

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #11

Hebrews 6:4-8

Years ago I talked with a guide who worked for an outfitter in Idaho who told me about the most dangerous trail he ever traveled by horse. He said it was so narrow that no animal could pass. The forest service actually posted a time you could go up this mountain and a time when you could go down the mountain. He said that there was a place that you actually had to get off your horse and make a 90 degree turn. He said if either you or your horse fell it was straight down and you would never be able to get back up. That kind of thing is what worried the writer of Hebrews. He was fearful that some of these believers would fall from their award winning trail and never get back up on it again.

The book of Hebrews says to every believer - it is time for a spiritual reality check concerning where you are at in your relationship with God. It is time to assess yourself and see whether or not you are on the path of an award winner, a path of full inheritance.

How can we as a believer know that we are in the process of throwing away our eternal inheritance? There are some key indicators in this book of Hebrews that we may look for that would suggest one is tossing away his inheritance:

- 1) A disinterest in, and a drifting away from, and neglect of your great salvation. 2:2-3
- 2) A gradual hardening of your heart, moving more toward unbelief and sinful things. 3:12-13
- 3) A spiritual dullness and deadness that is not interested in growing deep in the Word of God. 5:11-14
- 4) A falling away from a commitment to Jesus Christ. **6:4-8**
- 5) A loss of desire to fellowship with God's people at church. 10:25
- 6) More and more willful choices to sin. 10:26

If this describes you as a believer, you can be relatively certain you are on a path of a loser and you risk forfeiting your eternal rewards.

The central controversy that has always surrounded the book of Hebrews are the warnings that show up in the book. Christians are given serious warnings that it is possible to fall away and drift away from Jesus Christ to the point that they receive severe punishment. **The dangers presented in this book of Hebrews are not hypothetical or theoretical; they are very real.**

As we come to this text, we come to one of the most serious warnings given to believers in the entire book of Hebrews. Joseph Dillow said of this text in Hebrews, "Few passages have had greater impact on Arminian thinking than this fearful warning about falling away and entering into such a spiritual state that it is impossible to be renewed to repentance" (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 433).

This warning is obviously one we need or else God would not have given it to us. **This warning is aimed at believers, those who possess everlasting life, not those who profess it but don't actually have it.**

There have been pages written trying to identify the target of this warning. C. I. Scofield said there were four opinions about this text: 1) Some said it was a warning to Jewish people who professed faith in Jesus Christ but did not have faith; 2) Some said it presented a hypothetical case that if one could fall away, it would be impossible for repentance; 3) Some said it referred to believers who were in danger of losing salvation; 4) Some said it referred to believers who were in danger of losing rewards (*Scofield Reference Bible*, NASV, p. 1675).

It is quite obvious that this text is aimed straight at believers. These are true Christians being addressed. **The context demands this interpretation.** First of all in 5:12–6:3, believers are challenged to eat solid food from God’s Word and go on to maturity. The believers are challenged to go beyond the shallow level of repentance and babyhood and grow up. The writer of Hebrews uses the pronoun “we” in **verse 3**, which includes himself in connection with this warning. This is not language aimed at nonbelievers.

Second, the language of this very warning demands that we see this warning aimed straight at true believers. In these verses these people are classified as:

- 1) Those who have been enlightened (**6:4a**);
- 2) Those who have tasted the heavenly gift (**6:4b**);
- 3) Those who have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (**6:4c**);
- 4) Those who have taken in the good Word of God (**6:5a**);
- 5) Those who have tasted of the powers of the age to come (**6:5b**).

This is not language that is ever used pertaining to an unbeliever. Those who take the position that this warning is not aimed at a believer use as their defense the fact that there is nothing said here about a broken and contrite heart. We may point out there is nothing said here about being born again or about being redeemed or being a new creation. Furthermore, the five aforementioned statements clearly prove these are real believers.

But what is not specifically stated is what exactly does the believer fall from? What exactly does it mean to fall away? The Greek word “fall away” (παραπιτω) is a word that means to fall away as in fall by the wayside or fall in or into something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 342).

It is specifically stated in Hebrews that the danger for the believer is to fall into a lifestyle of willful sin (10:26) that can end up meaning that a believer has thrown away his reward (10:35).

