

Hebrews 6:4-6
April 3, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Two weeks ago, we broached the hot topic of whether or not a believer can lose their salvation. There are people on both sides of this issue, and one 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.

In case you weren't here two weeks ago, I shared in our class that 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):

Process Observations/Questions:

V.4:

- It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit,

V.5:

- who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,

V.6:

- if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Process v.4-6: These verses have caused many a Christian to worry and have concern because it looks like it’s teaching that you can lose your salvation. There are a couple of views regarding these verses:

One view is that the writer is warning us against the sin of apostasy, willfully turning one’s back on Jesus Christ and returning to the old life. The term for that is “apostasy.” According to this view, such a person, or apostate, would be lost forever. The second view is that this passage refers to those who were exposed to Christian truth, but were never genuinely converted. However, there is not strong support for that because the author in v.4-5 bends over backwards to make sure the reader understands that the persons he’s describing are genuine, born-again believers.

Q: What terms does the author use to describe born-again believers?

- “Enlightened” - The “once” means “enlightened once and for all.” The way this same verb is used in Hebrews 10:32 indicates an experience of true salvation.
- “Tasted the heavenly gift” – “Taste” carries the idea of “experience.” There is some question about what the “heavenly gift” is, i.e. some say salvation; some say the Holy spirit; others say it refers to “forgiveness.” No matter what, they had a real dose of it.
- “Shared in the Holy Spirit” – In previous chapters the author reminded the readers that they were “partakers of a heavenly calling (Heb 3:1) and partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14).” There seems to be no doubt that the author is referring to authentic Christians.

- “Tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age” – Again, to suggest that they only went along with the Holy Spirit to a certain extent is to ignore the simple meaning of these phrases.

The best conclusion we can draw is that the people addressed were true believers. Furthermore, how could *unsaved* people ever disgrace Jesus Christ and put Him to open shame if they never had a relationship with Him in the first place?

Q: So if the author is addressing genuine believers, then it’s hard for us to read this and wonder if we could lose our salvation by “falling away.” So what does that mean? What is the believer “falling away” from? Knowledge of the truth? The personal possession of it? Christian growth and maturity? [To “fall away” is impossible as true believers are eternally secure.]

Process: “Repentance” – Read pg 166 with an emphasis on definition, i.e. “changing one’s mind.”

Think About It by Charles Stanley (pg 165): If Heb 6:6 is teaching that once a person loses their salvation, he or she can never regain it, then ***aren’t we doing children a disservice by encouraging them to be born again? Shouldn’t we wait until they’re much older to lessen the likelihood that they fall away during their teen years and thus lose their salvation forever?***

Process/X-Ref: What passages do you already know that assure us eternal security? [DEB and record]

- John 5:24
- John 10:26-30
- Rom 8:28-30
- I John 5:11-13
- Eph 1:13
- Eph 4:30

[Invite others to offer favorite Bible passages that support eternal security]

Process “Think About It” boxes by Charles Stanley from *Eternal Security: Can You be Sure?*

If Time Permits:

- Cover “blaspheming the Holy Spirit” (Matt 12:31-32) – pg 132-133 in Stanley book. There is no unpardonable sin, but rather one unpardonable state, i.e. the state of unbelief.
- [DEB – Fill in the blank] – “If it is really true that we can lose our salvation, then “X”
 - Wouldn’t Jesus have spent most of His time showing us how to protect our salvation?
 - Shouldn’t Rom 10:13 say, “For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved – unless you have committed the unpardonable sin?!”

LOOK:

Review the key Christian doctrines that are at stake if you really believe you can lose your salvation:

Taken from Stanley's book (pg 9-12)

- **Assurance:** based on finished work of Christ, or else we're in trouble. By definition, we will be partially motivated by fear, which is not of God.
- **Forgiveness:** It's unconditional. The timing of your sins is irrelevant since they were all in the future from the perspective of the cross.
- **Faith Alone:** Salvation by faith is at stake. To imply that salvation is maintained by good works (or not sinning) is to take the daily burden of our salvation upon ourselves. There can't be any boasting in heaven according to Eph 2:8-9.
- **Love:** God's unconditional love is at stake. If His holiness demands something in return from those He loves, it is clear that His holiness makes God incapable of unconditional love!
- **Evangelism:** If you believe you can lose your salvation, you will have a difficult time sharing the love of God with others.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 296–297). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

This progress does not affect salvation (vv. 4–6). These verses, along with the exhortation in Hebrews 10:26–39, have given people cause for worry and concern, mainly because these verses have been misunderstood and misapplied. I have received long-distance phone calls from upset people who have misread this passage and convinced themselves (or been convinced by Satan) that they were hopelessly lost and had committed some unpardonable sin. While I do not want to give a false assurance to any professed Christian who is not truly born again, neither do I want to cause some true believer to stumble and miss God's best.

