

## Having Had All These Things: Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6a

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Heb 6:4-6a "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance ..."

### I. Introduction

#### A. There are at least three schools of thought on Hebrews 6:4ff.

1. False Christians: People who claim to be Christians but who never had eternal life (Reformed; Lordship View)

One school regards those who are referred to in the passage as not having eternal life and thus were never Christians in the first place since the assumption of this school is that one cannot lose his eternal life.

2. Failed Christians: Christians who lose their eternal life (Arminianism)

The other school regards those who are referred to in the passage as real Christians who had eternal life but subsequently lost it.

3. Fruitless Christians: Real Christians who have fallen away but nevertheless retain their eternal life.

These are real Christians who have eternal life, fall away and yet do not forfeit that eternal life. This view holds in common with the first view that one cannot lose his eternal life.

#### B. The passage

1. in the Greek

(4) Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας Πνεύματος Ἁγίου [5] καὶ καλὸν γευσαμένους Θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος [6] καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν ...

2. A literal, if cumbersome, translation:

*<sup>4</sup>[It is] impossible for the [ones] once having been enlightened, having tasted and of the gift of the heavenly and sharers having become of Spirit Holy <sup>5</sup>and good having tasted of God word powers and of coming age <sup>6</sup>and having fallen away, again to renew into repentance ...*

Ἄδύνατον	γὰρ	τοὺς	ἅπαξ	φωτισθέντας				
<i>[It is] impossible</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>the [ones]</i>	<i>once</i>	<i>having been enlightened</i>				
γευσάμενους	τε	τῆς	δωρεᾶς	τῆς	ἐπουρανίου			
<i>having tasted</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>of the</i>	<i>gift</i>	<i>of the</i>	<i>heavenly</i>			
καὶ	μετόχους	γενηθέντας	Πνεύματος	Ἁγίου				
<i>and</i>	<i>sharers</i>	<i>having become</i>	<i>of Spirit</i>	<i>Holy</i>				
καὶ	καλὸν	γευσάμενους	Θεοῦ	ῥῆμα	δυνάμεις	τε	μέλλοντος	αἰῶνος
<i>and</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>having tasted</i>	<i>of God</i>	<i>word</i>	<i>powers</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>of coming</i>	<i>age</i>
καὶ	παραπεσόντας	πάλιν	ἀνακαινίζειν	εἰς	μετάνοιαν			
<i>and</i>	<i>having fallen away</i>	<i>again</i>	<i>to renew</i>	<i>into</i>	<i>repentance</i>			

## II. The Writer is Referring to Christians

- A. Perhaps the biggest hindrance to understanding the passage is the unwarranted insertion at the beginning of v. 6 of the word 'if' before the expression 'fall away.'
- B. It is critical to note that there is no conditional in the Greek.
  1. The term παραπεσόντας (parapesontas)<sup>1</sup> is an aorist participle just like
    - a. 'enlightened,' (φωτισθέντας, photisthentas)
    - b. 'tasted,' (γευσάμενους, geusamenous)
    - c. 'become,' (γενηθέντας, genethentas) and
    - d. 'tasted,' (γευσάμενους, geusamenous, second occurrence).
  2. All should be translated with the idea of "having" in the sense of "having been enlightened," "having tasted," (twice) and "having become."
  3. Thus παραπεσόντας should be translated "having fallen away."
    - a. The sense is that it is impossible to renew those to repentance who have done all these things.
    - b. It is not saying that it is impossible for those who have done the first four things to be renewed to repentance *if* they should fall away, as if there is some doubt whether they have or could fall away.

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<sup>1</sup> παραπεσόντας (par-a-pes-on'-tas), accusative masculine plural, 2 aorist participle of παραπίπτω (par-a-pip'-tō), "I fall away"

- C. The expression "having been enlightened" (φωτισθέντας [photisthentas])<sup>2</sup> is used in Hebrews 10:32 to describe his Christians readers.