The contextual issue at stake is a growth to maturity (6:1-3) that would lead to a future inheritance (6:12). Now what exactly is the falling danger for the believer? You certainly cannot lose your justification, so what could you lose? In the immediate context the falling away danger would be just the opposite of going on to maturity. **The most obvious interpretation is the threat of not staying on the path toward maturity in the development and progression of the Christian life and a drifting away from a love for the Lord into sin. The real danger for the believer is that he will forfeit his position as partner with Jesus Christ when Christ reigns because he fell away from his focus.**

In this immediate context it would seem that the inspired stated danger is that of falling away from an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that goes on to maturity (6:6; 19-20). The writer was convinced of “better things” (verse 9) for these believers than just pursuing a life of sin (Heb. 10:26).

We believe that the falling away danger is that of a believer falling away from His commitment to Jesus Christ and His relationship with Jesus Christ to such a state that one ends up pursuing a life of willful sin and costing himself his inheritance.

What this text warns is this:

IF A BELIEVER CONTINUALLY FALLS AWAY FROM HIS COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST INTO A LIFESTYLE OF WILFULL SIN, IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO RESTORE HIM TO A FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THAT WILL GIVE HIM A WONDERFUL ETERNAL INHERITANCE.

The only warning ever given to an unbeliever is the warning of eternal hell if one does not believe on Jesus Christ. However, the warning to the believer is you can fall away into sin to the point that you lose your inheritance.

Now to carefully understand this warning text, we would like to break it down into three main warning parts:

WARNING PART #1 – The description of people who may actually fall away. **6:4-5**

There are five descriptions of people who actually have the potential of falling away:

Description #1 - Those who have been enlightened. **6:4a**

The particular word “enlighten” (φωτισθεντας) is one that means that this person was lit up by God and had God’s light shining in him (Smith, p. 477). The Apostle Paul used this light concept in the specific context of a true God-wrought salvation (II Cor. 4:4-7).

It is the same word used in Hebrews 10:32. In that Hebrews 10 context, it is used to describe those who had believed on Jesus Christ and suffered (10:32-33); who had been sanctified (10:29) and those who had experienced justification (10:38).

Description #2 - Those who have tasted of the heavenly gift. **6:4b**

Joseph Dillow made an interesting observation when he said, “In every usage of gift in the Bible it refers to the bestowal of some divine gift, spiritual and supernatural, given to man. In each case, unless Hebrews 6 is an exception, the receiver of the gift is either regenerate already, or the gift itself is regeneration” (*Ibid.*, p. 438).

Now the idea behind the word “taste” is not that of sampling something, but fully experiencing something. In fact, in Hebrews 2:9 the same word is used and it refers to the fact that Jesus Christ experienced the fullness of death for every man. It was not that he just was sampling death, He fully experienced it.

Description #3 - Those who have partaken of the Holy Spirit. **6:4c**

The word used here in reference to the Holy Spirit is metochoi (μετοχοι), which refers to those who have fellow-shared or who have entered into a partner relationship with the Holy Spirit. **In the book of Hebrews these metochoi are always those who are regenerate people.** This refers to a real partnership with the Holy Spirit. These were believers who had walked close with the Lord.

Description #4 - Those who have tasted the good Word of God. **6:5a**

These believers had continually taken in the Word of God. The noun used for “word” (ρημα) has in mind single words (Smith, p. 397). What I understand this to mean is that these believers had been serious students of God’s Word. They had studied things right to the very word. Perhaps even in a word by word analysis.

Description #5 - Those who have tasted of the powers of the age to come. **6:5b**

These believers were familiar with the miracles of Jesus Christ and the future program of God. They had experienced it.

It does not matter how long you have known the Lord, there is no doubt that you actually can fall.

PART #2 – The potential real possibility to fall away. **4:6a**

The potential clearly stated here is that it is possible for believers who have had all of these marvelous blessings to fall away in their faith. The potential to fall from a rich welcome into heaven is something the Apostle Peter implied (II Peter 1:10-11).

It is hard to grammatically determine whether or not some had already fallen away or that they were just in danger of falling away. But regardless, the danger was real.

