

Can I Lose My Salvation If I Fall Away?

Have you ever wondered or thought that maybe there is something or someone better than Jesus? I know men and women who have wondered about Jesus Christ. They have wondered if maybe there is not something better in the Christian life. Some are disillusioned; some stay home. Some shop around the different cults and different religions. They are looking and wondering if there is something better than what they have known. Maybe they claimed to be Christians as a child. Maybe they are Christians in young adulthood. Maybe they are Christians in older life. But they are looking. I met a man some years ago who very proudly told me that he was searching. He rattled off about six or seven different groups whose meetings he had been attending. I would not call myself a Christian if I was considering different religions.

The book of Hebrews is written to some people who appeared to be Christians. They appeared to believe in Jesus Christ.

They appeared to belong to Jesus. But the truth is that they were unhappy. Difficult times had come, and they were beginning to wonder about Jesus. They had been followers of Moses and of the Jewish faith. Life was not now as good as it once was; so they were searching. They were thinking about going back to Judaism. They were thinking that maybe Judaism was better than Jesus Christ.

We saw in previous studies that the Holy Spirit was

trying to encourage them. Jesus is better than the angels. Jesus is better than both Moses and Aaron. He is better than the Levitical priesthood because these leaders were all part of Judaism, part of what they had left. So the Holy Spirit was trying to help these people understand that going back would not be better. Going back would not be an improvement. Staying with Jesus was the best because He is the best! He is superior. So the Holy Spirit has been warning them. Not only has the Spirit told them that Jesus is superior; He also warned them to listen. He has warned them to not leave. We have seen that in Hebrews 2:1-4, Hebrews 3:1-14, and also in Hebrews 4:11. The message has been to

hold on, hang on, do not leave, but stay.

We saw in Hebrews 4:16 that the Holy Spirit told these people that God really does care. Yes, you are going through difficult time. Yes, there are potholes in the road of your life, but Jesus really cares. In Hebrews 4:16 we read the following:



Woman Falling Away

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (NASB)

This was an appeal to them. You are going through some difficult times, but God will show you mercy. He will provide grace. He will do it at the appropriate time, and help you go

through the trial—not necessarily take you out of the trial.

Pressing On to Maturity. When we come to our study now in Hebrews 6, we are moving into a difficult passage. I remember the first time I taught Hebrews 6, I told the Lord that if my understanding of salvation was wrong, then I wanted the Holy Spirit to help me know and understand the truth. Just because I had believed something in the past did not mean that it was the truth. Often when we come to a passage of Scripture that seems to contradict something that we have been taught, we seek to defend our belief rather than honestly determining if we have been wrong. When I came to this passage of Scripture, I said, “Lord, I do not care what I used to believe, I want to know what does this passage say. What does it mean? What is the truth?”

Dr. R. W. Dale makes the following comment about this passage. I thought it was instructive for us. He says,

I know how this passage has made the heart of many a good man tremble. It rises up in the New Testament with a gloomy grandeur, stern, portentous, awful, sublime as Mt. Sinai, when the Lord descended upon it in fire, and threatening storm clouds were around Him, and thundering and lightnings and unearthly voices told that He was there.¹

This is just a reminder that this is a difficult passage. We should not be surprised if there are a multitude of interpretations about what this passage really means. There are some who say that the passage is about Christians losing their salvation. There are some who believe that the passage is about those who have sinned. There are a multitude of different viewpoints as to what kinds of sins these Christians committed. There are those who believe the passage is about unbelievers. The bottom line is: there are many views.

Hebrews 6:1 is where we will start, and the first word is “therefore.” The passage reads,

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 Hebrews 6:1 (NASB)

When you see a “therefore,” you should ask, “Why is the therefore there for?” The therefore points us back to something that occurred previously, something that you have already read. This time, “therefore” refers to verses 11-14 of chapter 5. There the Holy Spirit warned believers that they were baby Christians. They hardly knew the Word of God. They needed to know more about Scripture in order to become spiritually mature. They did not have a solid understanding about Jesus or of the Scriptures.

So he said, “Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity.” His solution for the immaturity of these baby Christians was *not* to start again with the elementary truths of Scripture. I find this very instructive. He said, “We are *not* going to talk about the foundational principle of repentance from dead works. We are *not* going to talk about faith toward God.”

Verse 2 says,

Of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. Hebrews 6:2 (NASB)

The author said we are *not* going to talk about those elementary doctrines. We are going to leave all that behind and press on to maturity. That is, at some point we must be willing to dig deep into Scripture if we desire to grow spiritually!

In verse 3, he said,

And this we will do, if God permits . . . Hebrews 6:3a (NASB)

We will discover, Lord willing, in our study ahead some more mature things taught in Scripture. We will do that as we talk about Melchizedek.