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

1. The writer of Hebrews regards his readers as believers.
    - a. He calls them "brethren" (3:12; 10:19; 13:22).
    - b. He calls them "holy brethren" (3:1).
    - c. Further, he says that his readers are sanctified (10:10).
      - (1) Note that he says that these ones in chapter 10 "have a better and an enduring possession ... in heaven." (v. 34)
      - (2) It follows, then that their "having been enlightened" in 10:32 is because they are believers.
    - d. If a believer is one who has been enlightened (as 10:10, 34 indicate), then the ones who have been enlightened in 6:4 are believers.
  2. My argument here is not that φωτίζω or its cognates always refer to someone having been saved.
    - a. John 1:9 might be a reference to the fact that there is a sense that every person is enlightened.
    - b. Each one is either enlightened by salvation or by the conviction of sin. (John 3:19; 9:39; 16:8)
    - c. But the context of the use of φωτισθέντες in Hebrews 10 seems to indicate that this enlightenment has eventuated in their having been saved.
    - d. In like manner, the enlightened ones in Hebrews 6 can only be people that the writer is trying to describe as those who are saved.
    - e. It is precisely because the writer describes his Christian readers as having been enlightened that one should expect the writer to have his readers take the enlightened ones in Hebrews 6 as having been saved as well.
- D. They are described as "having tasted of the heavenly gift" and of "the good word of God and of the powers of the age to come."

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<sup>2</sup> φωτισθέντας (pho-tis-then'-tas), accusative masculine plural, 1 aorist passive participle, from φωτίζω (pho-tid'zō), "I give light"

1. Some interpreters try to weaken the notion of γευσσάμενους (geusamenous, occurring twice)<sup>3</sup> "having tasted" as if it was saying that the readers might be only partially acquainted with "the heavenly gift" and "the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" as if to say that they merely sampled something but had not eaten of it.<sup>4</sup>
2. However, the term means "taste, partake of, enjoy" and in a figurative sense "to come to know."<sup>5</sup>
3. Further, the same term is used in Heb. 2:9 to describe Jesus' relation to the death that He died for everyone.
4. But surely it was not the case that Jesus only sampled or was only partially acquainted with death but rather, Jesus experienced death fully.
5. Thus, the ones being described here have partaken of and enjoyed "the heavenly gift" and "the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" can only be a description of Christians.

E. They are "partakers (μετόχους [metochous]<sup>6</sup>) of the Holy Spirit."

1. The word here has the idea of *sharing or participating in*, and as a substantive means "a partner, companion."<sup>7</sup>
2. Heb. 3:1 uses this term to describe the readers' partaking of the heavenly calling.
3. The term is also used in Heb. 12:8 to describe the readers' partaking of the Lord's chastening.
4. Taking this term in the participial phrase in which it occurs (μετόχους γενηθέντας, metochous genethentas), it should be translated "having become partakers."<sup>8</sup>
5. This same phrase is used in Heb. 3:14 to describe the readers' partaking of Christ.
6. The writer recognizes that his readers have partaken of Christ which surely describes only a Christian.

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<sup>3</sup> γευσσάμενους (geus-a-men'-ous), accusative masculine plural, 1 aorist participle of γεύομαι (geu'-o-mai), "I taste "

<sup>4</sup> This seems to be the position of the *Bible Study Fellowship International* study notes, Lesson 12, Series VII, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, s.v., γεύομαι, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> μετόχους (met-o'-chous), accusative plural of μέτεχος (met'-e-chos), "a partner, companion"

<sup>7</sup> William Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v., μέτεχος, p. 514.

<sup>8</sup> γενηθέντας (gen-ā-then'-tas), accusative masculine plural 1 aorist passive participle, from γίνομαι (gin'-o-mai), "I become"

7. It should be equally as clear, then, that only a Christian can be described as a partaker of the Holy Spirit as described here in chapter six.

F. Thus, on the basis of these considerations, it seems clear that the ones being referred to are Christians.

### III. A Christian Cannot Lose His Eternal Life

#### A. The Doctrine

1. The doctrine that a Christian cannot lose his eternal life is sometimes called "eternal security," "perseverance of the saints," "preservation of the saints," and "once-saved-always-saved."

