

Hebrews 6:1-3
March 20, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

One of the hot topics in Christian circles is whether or not a believer can lose their salvation. There are people on both sides of this issue, and one such passage that seems to lend support that you can lose your salvation is in Heb 6:4-6, which we'll look at more closely today to see if it's really saying that.

As background, I grew up Southern Baptist and was taught "once saved, always saved." I still believe that wholeheartedly. I believe if you've really transferred your trust to Christ alone for your salvation, you are eternally secure without a shadow of a doubt. But here's the criticism that is often heard about "once saved, always saved:" You mean to tell me that people can trust Christ as their Savior and then turn around and live any way they please and still go to heaven?" Some Christians perceive this doctrine of eternal security as "dangerous." The very idea that a person can trust Christ in order to get "fire insurance" with no intention of changing behavior, makes this doctrine repulsive.

So what are some of the arguments to support you can lose your salvation?

1. There are some believers who view "once saved, always saved" as an affront on the holiness of God. The thinking is, "A holy God demands holy living from His children." If a person claims to be a Christian, but there doesn't appear to be any evidence that they are walking with the Lord, then the perception is that they people have a "license to sin." Do disobedient Christians really get a pass on their sinful behaviors? Of course, Paul dealt with this notion in our study of Romans where we learned that wasn't the case at all!
2. Some read John 6:47, "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life" and logically ask, "Doesn't that mean that if you stop believing in Christ that you no longer have eternal life?"
3. Isn't "blaspheming the Holy Spirit" considered the unpardonable sin?

The bottom line is that there are some Christians who argue that the doctrine of eternal security allows people to "get by" with their sin. They get both the benefit of heaven and the pleasure of sin. Eternal security is seen as a loophole in God's economy.

Transition: Today, we will see the writer of Hebrews describe a *hypothetical* case to prove his point that a true believer cannot lose his salvation. By the time we get to v.9, you will read, "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case." Moreover, we need to keep the overarching message in mind as the author continues to reach out to these Jewish Christians. He is exhorting them to spiritually mature! His argument runs like this: "Let's suppose that you do not go on to maturity. Does this mean that you will go back to condemnation, that you will lose your salvation? Impossible! If you *could* lose your salvation, it would be impossible to get it back again; and this would disgrace Jesus Christ. He would have to

be crucified again for you, and this could never happen.” This chapter is really a continuation of the last chapter, which stresses the importance of maturing as a Christian.

Having said that, given the questions that Christians have around “eternal security,” **I made a big assumption that you would take great interest in strengthening your understanding of eternal security.** I assumed you would appreciate seeing other passages that support eternal security. I assumed that each of us has something we can bring to the table that helps anyone here who thinks that you can lose your salvation.

It is my prayer that all of us can rest in God’s assurance of eternal security by knowing the foundational truths of Scripture that support this. And no matter what side of the fence you’re on, please keep in mind that the writer’s purpose was not to frighten the readers but to assure them.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 6:1-3]

V.1:

- Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,

V.2:

- instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

V.3:

- And God permitting, we will do so.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1-3: The writer records in the first three verses what he believes are the “elementary teachings” about Christ. Let’s tag them and make sure we understand what these teachings are.

- Repentance – What does that mean? [to change one’s mind; it’s not good enough to just feel bad about our sin, but to change one’s mind in order to change our behavior.]
- Sin – “acts that lead to death.” [Rom 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”]
- Faith – Where does faith come from? [God! Eph 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved by faith, and this not from yourselves, it is **gift from God**, not by works, lest any man should boast.]
- Baptism – Why is baptism important? [It is a visible testimony of one’s salvation. It is not only symbolic of our sins being washed away and that our old self died with Christ and was raised as a new creation in Christ Jesus, but we are also identifying with a local body of believers. We are saying, “I am one of you.”]
- Laying on of Hands – We don’t see that much in our churches, but it still is considered an important way in which we set apart a person for ministry (I Tim 4:14) or to share some blessing with another (Lk 24:50; Acts 19:6).
- Resurrection of the dead – What does Scripture teach about the resurrection of the dead? [John 5:28-29 “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out...” Rev 20:11-15 All unsaved people will be raised after the Millennium to stand before the Great White Throne in judgment.]

- Eternal Judgment/Hell – Heb 9:27 “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Matt 25:31-45 The sheep and the goats. V.41 “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

LOOK:

Believers are called to spiritually mature, and our starting point is having a strong handle on the “elementary teachings” that form the foundation of the gospel message. Let’s review these basic elements of the gospel and be ready to share it with others.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 295–296). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Call to Spiritual Maturity (Heb. 6:1–3)

No one can escape coming into the world as a baby because that is the only way to get here! But it is tragic when a baby fails to mature. No matter how much parents and grandparents love to hold and cuddle a baby, it is their great desire that the baby grow up and enjoy a full life as a mature adult. God has the same desire for His children. That is why He calls to us, “Go on to maturity!” (Heb. 6:1, NIV)

It is a call to spiritual progress (vv. 1–3). If we are going to make progress, we have to leave the childhood things behind and go forward in spiritual growth. Hebrews 6:1 literally reads, “Therefore, having left [once and for all] the elementary lessons [the ABCs] of the teaching of Christ.” When I was in kindergarten, the teacher taught us our ABCs. (We didn’t have television to teach us in those days.) You learn your ABCs so that you might read words, sentences, books—in fact, anything in literature. But you do not keep learning the basics. You use the basics to go on to better things.

