

## Hebrews 6 - Loss of Salvation?

*6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,  
2 of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

*3 And this will we do, if God permit.*

*4 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,*

*5 and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,*

*6 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.*

*7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:*

*8 but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

*9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*

*10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

*11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:*

*12 that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Just perused part of an article of the interpretation of Hebrew 6, concentrating on vv. 4-5. The author gives a survey of 4 views as have gained traction in the past in one communion or another. Since the import of the passage is fearful on the face of it, and since I claim no expertise in the Greek, if I am to read the Bible for myself and understand what is said, it seems I must parse the English text. That doesn't mean I should ignore the commentators, but what of their disagreements? Suppose I adopt the position that I will trust the translators to have mainly got it right, and that any fine shades of meaning will be illuminated by context. I read the passage as annotated following.

*6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,  
2 of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

*3 And this will we do, if God permit.*

In these verses, I take the notion that Paul (and I take the writer to be Paul, who is as Hebrew as can be; you don't have to agree) is saying that the basic doctrines of Christianity have already been covered. There is more to be said, but to those who have a level of maturity. So this is the context.

*4 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,*

*5 and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,*

So, in these verses, who is described? On the face of it, it surely SOUNDS like believers, does it not? There has been much discussion of the meaning, the most sensible of which is about whether these are real believers (whom we know cannot be ultimately lost -see Romans 8:29 and following for but one supporting passage of many) or those who only appear to be. If they ARE real believers, and if we are talking about a real falling away, something NOT hypothetical, then we become very uncomfortable doctrinally in v. 6.

*6 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.*

And this here is the crux of any difficulty with the passage. The one thing immediately clear is that, for whomever it is who falls away, hypothetical or otherwise, recovery is not a possibility.

*7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:*

*8 but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

These verses set forth an analogy of what is to be expected for those who are fruitful believers, as opposed to those who (whether we account them present believers or not) have an existence separated from God. V. 8 speaks, I believe, of real damnation, of hell.

*9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*

But in v. 9 and following, Paul brings it home to his audience. YOU, he says, are not at risk for any of this. Moreover, he speaks of salvation in this verse, contrasting salvation to the description of what went before. That appears to confirm that v. 8 was indeed talking about those not saved.

*10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

*11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:*

*12 that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

And, since he's talking to believers, now there is encouragement to continue in the faith, behaving as becomes believers. I know not so much of church history, but I think I recall that this letter came at a time of great persecution and hardship among the recipients.

Perhaps we have at least two truths discussed here.

- It seems inescapable that there is a contrast between an end in heaven and an end in hell. The point is real, and the fruit displayed is shown to be relevant as well. Can it be that Paul is saying that either some of you are not believers, or, anyway, to look at you, I can't tell the difference, and I'd better remind you of what consequences go with what state of your heart?
- And what of v.6? I read this as a hypothetical. If people are addressed for whom it is a description, what is the point? Shall they repent? By the very text, the answer is no. Rather, I think it is addressed to Christians. I think it shows the doctrinal error of those who would be saved, then lost, then saved, then lost. Communions like the Roman Catholic Church and the Salvation Army, different as otherwise they are, seem to embrace such a doctrine. I read here the logical impossibility of it.

I note also the whole flow of the discussion. We have discussed the basics, now we shall perhaps move on and build a more complete canon of doctrine. Repeating the basic Gospel is not all bad, but we shall, after all, not convince anyone who has (as a hypothetical or not, have it either way) fallen away. Therefore, we continue to provide the further truth that builds up the saints for the work to which they are called.