us. Patterns of sin are warning signs.

THE SYMPTOM. The author of Hebrews told his readers that they would have a difficult time understanding what he was going to say about Melchizedek. That was their symptom. Their “disease” was that they were “dull of hearing” or lazy when it came to in-depth study of the Word. They were not really interested in the deep, meaty things of scripture, but wanted warm, simple, comfortable, encouragement from scripture. Apparently, they did not want to study the Word but preferred to have someone else teach them. They were on a diet of milk and not solid spiritual food. The Spirit called them spiritual babes. The Greek means spiritual preschoolers. They should have been able to teach others, but instead they had gone backwards spiritually. Now they needed someone to teach them the basics all over again. It is a sad picture. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that a knowledge of the Word is one necessary mark of mature Christians. So the author of Hebrews is concerned about them - very concerned.

THIRD WARNING. Their problem was revealed for all to see and for us to learn. They had no desire to grow beyond the basics of the faith, and as a result they did not even know the basic truths (Heb. 5:12). Here are the basic truths Hebrews is talking about.

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 shall do, if God permits. (NASB) Heb. 6:1-3

They needed to be taught these again. This is a major reason to doubt they were for real. Consequently, the author of Hebrews gives them another warning - the third. Each warning (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13) has been stronger and darker. This warning is the strongest and darkest. The heart of the warning occurs in Hebrews 6:4-6.

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 . . . (NASB) Hebrews 6:4-5

FOUR KEY GREEK WORDS. There are four important Greek words that we must understand if we hope to unscramble the meaning of Hebrews 6:4-6.

Enlightened. Our first Greek word, PHOTIZO, is translated “enlightened.” Our English word “photo” is closely



related to it. It means “to bring to light, to give light, and to make plain.” It is used in Ephesians 1:18,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling . . .
(NASB) Eph. 1:18

It also occurs in Eph. 3:9 and 2 Tim. 1:10 for example. The ancient writer Erasmus makes the meaning of the word clear in the following quote.

Who once for all have left the darkness of their former life, having been enlightened by the gospel teaching . . .

It means to give light or understanding.

So when Hebrews 6:4 says, “In the case of those who have once been enlightened.” it is simply saying that these folks have been given light or understanding. Hebrews 10:32 says they understood the gospel, but it does not say they became Christians. That conclusion is a guess.

Tasted. The second Greek word, GEUOMAI, simply means “to taste, to get a taste, or to experience.” In Matt. 16:28 the word is used to talk about experiencing death. In 1 Peter 2:3 it is used figuratively of tasting of “the kindness of the Lord” - an experience. In Matt. 27:34 it refers to Jesus’ tasting the “drink mingled with gall.” This implies that the meaning of the phrase “tasted of the heavenly gift” means that they “experienced the heavenly gift.”

What happens if we conclude that this means they received faith (Eph. 2:8), or the Holy Spirit? If we do that, we have changed the meaning of the word GEUOMAI to the idea of “possessing” salvation or someone living inside of us. We must not forget that Hebrews also says they tasted “the good Word of God” and “the powers of the age to come.” If GEUOMAI means “possessed,” then how do they possess the Word of God or the powers of the age to come? The conclusion is: we have a problem. The answer is that “tasted” means they experienced. They experienced the heavenly gift. They did not possess it, nor was it inside of them. Jesus tasted wine on the cross. He did not drink it (Matt 27:34).

Partakers. The English word “partakers” is our third Greek word, METOCHOS. It means “companions, share in, or

partners.” In Hebrews 1:9 it is used to say that Jesus and the angels are companions. So Hebrews 6:4 means these folks were partners of the Holy Spirit or had shared in the experience of the Spirit. It does not say they were sealed by the Spirit (Eph. 1:13) or baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). This will be explained more in the next study.

FALLEN AWAY. Maybe the readers of Hebrews were Christians, but there was doubt. They were struggling. They needed to preserve rather than quit. What is described here in Heb. 6:4-5 is the experience of a non-Christian - one who was in church with other Christians, a person who was around Christians, and experienced the life of the church. They had heard the Word of God taught, witnessed the power of the Spirit and had seen the display of the Spirit, but they were not possessors. They were not Christians. These people are described as being enlightened, tasting, and sharing. They are not described as believing, accepting, and being sealed or even baptized.

So when we come to Heb. 6:6 we find that if this person falls away, he/she cannot be renewed or restored.

Perseverance

*Two frogs fell into a can of cream,
The sides of the can were shiny and steep,
The cream was deep and cold.
"Oh, what's the use?" croaked number one.
"Tis fate, no help's around. This was a mistake.
Good-bye, my friend!
Good-bye, my friend!"
And weeping still, he drowned.*

*But number two, of sterner stuff,
Dog-paddled in surprise.
The all the while he wiped his creamy face,
And dried his creamy eyes.
"I'll swim awhile at least," he said,
It really wouldn't help the world,
If one more frog were dead."
An hour or two he kicked and swam,
A breast stroke or a back stroke he did.
Not once he stopped to mutter,
But kicked and kicked and swam and kicked,
Then he hopped out, via butter."*

Anonymous

. . . 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.
(NASB) Hebrews 6:6

The Greek word for “fall away” is PARAPIPTO. It means “to commit an error, to offend, to go astray, to abandon a former relationship or association.” The Holy Spirit is saying that if a non-Christian, after being taught truth, after experiencing the life of the church, and seeing the power of the Spirit, then abandons the faith, it is all over.

If we believe this passage teaches that a Christian can lose his/her salvation, we must also believe it when it says he/she cannot be restored. Some say that “impossible” really means that is difficult for them to come back. But that ignores the meaning of the word “impossible.” It is the same Greek word used in Heb. 6:18 to say that is impossible for God to lie. Is it impossible or difficult for God to lie? If this is talking about a Christian, the Christian must never slip!

ILLUSTRATION. The Holy Spirit uses an illustration to explain Heb. 6:4-6.

For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon 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. (NASB) Heb. 6:7-8

It is a picture of rain falling on the ground. The ground produces either good plants or thistles. This is not a picture of ground that is either good or bad. It is a picture of a person who believes, accepts Jesus, and receives the Holy Spirit, or a person who has experienced everything a non-Christian can experience short of becoming a Christian and then turns away (abandons or falls away) from the faith. A person who ultimately abandons the faith will not return.

CONCLUSION. This has been part one of this passage. Next week we will, Lord willing, complete the study of this important passage. The Holy Spirit will challenge these Hebrew readers to be diligent in the faith. We who call ourselves Christians need to be faithful.