The phrase, “Let us go on,” should be translated, “Let us be carried forward.” It is God who enables us to progress as we yield to Him, receive His Word, and act on it. A baby does not “grow himself.” He grows as he eats, sleeps, exercises, and permits his body to function. Nature, as ordained by God, carries the baby along day after day, and gradually he matures into an adult. It is normal for Christians to grow; it is abnormal for them to have arrested growth.

The writer lists six foundational truths of the Christian life, all of which, by the way, are also foundational to the Jewish faith. After all, our Christian faith is based on the Jewish faith and is a fulfillment of it. “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). If the readers of this epistle went back to Judaism in order to escape persecution, they would only be abandoning the perfect for the imperfect, the mature for the immature.

The first two items (repentance and faith) are *Godward* and mark the initiation of the spiritual life. To repent means to change one’s mind. It is not simply a “bad feeling about sin,” because that could be regret or remorse. It is changing one’s mind about sin to the point of turning from it. Once a sinner has repented (and this itself is a gift from God, Acts 5:31; 11:18), then he is able to exercise faith in God. Repentance and faith go together (Acts 20:21).

The next two items (baptisms and laying on of hands) have to do with a person’s relationship to *the local assembly of believers*. In the New Testament, a person who repented and trusted Christ was baptized and became a part of a local church (Acts 2:41–47). The word “baptisms” in Hebrews 6:2 is plural and can be translated “washings” (Heb. 9:10). While water itself can never cleanse sin (1 Peter 3:21), baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing (“Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on His name”—Acts 22:16, NIV) as well as our identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–4). The “laying on of hands” (Heb. 6:2) symbolized the sharing of some blessing (Luke 24:50; Acts 19:6) or the setting apart of a person for ministry (1 Tim. 4:14).

The last two items, the resurrection of the dead (Acts 24:14–15) and the final judgment (Acts 17:30–31), have to do with *the future*. Both orthodox Jews and Christians believe in these doctrines. The Old Testament teaches a general resurrection, but does not make the doctrine clear. The New Testament teaches a resurrection of the saved and also a resurrection of the lost (John 5:24–29; Rev. 20:4–6, 12–15).

The lesson of the paragraph (Heb. 6:1–3) is clear: “You have laid the foundation. You know your ABCs. Now move forward! Let God carry you along to maturity!”

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 793-794). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM (6:1–3)

6:1–2. Somewhat surprisingly, despite his estimate of their spiritual state, the author declined to go over old ground. Instead he urged them to go beyond **the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity**. To have reviewed the fundamentals would only have left them where they were. The author preferred “radical surgery” and decided to pull them forward as rapidly as he could. Indeed this was the solution to their problem. If they progressed properly, they would avoid the danger of **laying again the foundation of repentance**. If, as verses 4–6 went on to warn, they were to “fall away,” then a foundation would have been laid for a new repentance, but such a repentance is “impossible” (cf. vv. 4, 6). So advance was their only real remedy.

Acts that lead to death literally means “dead works,” which expression occurs again in a context where it seems to refer to the Levitical ritual (9:14). Here it would be appropriate in the same sense since many of the readers had been converted to Christianity from Judaism. The rituals they had left behind were lifeless ones, incapable of imparting the experiences of life they had found in Christ. The author implied that they should not return to these dead works in any form since to do so would be to lay again a basis for repenting from them—though such repentance would not be easily reached, however appropriate it might be.

But the foundation they would lay in the unhappy event that they fell away would involve other fundamental truths. These are enumerated in the words, **and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment**. The author clearly implied that all these matters belong to the “elementary truths” (5:12) on which the readers gave every indication of wavering. It is likely that each of them was a point at issue in one way or another in the readers’ confrontation with those of other persuasions. The return to ordinances, whether in normative or sectarian Judaism, would only be a return to “dead works.” One who took that backward step would need to be taught all over again that acceptance was obtained by “faith in God,” not by rituals.

Moreover the significance of the various “baptisms” which Christianity knew (John’s baptism, Christian baptism proper, or even Spirit baptism) would have to be relearned as well as the basic facts about “laying on of hands.” In alluding to matters like these, the writer may have been consciously countering sectarian teachings which may well have offered initiations of their own involving “baptisms” and “laying on of hands.” If the sectarians or others, in addition to offering their own initiatory rites, likewise denied the normal Christian eschatological expectations (cf. comments on 4:1, 8–10), then the fundamental doctrines of “the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” would also have been at issue. To abandon their Christian profession and “fall away” (6:6) would be to abandon all these doctrines. Whatever the readers had previously learned, they would be giving up. In this sense the foundation would have been laid for relearning them all over again, though the writer held out little hope in his subsequent statements for such a process to take place.

6:3. What he wanted them to do was to press forward. But he was perfectly aware that this required more than his effort to challenge his readers to make progress. God must help and He alone could help them achieve these goals. The writer had said, “Let us ... go on to maturity” (v. 1), but in a spirit of dependence on divine aid he then added, **and God permitting, we will do so.**

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