Holy Spirit Gives a Warning. In verse 4 the author gives a warning. It is the third of five warnings in the book of Hebrews. He says,

1. R. W. Dale, Hebrews, Gould and Lincoln. 1871. p. 118.

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 . . . Hebrews 6:4 (NASB)

It is important to note that the New American Standard Bible (NASB) does not correctly translate the Greek text for this verse. It does not read correctly because it does not begin with the word "impossible." It is important to note that the first word in the Greek text of verse 4 is *adunatos*. It literally means "no power." So, it is translated as "impossible." This is an important point because in the Greek language, the most important word occurs first. That is, the emphasis in verses 4-6 is on "impossible." But the NASB moved "impossible" to verse 6. Apparently, they believed it would read better. But the reader needs to know that "impossible" is the major issue in verses 4-6.

But the New International Version (NIV), the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), and the New Living Translation Bible (NLT) have translated the verse correctly by adding the word "impossible" at the beginning of verse 4. Their translations read as follows,

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit . . . Hebrews 6:4 (NKJV)

Now what is impossible? He says it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened to be renewed to repentance. The word "enlightened" has the idea of illumination. It is the Spirit who illuminates our understanding so that we can understand Scripture.

Then we are told "that have tasted of the heavenly gift." There are a variety of views on the heavenly gift. We find in 2 Corinthians 9:15 that Jesus Christ is referred to here as "the indescribable gift" because salvation is also called a gift. Jesus is never called a gift in Scripture. In Ephesians 2:8-9, we are told that we are saved by grace and not by works. Salvation is the gift of God and faith is called a gift. In Romans 6:23 we are told that eternal life is a gift of God.

Also notice it says that they have tasted of the heavenly gift. Some people have said "tasted" means they really did not fully partake of the Holy Spirit. Now that could be true. But the bottom line is that someone who has "tasted of" has eternal life. They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. The first time I ever read that phrase, "partakers of the Holy Spirit," I came away with the conclusion it is talking about somebody who really is a Christian. Then I began to realize that Scripture never talks about Christians partaking of the Holy Spirit. It only talks about the Holy Spirit being within us. The word for "partakers" has the following meaning in the Greek: one who shares as an associate in an enterprise. So when we think about partakers, sometimes we misunderstand the meaning. It means somebody who had an association with the Holy Spirit, but it does not mean they are a Christian. They had been exposed to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church, seen the evidence of His ministry in the lives of believers, or witnessed the ministry of the Spirit through the apostles.

Now notice verse 5:

And have tasted the good word of God . . . Hebrews 6:5a (NASB)

That is talking about the Scriptures. They had tasted it. That is, they had read it. They had learned some things from it.

. . . and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. Hebrews 6:5 (NASB)

In Hebrews 2:4 helps us understand that even unbelievers would have witnessed the ministry of the Holy Spirit. .

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. Hebrews 2:4 (NASB)

These people who appeared to be believers, had tasted of, or

had some experiences with signs, healings, and wonders—powers of the age to come. They had been enlightened, had tasted of the heavenly gift, had been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, had tasted of the word of God, and had experienced the powers of the age to come.

Then he says in verse 6,

And then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance . . . Hebrews 6:6a (NASB)

Verse 6 is the problem because it says if they have fallen away, they cannot be renewed to repentance again. They cannot come back. If someone believes that this passage means Christians can lose their salvation, then this passage also tells us that we cannot come back. You are going to discover that I do not believe it means you can lose your salvation.

So, what does this verse mean? It all hinges on our understanding of verse 6, on the meaning to fall away. What does it mean to fall away? If we are wrong here, we will misunderstand this entire passage. We also need to understand,

. . . since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. Hebrews 6:b (NASB)

We also need to understand verses 7 and 8, which are an illustration. Then we need to understand verse 9. That will help us understand what is truly being said here in this passage.

So, what does it mean to “fall away”? In the Greek the word *parapipto*, is the word for “fall away.” It means “to turn aside or wander.” It has the idea of straying. Someone is walking along a path and they stray. It reminds me of walking my dog. He is walking down the sidewalk with me; when suddenly he wants to go somewhere else. That is the idea. They had gone off the path. They have fallen away when they take a different path.