Bible students over the years have come up with several approaches to this serious passage. One view is that the writer is warning us against the sin of apostasy, willfully turning one's back on Jesus Christ and returning to the old life. According to them, such a person would be lost forever. I have several problems with this interpretation. To begin with, the Greek word *APOSTASIA* is not used in this passage. The verb for "fall away" (Heb. 6:6) is *PARAPIPTO*, which literally means "to fall alongside." Second, we always interpret the obscure by the obvious. There are many verses in Scripture that assure the true believer that he can never be lost. In fact, one of the greatest arguments for security is the last section of this chapter! (Heb. 6:13–20; see also John 5:24; 10:26–30; Rom. 8:28–39)

Those who teach that we can lose our salvation also teach that such a person can be restored. But this passage (Heb. 6:4–6) teaches just the opposite! If you omit the intervening clauses, the statement reads: "For it is impossible ... to renew them again to repentance." In other words, *if* this refers to apostasy, once a saved person turns his back on Christ, he *cannot* be restored to salvation. He is lost forever.

Others claim that the people addressed were not true believers. They had cooperated with the Holy Spirit up to a point, but were not actually born again. Well, let's examine the description of these people and see if they possessed true salvation.

They were "enlightened" (Heb. 6:4). The "once" means "enlightened once and for all." The way this same verb is used in Hebrews 10:32 indicates an experience of true salvation (see 2 Cor. 4:4-6).

They "tasted of the heavenly gift" (Heb. 6:4b), and "tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world [age] to come" (Heb. 6:5). To claim that these people "tasted but did not eat" is to base interpretation on one meaning of an English word. God permitted His Son to "taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). Surely Jesus Christ did not simply *sample* death on the cross! "Taste" carries the idea of "experience." These Hebrew believers had experienced the gift of salvation, the Word of God, and the power of God. Doesn't this describe authentic salvation?

They "were made partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 6:4c). To suggest that they only went along with the Holy Spirit to a certain extent is to ignore the simple meaning of the verb. It means "to become sharers." These same people were not only "sharers of the Holy Spirit," but also "sharers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1) and "sharers of Christ" (Heb. 3:14).

In view of these facts, I have concluded that the people addressed were true believers, not mere professors. Furthermore, how could *unsaved* people ever disgrace Jesus Christ and put Him to open shame?

A third view is that this sin (whatever it is) could be committed only by Hebrew Christians in the first century, while the temple services were still going on. If so, then why did the writer connect this exhortation with the *heavenly* priesthood of our Lord and the importance of spiritual maturity? If what he wrote about cannot happen today, what is the motivation behind the exhortation? It all seems futile to me if we limit these verses to first-century Jewish believers.

Then what is the writer trying to say to us? It is probable that he is describing a *hypothetical case* to prove his point that a true believer cannot lose his salvation. His statement in Hebrews 6:9 seems to support this interpretation: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case" (NIV). 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."

In Hebrews 6:4, the writer changed the pronouns from "we" and "us" to "those." This change also suggests that he had a hypothetical case in mind.

However, there is another possible interpretation that does not require a hypothetical case. You should note that the words "crucify" and "put" in Hebrews 6:6 are, in the Greek, present participles: "while they *are crucifying* ... and while they *are putting* Him to an open shame." The writer did not say that these people could *never* be brought to repentance. He said that they could not be brought to repentance *while they were treating Jesus Christ in such a shameful way*. Once they stop disgracing Jesus Christ in this way, they can be brought to repentance and renew their fellowship with God.

Whatever approach you take, please keep in mind that the writer's purpose was not to frighten the readers but to assure them. If he had wanted to frighten them, he would have named whatever sin (or sins) would have caused them to disgrace Jesus Christ; but he did not do so. In fact, he avoided the word *apostasy* and used instead "to fall by the wayside" (see Gal. 6:1 for a similar word).

Christians *can* “sin unto death” (1 Cor. 11:30–32; 1 John 5:16–17). This is God’s chastening, a theme the writer of Hebrews will take up in Hebrews 12.

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. 794-795). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3. THE ALTERNATIVE TO PROGRESS (6:4–6)

In an extremely solemn pronouncement, the author then set forth the tragic alternative to the progress he desired his readers to make. If they did not advance, they would retreat. Should anyone so retreat, his situation would be grim indeed.

6:4–6. This passage has been interpreted in four ways: (1) that the danger of a Christian losing his salvation is described, a view rejected because of biblical assurances that salvation is a work of God which cannot be reversed; (2) that the warning is against mere profession of faith short of salvation, or tasting but not really partaking of salvation (*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1315); (3) that hypothetically *if* a Christian could lose his salvation, there is no provision for repentance (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1736); (4) that a warning is given of the danger of a Christian moving from a position of true faith and life to the extent of becoming disqualified for further service (1 Cor. 9:27) and for inheriting millennial glory. The latter is the interpretation adopted here. The entirety of these verses constitutes a single sentence in Greek as well as in the English of the NIV. The central assertion is: **It is impossible for those who have ... to be brought back to repentance.** Following the words “those who” is a description of the persons whom the writer affirmed cannot possibly be brought back to a state of repentance. The description he gave shows that he had Christians in mind.