2. It does not mean that all who profess are truly saved. Lost people can profess salvation.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

3. It does not mean that all who prosper are truly saved. Lost people can prosper.

Psalm 73:3-5 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men.

Psalm 37:7-9 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

4. It does not mean that those who are truly saved can in no sense fail. Saved people can fail at things.

Some of the "champions of faith" failed by many people's standard.

Hebrews 11: 32-39 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. **And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the**

**sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,**

Thus, contrary to the preaching of some today, being a Christian does not mean they you'll succeed at everything you attempt, even if the task is a worthy one.

But failing does not mean that you are not saved.

5. It does not mean that those who are truly saved can in no sense fall. Saved people can morally and doctrinally fall.
  - a. Hymenaeus and Alexander suffered "shipwreck" in their faith.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

I take the expression 'delivered to Satan' to mean 'being excommunicated; put out of the church

Cf. Matthew 18:15-17 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Cf. 1 Corinthians 5: 9-10 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet *I* certainly *did not mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore **"put away from yourselves the evil person."**

Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe,

Cf. 1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of* the wicked one.

- b. Some had their faith "overthrown" because of the false doctrines taught by others.

2 Timothy 2:17-18 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

B. The Case for Eternal Security<sup>9</sup>

1. PERISH: It is not God's will that we perish.

Matthew 18:12-14 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

John 6:37-39 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."

C. PRAYER: Jesus prayed for us.

John 17:15, 20 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;"

D. POWER: God is powerful: Nothing can separate us (from without).

John 10:28-29 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor

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<sup>9</sup> These allusive points were inspired by a sermon I heard by Adrian Rogers of Bellview Baptist Church, Memphis, TN. I have borrowed and adopted them for my purposes.

things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

'nor any other created thing' must include yourself

E. PRESERVATION: God preserves us from ultimately falling (from within).

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

2 Timothy 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

F. PRESENT TENSE: Eternal life is present tense.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John 6:47 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

1 John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Holding a ticket example:

- If I have a plane ticket to Brazil, the ticket will guarantee me the plane ride to get me to Brazil at some point in the future.
- If I lose the ticket, I cannot board the plane, unless and until I get another ticket.
- Many people mistakenly think that "being saved" or "having eternal life" means that right now they possess, as it were, a ticket to get them to heaven when they die.
- Thus, they mistakenly think that something could happen to cause them to lose their ticket to heaven and end up going to hell when they die, unless and until they get the "ticket to heaven" back.

- But if having eternal life is a present possession, and not merely what happens after one dies, then to say "I had eternal life for about 10 years." is a contradiction.

G. PREDESTINATION: We're predestined to adoption and conformation.

Whatever else one might want to say about predestination (i.e., are only certain people predestined to be saved) it seems indisputable that Christians are predestined to their destiny of adoption and conformity to the image of Jesus.

1. We have been predestined to adoption.

Ephesians 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Adoption is that state of entering into the fullness of our relationship with God when we receive our renewed bodies and enter heaven .

cf. Romans 8: 23 Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

2. We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

cf. 1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is.

H. PROTECTION: We're sealed by the Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

I. PROMISE: The Spirit is an earnest or guarantee.

Ephesians 1:14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

2 Corinthians 1:22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Holman Bible Dictionary: earnest -

The Greek arrabon is a first payment on a purchase which obligates the purchaser to make further payments.

A payment made in advance, it secures legal claim to an article or validates a sales contract before the full price is paid.

The concept is a Semitic one with the word being adopted into Greek.

The related Hebrew term appears in Genesis 38:17, where Judah promised to send Tamar a young goat and she asked for a pledge to hold until she received the promised animal.

God has given believers the Holy Spirit in their hearts as an earnest or pledge of the salvation to come (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

Daily relationship with the Spirit brings total confidence that God will complete His plan and the believer will share His gift of eternal life.

J. PERFECT: Christ's work is perfect.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

K. Problem Verses

### 1. Dealing with "problem" verses in general on any topic

a. Interpret obscure passages in light of clear.

