

# On Hebrews 6

The question is occasionally raised in respect of Hebrews 6 whether we are taught there that a Christian may lose his salvation.

The opening text of Hebrews 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.*

And, for context, the end of Hebrews 5:

- 11 *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.*
- 12 *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*
- 13 *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*
- 14 *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

I think that, at first, we might all agree on at least this: IF we understand in v. 4-5 that genuine Christians are referred to, and IF there is a real falling away of the same, then those referred to have no possibility of recovery to a saved state. The words mean this, if nothing else. V. 7-8 further amplify the logical consequence; we are not left in doubt of what is meant by "fall away".

However, among Christian communions which accept a doctrine that a genuine Christian can fall away, to be separated from Christ not just in respect of fellowship, but altogether, it seems that most if not all of these communions believe that that very same (former, may we say?) Christian may be forgiven and restored. This seems to me an inconsistent set of beliefs.

Now, how might we understand the passage consistently? Some say that what is being taught resolves to the notion that those who fall away, who apostasize, were never Christians, really and truly, to begin with; they never believed into Christ. It seems a plausible way to receive the passage: they are people WE think are Christians to look at them, but they turn out not to be, and so they exhibit behavior of falling away.

Now I don't doubt that there are some people who answer that description. But I don't think that's really what's being taught here. You may disagree, and you may possibly be able to show me from Scripture that I am wrong. Until you do, I find the following explanation a bit more on point.

Note the final verses of Chapter 5, and v. 1-3 of Chapter 6, recalling that chapter and verse numbers are not part of the original text, but assigned for convenience of navigation and study. That is, the thoughts set forth are not

bound to be organized according to chapter divisions. Also, note, if you will, the teaching in 5:10 and preceding, which the author seems to be working his way back into from (say) 6:13 on. It seems to me that the passage between is parenthetical. The current immaturity of the audience is stated, but also the need to go on to teach more than the bare bones of the Gospel.

There is no point on dwelling on only the basics; these are people who are at least saved, they do not need to be "re-saved", and if by any means any could be said to have been lost, going over the basics again would avail them nothing. Rather, this saved (v. 9) audience needs to know more, and appreciate more, of the Christ Who bought them.

I think that the logical impossibility of being first saved, then unsaved, then saved again, etc., is being set forth in passing, in the midst of the larger discourse of the superiority of Christ. It is a doctrinal point that must be stated, yes, and it clarifies how that we can and should pursue mature doctrinal and spiritual understanding. But I don't think this place is the main thrust of Hebrews.

Observe communions believing that Christians may move in and out of a state of being saved, of a "state of grace", as some say. What happens? There have been Salvation Army meetings where the same folk repeatedly come down front to be saved yet again, last week and again this week. Catholics make regular confessions to a priest, especially so if they've committed a "mortal" sin or if they aren't quite sure. Do you see how this becomes a salvation by works, or partly by works? Does this honor Christ, Who died once for all? Is not His work sufficient? Can He not keep that which I commit to Him? Can I be lost out of His hand? If He offers me eternal life as a present possession, how is it eternal, if once I've accepted it, I can somehow lose it?

But if I AM saved, and CAN'T lose my salvation, then I am the more free to know more of Christ and to care about others coming to know Him. I don't need to pursue and conserve my own salvation; that's HIS job.

Now, what about those who DO appear to apostasize? I suggest we regard Peter, who did "not know the man!" as one example, and Judas, who recognized he had betrayed innocent blood, as another. By what a man does or says right before us today, we still can't know his heart. We know, yes, what we see, and we'd be foolish to follow one who seems to have abandoned faith in Christ. But we shouldn't judge such a one, but pray for him to believe truly. If we conclude that he never knew Christ to begin with, then what is he but another unsaved man who needs to be saved? If we conclude he really is a genuine Christian, then might he be like Peter - or like Ananias and Saphira - either one whom God can restore, or one whom God can discipline, perhaps severely? And we can pray for him also.