W. H. Griffith Thomas said this “is no ordinary or general fall but a deliberate apostasy, not backsliding but willful departure” (*Let Us Go On*, p. 73).

Do not try to fool yourself. You can walk away from your commitment to God. You can walk away from the Word of God. You can walk away from your inheritance.

PART #3 – The impossibility of being restored if one does fall away. **6:6b**

W. H. Griffith Thomas believed that everything in this passage hinges on the word “impossible” (*Let Us Go On*, p. 73). What actually is the impossibility?

In the Greek text, the word “impossible” actually is the first word of **verse 4** and is not even in **verse 6**. Here is one time where the King James and the New International Version are more technically accurate than the NASV in their English translation.

The actual word “impossible” (αδυνατον) means to be without power, might and strength which leaves one incapable and unable to do something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 10). Now the stated impossibility would be to “renew them again to repentance.” It is obviously possible for something to happen to a believer that would leave them in a state where it would be impossible for them to be renewed to repentance.

The word “renew” (ανακαινιζω) is very rare. It is strictly a Pauline word and this specific word and forms of it are only used four other times in the New Testament.

Paul uses a form of this word in **Romans 12:2** where he talks about being transformed by renewing the mind ; **II Corinthians 4:16** where he talks about being renewed in our inner man day by day; **Colossians 3:10** where he uses it in reference to be renewed in our development in Christ; and in **Titus 3:5** where he talks about the work of the Holy Spirit in actually saving us.

The specific danger that faces the believer is a danger of falling away from the Lord and the Word and reaching a point where it is impossible to be renewed to repentance. The word “repent” (μετανοεω) means to change thinking or change mind (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 287).

Now, of course, the real question here is for whom is this an impossibility? It cannot be an impossibility for God for nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). God certainly has the power to break any rebellious child down if He so chooses to do so. The immediate context would mean that God would not permit a believer to be restored to being an award winner. God may say, I will not permit you to share in a full inheritance because of your willful sin.

What I understand this to mean is that a saved person can get into a mental and spiritual condition and state that he is so hardened in sin that he cannot be renewed to partnership with Jesus Christ because God will not let him.

It is possible for a believer to drift so far away from God that he cannot even confess his sin or change his mind about it. As Dr. Joseph Dillow observed, “This is not a renewal to salvation from sin’s penalty, hell, but a salvation from sin’s power” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 446). You can fall off a cliff into sin and never get out of it. A believer can actually be sentenced by God to a state where they do not even sense any conviction or need to get right with God.

One reason given why God would permit something like this to happen to His own people is because of what this does to God’s own Son, “it crucifies Him again.” Now carefully observe from **verse 6** that the crucifixion is “to themselves.” What this means is that those who drift away from God and fall away from Jesus Christ cannot be renewed to repentance because their lifestyle and conduct again reflects the sin for which Christ was crucified.

It is interesting that all other verb tenses in this text are aorist except “crucify” which is present tense. In other words because these believers continually and habitually sin and continually and habitually shame the name of Jesus Christ, they continually make a personal mockery of what Christ did on that cross.

Their continual hard heart and the refusal to listen to the Word of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, makes their repentance impossible. God will not let them confess and be restored to a position of getting full reward, because they have believed on His Son but they live their lives like they haven't.

The “for” (γὰρ) which begins verse 7 explains this whole thing. God gives His Spirit and His Word to His people and He desires that they blossom and mature to a point where they are fruitful and receive His blessings. God delights in blessing His people. However, as **verse 8** says, the believer who pursues a life of sin is worthless and is close to being cursed. However, he will not be cursed because of the justification of God. **But in the end, his works will be burned up and he will lose his rewards and inheritance (I Corinthians 3:13-15).**

If you are a believer ask yourself some serious, honest questions:

- 1) Do you sense that you are drifting away from the marvel of your great grace salvation?
- 2) Do you sense that you are moving more and more toward sinful things and less and less from spiritual things?
- 3) Do you sense that you are falling away from a desire to grow deep in your knowledge of the Word of God?
- 4) Do you sense that you are drifting away from an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?
- 5) Do you find that you are making more and more willful choices to sin?

Check yourself - you can throw a lot away.

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, it is better to lose your inheritance as a believer than to burn in the eternal lake of fire. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.