- b. Interpret minority passages in light of majority.

If we let the "problem" verse lead us to conclude that one can lose his salvation, then we will have created many more "problem" verses than we had in the first place.

- c. Interpret earlier revelation in light of later revelation.

(1) The Bible contains God's special revelation of Himself and His will.

(2) This revelation by God is progressive, which is to say:

not every truth is revealed from the beginning

not every truth that is revealed from the beginning is revealed in its fullness.

(3) Some truths of the New Testament are "mysteries," which is to say that they were not clearly revealed in the Old Testament.

two comings of the messiah

the Church (vs. Israel)

## 2. Dealing with "problem" verses in general on "once saved always saved"

- a. Is the passage referring to one who has lost his salvation or to one who was never saved in the first place?
- b. The word 'saved' does not always necessarily refer to going to heaven when one dies, but may refer to temporal deliverance.

Matthew 8:24-25 And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. 25 Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

- c. The word 'judgment' does not necessarily refer to going to hell when one dies, but may refer to temporal judgment.
- d. Some of the "problem" verses prove too much even for the one who thinks a Christian can lose his salvation.

Cf. Hebrews 6:4-8 For **it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Thus, if "once saved always saved" is not true, then "twice lost always lost" must be true.

- e. What does the Bible say about what can happen to a Christian when he sins?

Hebrews 12:7-11 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

1 Corinthians 11:27-31 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

### 3. Specific "Problem" Verses

**Hebrews 6:4-8** For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

[see "Having Done All These Things: Brief Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6a"]

**Galatians 5:4** You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

If someone asks me if I believe that someone can fall from grace, I say "Yes."

But the erroneous assumption is that falling from grace = lose of salvation.

However, grace is not itself salvation, but is the basis of salvation.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith."

The contrast here is the contrast between the law as the basis of salvation and grace as the basis of salvation.

The Galatians were seeking to mix the two. (cf. 5:1-3)

But there cannot be that mixture.

Rom 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

Thus, if one seeks salvation through works or the law, he is no longer seeking it through grace, but has fallen from grace.

**Hebrews 10:26-30** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord." And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

Are the readers Christians?

They are the same group addressed in Heb. 6.

They are called "sanctified" in v. 29.

They were "illuminated." v. 32

They have an enduring possession in heaven. v. 34

They confessed Christ. v. 35

**Matthew 24:13** "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

context is the tribulation period

those (Jews) who endure physically through the tribulation will be delivered by the Savior at His second coming.

**Matthew 12:31-32** "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

**1 Corinthians 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

**Revelation 3:5** "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before

cf. overcoming: 1 John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? His angels.

cf. overcoming in Revelation:

2:7	I will give to eat from the tree of life  "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."
2:11	shall not be hurt by the second death  "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."
2:17	I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it  "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."
2:26-27	I will give power over the nations; 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'  "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; 27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces

	like the potter's vessels'; as I also have received from My Father;"
3:5	shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels  "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."
3:12	I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name  "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."
3:21	I will grant to sit with Me on My throne  "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."
21:7	shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son  "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

**Revelation 22:19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

#### L. Problem Questions

1. Does the doctrine of once saved always saved mean that it does not matter how much someone sins after they have trusted Christ?
  - a. It is always possible that someone who claims to be saved is not in fact saved.
  - b. The doctrine of rewards comes in to play regarding what happens when the Christian sins.
2. If we are "free" to choose Christ, why are we not "free" having chosen Christ, to reject Him?

decisions that are irreversible, e.g. jumping off a building you may have the "freedom" to jump off the building and fall, but having jumped, you can no longer decide to fall or not, likewise, you may have the "freedom" to receive Christ, but having received Him the decision is irrevocable.