There are two possible meanings to “have fallen away”. These either are people who have rejected Jesus or these are people who have sinned in their walk with Christ and are drifting away. In order to determine which view is correct,

we must notice the last part of the verse. it says, “since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” What does that mean? Notice it says, “they again crucify to themselves the Son of God,” and then it says putting Him to open shame. What does that mean? The ESV translates the last part of this verse in a very interesting way. I think it is instructive for us. It reads as follows:

Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding Him up to contempt. Hebrews 6:6b (ESV)

I think the New Living Translation (NLT) is a little clearer. It has the same meaning as the ESV, only uses different words. It reads as follows:

They themselves are nailing Him to the cross once again, and holding Him up to open shame. Hebrews 6:6b (NLT)

The phrase “once again” is a reminder that Jesus died on a cross, and was crucified by the religious leaders of the day. They were rejecting Jesus. They had heard Him, seen Him do miracles, do signs, do a lot of wonderful things, and yet they did not believe in Him. They rejected Him. We are told in the Gospels that they spit on Him and mocked Him. We are told that they tortured Him, laughed at Him, and crucified Him. You can read about it in Matthew 26 and 27 and also in Mark, Luke, and John. Galatians 3:13 tells us that,

Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. Galatians 3:13 (NASB)

When Jesus died on a cross, He was put to open shame. It was an embarrassing time of open ridicule. I think that gives us a clue to the meaning of the phrase “fallen away”. This passage is a picture of someone who has come to full knowledge about Jesus. They have been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit in some sense of the word. They had experienced

"the good word of God and the power of the age to come." They came to full knowledge, had full understanding of the truth, and then what do they do? They rejected Jesus. The Jewish leaders did that: Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, all of them. They rejected Jesus, nailed Him to a cross, and He was put to open shame.

These people to which Hebrews is written appeared to be Christians. If after coming to full knowledge about Jesus, they then rejected Jesus, it would have been just as if they had nailed Him to a cross. They would have been just like the Jewish leaders effectively putting Jesus to open shame. Their friends and neighbors would know that they were no longer believers, no longer Christians. They put Him to open shame. They would in effect be saying, "He rejected; Jesus, she rejected Jesus because they believed there was something better than Jesus." In Acts 8 we read about a man who had some experiences with Christ. It says,

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city. Acts 8:4-8 (NASB)

Verse 9:

Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." Acts 8:9-10 (NASB)

So Simon Magus saw what Peter was doing. He saw some of the powers of the age to come.

Verse 11:

And they were giving him attention. . .

This refers to the people's reaction to Simon.

And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Even Simon himself . . . Acts 8:11-13a (NASB)

Watch this.

. . . believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:13b-17 (NASB)

Now here is the picture. Verse 13 tells us that Simon believed. He was baptized, saw signs and miracles, heard the word of God, was illuminated, tasted of the heavenly gift, tasted of the good word of God, and experienced the powers of the age to come.

Verse 18:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him . . . Acts 8:18-20a (NASB)

Now watch what Peter said. His words are instructive. He said,

“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.” Acts 8:20-23 (NASB)

Peter said Simon's heart was not right before God. He told him that he would not have any part or portion in this matter. Was Peter talking about the Holy Spirit? That could be. Or was he talking about salvation? Yes! Simon was not a believer because a believer must have the Holy Spirit dwelling within. In addition, verse 24 reveals that Simon was not concerned about salvation but only in escaping punishment.

Now realize that Simon Magus had full illumination. He had full understanding. He believed and yet he was not a Christian. How can that be? Remember in 1 Corinthians 15:2, Paul was communicating to the Corinthians. In the beginning of 1 Corinthians, he called them Christians. He described them as saints. But in chapter 15, verse 2, Paul said it is possible to have true faith, and it is also possible for someone to have vain faith—that is, faith that is not real. Yes, Simon believed but it was not real faith. Simon believed, but it was not transforming faith that resulted in eternal life. It was not true faith, life changing faith.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus mentions that at the end times there will be those who will come to Him and say that they did good works in Jesus' name. They did this miracle or that miracle. Jesus will say, “Depart from me because I do not know you.” They thought they were Christians. They thought they were real. They did some marvelous things. Have you ever thought about Judas? In Matthew 10 we are told that Jesus sent the disciples out to preach the Gospel. He gave them power to cast out demons and to perform miracles. There is no reason to believe that Judas did not do those things. However, just because he did those things does not mean he was a Christian.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, at the end of the book, Paul said,

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. 2
Corinthians 13:5 (NASB)

Check yourself out. Are you really a Christian? Did you really believe in Jesus? Just because someone professes to be a Christian, or appears to be real does not mean they are. Hebrews 6:4-6 is an example of people who appear to be Christians. They had many “Christian like” experiences. This is a warning.

Verses 7 and 8 give us an illustration that helps press the point. Verse 7 says,

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 . . .
Hebrews 6:7 (NASB)

Here is the picture: The rain illustrates a person being enlightened, tasting, partaking, and observing the powers of the age to come. That is the rain. It illustrates learning about Jesus and God's plan of salvation. It should produce fruit. Good things should happen. But verse 8 says there is also another possibility.