To begin with, he described them as individuals **who have once been enlightened**. This is a natural way to refer to the conversion experience (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3–6). The writer’s only other use of the verb “enlightened,” is Hebrews 10:32, where the reference to true Christian experience can hardly be doubted. In also calling them people **who have tasted the heavenly gift**, he again employed familiar concepts related to initial conversion (cf. John 4:10; Rom. 6:23; James 1:17–18). The effort to evade this conclusion by seeing in the word “tasted” something less than full participation fails—in view of the writer’s own use of this word (Heb. 2:9)—to describe Jesus’ experience of death. One might also compare 1 Peter 2:3, which quotes Psalm 34:8.

The description is continued with the words **who have shared in the Holy Spirit**. The underlying Greek employs again the word *metochoi*, used in Hebrews 1:9 of the “companions” of the messianic King, and in 3:1, 14 of the Christian readers (and is also used in 12:8). The preceding expression evidently led the author to think about those who had received the gift of the Spirit as a result of their conversions. Finally, there are also those **who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming Age**. Here the thought naturally applies to converts whose instruction in “the Word of God” had given them a genuine experience of its “goodness” and who likewise had known the reality of miracles. The word rendered “powers” (*dynameis*) in NIV is the usual one in the New Testament for “miracles” and is an apparent allusion back to the experience mentioned in 2:4. In every way the language fits true Christians with remarkable ease. The effort to see here mere professors of the faith as over against true converts is somewhat forced.

There follows, however, the grim expression **if they fall away**. But the translation does not do full justice to the original language, where there is no hint of a conditional element. The

Greek word *parapesontas* is in fact a part of the construction to which the preceding descriptive phrases belong. Thus a more accurate translation would be: “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted ... who have shared ... who have tasted ... and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.” Far from treating the question in any hypothetical way, the writer’s language sounds as if he knew of such cases.

Naturally the words “fall away” cannot refer to the loss of eternal life which, as the Gospel of John makes perfectly clear, is the inalienable possession of those who trust Christ for it. But the writer evidently has in mind defection from the faith, that is, apostasy, withdrawal from their Christian profession (cf. Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:23–25, 35–39). The assertion that such a failure is not possible for a regenerate person is a theological proposition which is not supported by the New Testament. Paul knew the dangers of false doctrine to a Christian’s faith and spoke of a certain Hymenaeus and Philetus who said “that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17–18). The author of Hebrews was a solid realist who took assaults against the faith of his readers with great seriousness. And he warned that those who succumb, that is, “fall away,” after all of the great spiritual privileges they had experienced, could not **be brought back to repentance**.

The reason is expressed in the words **because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace**. The words “to their loss” might be better rendered “with respect to themselves.” Those who renounce their Christian faith are, with respect to their own conduct and attitude, taking a step that amounts to a fresh public rejection of Christ. When they first trusted Him, they thereby acknowledged that His crucifixion had been unjust and the result of man’s sinful rejection of the Savior. But by renouncing this opinion, they reaffirmed the view of Jesus’ enemies that He deserved to die on a cross. In this sense, “they [were] crucifying the Son of God all over again.” Since the original Crucifixion was especially the work of the Jewish nation, if the readers were Jews being lured back into some form of their ancestral religion, the writer’s words made a particular point. Their apostasy would be like stepping back over the line again and once more expressing solidarity with their compatriots who wanted Jesus put on the cross. That this was most serious was precisely the writer’s point. Such persons could not be won back to the state of repentance which marked their original conversion to Christianity. In affirming this, the author’s words suggested a deep hardening of their hearts against all efforts to win them back, not to Christian conversion, but to Christian commitment.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1827). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

6:4–6 This passage, with its warning, is controversial and difficult. Some persons believe this text teaches that it is possible to fall out of salvation. Though a cursory look at this text might lead one to think that Christians can lose their salvation, that idea is not the issue. These verses instead speak of the need for believers to persevere in the Christian faith. The verbs “enlightened” (v. 4), “tasted” (vv. 4–5), and “became companions” (v. 4) describe persons who have professed Christ and claim to be believers. To “have fallen away” (v. 6) means to commit apostasy. The writer of Heb admonished his readers not to go back to the OT sacrificial system because Jesus is superior to it in every way. If they were to turn away from Christ, repentance would be impossible because it cannot be found anywhere else once Jesus is rejected (10:26–27). By their actions, such persons disgrace Christ openly and try to re-crucify Him. If they forsake

faith in Christ after having professed it and go back (i.e., do not persevere), they never were actually saved to begin with (see Mt 10:22; Mk 13:13).

Stanley, Dr. Charles F (2002). Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Eternal Security: Can You Know for Sure*

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