#### IV. Resolving the Apparent Problems in Hebrews 6:4-6a

- A. For those interpreters who come to this text with the assumption that it is not possible for a Christian to lose his eternal life (of which I am one), the passage seems to pose several problems.
  1. First, how is it possible for a Christian to fall away?
  2. Second, what does being renewed to repentance mean?
  3. Third, how is it that it is impossible to renew such ones to repentance?
  4. Fourth, how can it be that those Christians can be described as those who "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, put Him to open shame ... rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned"?
- B. How is it possible for a Christian to fall away?
  1. Probably one of the main reasons why Christians who hold that one cannot lose his eternal life insist that a Christian cannot fall away is that they falsely assume that to fall away means to lose one's eternal life.
  2. This is especially the case when it comes to the use of such phrases as "apostasy" or "falling from grace."
  3. There are several reasons why this notion of falling away here is not problematic for those of us who hold that a Christian cannot lose his eternal life.
    - a. First, there is no reason to grant that eternal life is even in question in this passage.
      - (1) The assumptions we bring to a passage often have a lot to do with confining the interpretive options we think we have with the passage.

- (2) It is a mistake to assume that the notion of falling away always (or ever) has anything to do with losing one's eternal life.
  - (3) The writer on several occasions encourages his readers to maintain and hold fast. (3:6, 12-15; 6:11-12; 10:23-25)
  - (4) The passage here in chapter six is clearly a case where some have not done so.
- b. Second, there are other instances in the New Testament where the Christian is described as falling in some sense.<sup>10</sup>
- (1) In 1 Cor. 9:27 Paul acknowledges the possibility that he could be disqualified.
  - (2) In 1 Tim. 1:18-20 Paul describes some who, because of false teaching, have suffered a shipwrecked faith.
  - (3) In 2 Tim. 2:17-18 Paul describes some who, again because of false teaching, have had their faith overthrown.
  - (4) In James 5:19 James describes one among the brethren who can avoid having his life saved from death.
4. Thus, for the human being, there are two issues at stake:
- a. whether one has eternal life and
  - b. whether the one who has eternal life has rewards.
5. What is at stake for the Christian when it comes to the warnings in scripture such as the one here in Heb. 6 about the danger of falling away from the faith or into sin are
- a. the issues of temporal judgment in this world,
  - b. the judgment of our works in the next world, and the gaining or losing of reward in Heaven.

C. What does being renewed to repentance mean?

- 1. Even if this passage is talking about Christians (which is what I am arguing), there is no reason to think that the issue being discussed has anything to do with one's eternal life.
  - a. This puts this passage off limits to those who try to argue that a Christian can lose his eternal life.

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<sup>10</sup> Some have taken these and other verses to argue that it is indeed possible for a Christian to lose his eternal life. At this point I am not trying to defend the notion that a Christian cannot do so. I am assuming that point for the sake of my overall argument that there is no reason for those of us who do hold this position to avoid admitting that Heb. 6 is a warning to Christians.

- b. Repentance is certainly something that a Christian can do. (Luke 17:3-4; 2 Cor. 7:9)
  - c. The writer was concerned that, after all his readers had experienced in the Lord in terms of their salvation, if that was not enough to keep them faithful, then nothing else, short of God's power itself, possibly could.
2. The stern warning is that if one of God's children falls away, there awaits him the awesome and terrible chastening and judgment of God, the extent of which could possibly result in his own physical death.
- a. It is clear that the Christian who falls into sin can experience the chastening of the Lord.
    - (1) Chastening is for the purpose of restoration. (Heb. 12:7-11)
    - (2) The imagery here in Hebrews 6 of the thorns and briers is reminiscent of the curse in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve fell into sin. (Gen 3:18)
    - (3) The imagery of burning and fire is too often associated by interpreters as references to eternal hell.
      - (a) However, fire can also refer to the judgment that can await a Christian.
      - (b) Perhaps the clearest and most direct reference to the judgment of fire that pertains to the Christian is 1 Cor. 3:12-15.
      - (c) Further, the metaphor of the burning of the fields had to do with the practice of burning the briers in a field in order to restore the field to a crop bearing capacity.
      - (d) The burning of the field was not intended to destroy the field.<sup>11</sup>
  - b. Physical death is also a possibility.
    - (1) Ananias and Sapphira died because of their sin. (Acts 5:1-11)
    - (2) Some of the sinning Corinthian believers had died due to their sin. (1 Cor. 11:30)
    - (3) James warns about the danger of death for one who sins. (James 2:14; 5:19-20)
    - (4) John warns about the danger of death for one who sins. (1 John 5:16-17)
3. Just as not every reference to judgment or death has to do with eternal judgment in hell, likewise not every reference to salvation and its cognates has to do with eternal life.
- a. Several passages talk about salvation in the sense of preserving the physical life, as, for example Acts 27:31.