. . . but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. Hebrews 6:8 (NASB)

Here is the picture of people who come to a full understanding of who Jesus is and go one of two ways. Either they produce fruit that reveals they have eternal life, or they produce thorns and thistles revealing they were never Christians. That is the message of verses 4-6. If the rain fell on them but the result was only thorns and thistles, then they were never Christians. If they had full knowledge about Christ, experienced the fellowship of believers, and then rejected Christ, how else can they be saved? What else can be done? At this point, it is impossible to renew them to repentance which leads to saving faith (v. 6).

This reminds me of the parable of the sower of the seed

and the four different kinds of soils. The first three soils are bad. The last soil is good because it produces fruit: some 30, some 60, some 100 fold. That is verse 7. But verse 8 illustrates the results of seed falling on the first three soils: thorns and thistles. Notice what it says, "It is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." They are sent to hell or the lake of fire.

So someone who receives a knowledge of Jesus Christ, understands what salvation is all about, and yet after coming to a full knowledge of the truth then rejects Jesus Christ, that person is not a Christian. Verse 8 has that person in view. This reminds me of Revelation 20:13-14. The rejecters of Jesus, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, will be sent to the lake of fire where they will suffer the second death, eternal separation from God.

Verse 9 will help put everything in focus for us. Verse 9 says,

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. Hebrews 6:9 (NASB)

Whoa! Wait a second! What is this? We are told here that these people appeared to not be Christians. In fact, the apostle said he thought they were Christians, but they were not living as Christians.

Conclusion. So how do we understand this then? There are people who appear to be Christians. They have gone through some difficult times in their life. They are discouraged. They are looking, wondering, thinking that maybe there is something better than Jesus. They are thinking about going back. The Holy Spirit and the human author of Hebrews says, "No! Do not do that. You do not understand that if you leave, if you end up rejecting Jesus Christ, then you cannot come back. You cannot return, not because God does not want you back, but because your decision reveals your heart. It reveals your ultimate rejection of Jesus Christ, and it will prove that you were never real." Hebrews 6:4-8 is a warning. It is a warning that if a person does leave, they were never real.

1 John 2:19 tells us,

They went out from us, but they were not really . . .

What? They were not. . .

. . . of us. 1 John 2:19 (NASB)

People can say they belong to Jesus Christ. But if somewhere along the way, someone who appeared to be a Christian walked away and are no longer really interested in Jesus Christ, then this passage tells us they were never for real.

Hebrews 6:10 continues the message:

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. Hebrews 6:10 (NASB)

Now verse 10 is wonderful. The Holy Spirit makes the point that the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews have been ministering to others and were still ministering. Now look at verse 11. He says,

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end. Hebrews 6:11 (NASB)

He said, "Do not leave!" You just need to continue. You just need to keep going. Do not give up on Jesus. Do not give up on salvation.

Verse 12:

So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:12 (NASB)

Now verse 12 is very important. He said, "Do not be sluggish." That is the same word that was used earlier in Hebrews 5:11. These folks were lazy. They were not pushing themselves. He says, "You need to give some effort. You need to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the

promises.”

May I ask, are you imitating anyone? Is there anybody whose walk with God and spiritual life you would like to imitate? When I was a young person, in my twenties, early thirties, there was a man who was my friend. I wanted to be like him. So I started imitating him. I do not mean I imitated his mannerisms or his words or his personality. I wanted to be like him spiritually. I wanted to be able to know Scripture as he knew it. I wanted to be able to pray as he prayed. I wanted to be like him spiritually. I wanted to imitate him. In effect, his spiritual life inspired me.

There is no reference to age in this verse, to young people, middle aged people, or older people. It is addressed to everyone. I call this the often forgotten ingredient of spiritual growth. We need to imitate someone who is more mature in the faith than you are. I do not think any of us will ever spiritually arrive. So, I think there should always be someone you should want to be like.

Ultimately, we should want to be like Jesus. That is the goal in the Christian life, to be just like Jesus, to be His friend, to love Him, to know Him. The way to get through the difficult times in our Christian walk is to imitate someone. We usually do not want or do not think about imitating someone else. But the author of Hebrews says, the Holy Spirit wants us to find someone who can mentor us. You ask, “How do I know who to imitate?” Hebrews 13:7 answers the question. We are to find someone whose Christian life is worthy of imitation. They may or may not be a recognized leader in the church. Perhaps they have taught the Scriptures. After evaluating their spiritual walk, ask them to mentor you.

I do not know if you are a Christian. Maybe you think you are a Christian. But I would say this: if you are not sure that you are a Christian, we would like to pray with you. We would like to talk with you and help you. You might be thinking to yourself, “I am a Christian—at least I think I am a Christian.” If you are not sure and you would like me to pray for you, I would be glad to pray for you. Maybe you would like to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If so, please feel free to email us.