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<sup>11</sup> Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege A Study on Faith and Works*. Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981, 71.

- b. I contend that Heb. 6:9 is not talking about eternal salvation in heaven but rather is talking about the preserving of the physical lives of those Christians who either do not fall away in the first place or who, because of God's chastening, repent of their sins and are restored. (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6-8)
4. The problem with taking all these passages that talk about judgment as if they are warnings to false professors (i.e., to those who are not really saved in the first place) is that we eliminate from the Scriptures the proper warnings that we as Christians do well to heed.
  5. If every time a warning is given about the possibility of falling, one concludes that the passage is not talking about the Christian, then to the extent that this person has full assurance of his own eternal life, to that extent all these warnings are dangerously dismissed as irrelevant.
- D. How is it that it is impossible to renew such ones to repentance?
1. The term 'impossible' (ἀδύνατον, adunaton) clearly refers to the infinitive 'to renew' (v. 6).
  2. As an adjective, it can occur with or without the verb to be (ἐστὶ (esti)) and is translated "It is impossible."
  3. However, for whom it is impossible is not necessarily expressed in the context.
    - a. Does the text mean that it is absolutely impossible even for God or does the text mean that it is merely impossible for man?
    - b. Compare, for example, Jesus' comments in Mt. 19:26 when He was queried directly about the possibility of who could be saved. Jesus said, "With men this is impossible (ἀδύνατον), but with God all things are possible."
    - c. Therefore, whether the writer of Hebrews here intends the impossible to be taken absolutely or only regarding men is a judgment call the interpreter has to make.
    - d. If the reference to the burning is indeed a use of the burning of the fields metaphor as I have suggested, then it seems reasonable that the repentance is not impossible for God to effect.
- E. How can it be that those Christians can be described as those who "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, put Him to open shame ... rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned"?
1. The language here is indeed severe. It can only bespeak of the gravity of a Christian's falling away. But again, there is nothing in the language that references any eternal judgment.
    - a. Rather, the ones whose "end is to be burned" are reminiscent of those occasions where God physically destroyed people by fire. (Lev. 10:2; Num. 11:1; 16:35).
    - b. Indeed, the Lord is described as a consuming fire. (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 9:3)

2. The severity of falling back into the shadows of Judaism for those who have experienced the reality of salvation in Christ is morally akin to crucifying the Son of God a second time.
  - a. This is so because of all people, the Jews who were reared on the shadows should know better the superiority of the reality to which the shadows had pointed.
  - b. Having experienced both, it is shameful for them to return to the shadows from that reality. Such ones are in danger of a most severe chastening from his Lord.
3. Again, however, there is no need to take the imagery of being cursed and burned as a reference to eternal damnation.
4. As I have argued above, this imagery is completely consistent with the chastening from the Lord exacted on those of His children who fall into grievous sin.

## V. Conclusion

- A. While I celebrate those fellow Christians who defend the doctrine that a Christian cannot lose his eternal life, one must be careful when bringing this assumption to a passage not to overreact and assume that a given passage is even threatening this truth.
- B. The doctrine of the possibility of experiencing God's chastening and judgment in this life and the doctrine the possibility of gaining and losing reward in the next life are too often neglected in some evangelical circles.
- C. It is important that we who understand the security of the believer nevertheless recognize that the Bible gives stern warnings to us of the dangers of lurking sin, especially when we are tempted to give in under persecution.
- D. It is hoped that such warnings will be the very thing that strengthens us to remain faithful when nothing else does.