

Hebrews 6:4 - 8

Along with the book of Romans there is probably no better book than Hebrews to establish the doctrine of eternal security. There are probably more expressions of eternal assurance for the believer in Hebrews than in any other book in the Bible.

- Hebrews 1:3 "when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"
- Hebrews 5:9 "he became the author of eternal salvation"
- Hebrews 6:18 "It is impossible for God to lie"
- Hebrews 7:25 "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him"
- Hebrews 9:12 "but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*."
- Hebrews 9:15 "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."
- Hebrews 10:10 "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
- Hebrews 10:12 "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;"
- Hebrews 10:14 "for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."
- Hebrews 10:16-17 "This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."
- Hebrews 10:22 "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,"
- Hebrews 10:13:20 "that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,"
- Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for..."

Hebrews 7:25-27; 9:12,25-26; 10:10-14 He was sacrificed once for all that we would be saved once for all.

And yet many in the Christian world question the doctrine of eternal security and possibly the primary passage used to show we can lose our salvation is Hebrews 6:4-8. **IF** one believes this passage teaches that we can lose our salvation (it doesn't) then that person also **MUST** believe that person can never be saved again - **"For it is impossible...If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."**

- 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,**
- 5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,**
- 6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.**

"For it is impossible...If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance;"

Here the writer is saying to these professing Jewish believers who need to leave the basics of Judaism and get saved that this can happen only if they have not yet become apostate, rejecting the truth of salvation in Messiah (if God permits).

"The choice must be made by these Hebrews between going back to the sacrifices or on to faith in Christ as High Priest. But their spiritual declension if persisted in, would result in their putting themselves beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit. This is implied in 3:7,8 where they are warned that if they desire to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, they should not harden their hearts, the implication being clear that they would have no more desire to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. This shows that the 'impossibility' of 6:4,6 resides in the condition of their hearts, not in the grace of God." Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, page 112-13

STANDARD INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PASSAGE (compiled by David Reagan, Antioch Baptist Church)

A. Real Loss of Salvation

1. The people were really saved
2. The passage deals with actual loss of salvation
3. Those who lose their salvation can never be saved again

B. Hypothetical Loss of Salvation

1. The people were really saved
2. The passage deals with actual loss of salvation
3. However, the "if" clause points to a hypothetical argument. Paul is not saying that the loss of salvation is possible. He is only saying that if it were then it would be impossible to be saved again.

C. The Spiritual Castaway

1. The people were really saved
2. However, they did not really lose their salvation but fell away from their service to God
3. The impossibility deals with the fact that they are spiritual castaways (1 Cor.9:27) and can no longer return to the perfect will of God in their lives and will never be much used of God

D. The Excommunicated Castaway

1. The people were really saved
2. However, they did not really lose their salvation but fell away from God by committing a major sin
3. They are castaways and, although they will go to heaven, they should never be received back into the church.

E. The Lost Apostate

1. The people were never truly saved
2. However, they were received into the church as saved and participated in a very active way as believers
3. Their falling away was simply proof that they were never truly saved
4. The impossibility of their repentance deals with two things:
 - a. Their return after having claimed to have been saved and fully participating as a believer and after then having fully and outwardly rejecting the truth of the gospel would make a mockery of the gospel of Christ. Christ would be seen as being crucified a second time
 - b. God is declaring that He will not participate in calling them back to the gospel. They have made a mockery of His offer and have gone to a point that He will no longer deal with them.

NOTE: Since the first 4 interpretations begin with the premise that the people in verse 4 are saved, if one can establish that these people are lost people who have become apostates, the first 4 positions are wrong.

To understand this passage there are some basic truths we need to remind ourselves of about this book and this passage:

- 1) Hebrew was addressed to Jewish people who were under persecution and in danger of falling back to the practices of the Mosaic Covenant. The Jewish people had professed a belief in Jesus but some were not really saved even though they gave lip-service to the Messiahship of Jesus.

"A study of the five warnings of the Book of Hebrews is important for two reasons. The first reason is that these are the passages which people generally use to teach that one can lose one's salvation. Second, these passages are usually interpreted from a modern, Gentile perspective, even by those who believe in eternal security. But a proper understanding of these Scriptures requires viewing them from the Jewish perspective of the first century." Arnold Fruchtenbaum, The 5 Warnings of Hebrews, Manuscript #135

"We will need to remind ourselves again of the historical background and analysis of the book, and the purpose of the author in writing it. He was writing to the visible professing Church made up of saved and unsaved. There is no greeting to the saints like we find in most of the epistles. The concern of the writer is with those of his unsaved Jewish readers who under stress of persecution were in danger of renouncing their professed faith in Messiah and returning to the abrogated sacrifices of the First Testament. These he repeatedly warns against this act, and repeatedly exhorts to go on to faith in the New Testament sacrifice, Messiah."

Kenneth S. Wuest in Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, page 119

- 2) There are five warning passages in Hebrews. Consistency argues that we understand these warnings as addressed to the same group of people.

All the warnings are addressed to professing Jewish believers warning them to come to true saving faith in Jesus. For an example of the two groups see Hebrews 4:2.

- 3) Hebrews 6:1 tells the readers to leave behind the elementary teachings and go on. The context of the book and the warning passages can't be referring to New Testament truth but must be referring to the need to leave Old Testament truth and go on to New Testament truth (specifically sacrifice).
- 4) Perfection in this context in the book of Hebrews (and other places also) is used of the sacrifice of Christ and salvation, not Christian maturity.
- 5) Many teach this is speaking of unsaved people:

"The view many, including myself, hold is that those who fall away are not true believers, but rather men and women who only appear so. They are people who have received a thorough exposure to the gospel-for example, the catechized Jewish believers off the preceding verses- and have made an ostensible profession of faith and have been received into the fellowship of God's people. However, at a later point they have abandoned their profession, even becoming opponent's of Christ.'" Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, Vol. 1, page 156-57

John F. MacArthur, Jr., highlights the same point: *People can go to church for years and hear the gospel over and over again, even be faithful church members, and never really make a commitment to Jesus Christ. That kind of person is addressed here... Persistent rejection of Christ may result in such persons' passing the point of no return spiritually, of losing forever the opportunity of salvation... He eventually follows his evil heart of unbelief and turns his back forever on the living God.*

E. Schuyler English appraises these immunized Christians: *"...some are enlightened as to the truth, are even stirred by it, but yet do not embrace it within their hearts. They may profess to be Christians, but they do not have saving faith." Later he adds, "These were never Christians. They were those who had ample opportunity to become children of God in Christ through faith, who have even professed to be converted, but they have turned away, to their condemnation."*

Lewis Sperry Chafer, president of the respected Dallas Theological Seminary from its founding in 1924 (as the Evangelical Theological College) until his death in 1952, said: *"The passage is not a warning to Christians to secure their salvation, but rather is addressed to those who profess faith without reality. For if they turn from their profession in Christ, they will be lost. And he made a kindred evaluation of the companion passage in Hebrews 10, ...best interpreted as a warning to those who hear the Gospel that they not deliberately turn away from it."*

Samuel Ridout examined the 5-fold description of those described in this passage and concluded: *"...not one of them speaks of justification, or of new birth, or of peace with God ...not one of the expressions in this passage speaks of the life of the soul they all speak of the outward privileges of Christianity into which these Hebrew professors had been introduced."* In short, for a time they looked like Christians acted like Christians, but in reality they had fallen short of the mark.

Phillip Edgcumbe Hughes, writing in the *Westminster Theological Journal* on the theme, *"Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Period of Apostasy,"* pictures the situation: *"They had come a significant way toward real faith in Christ but not far enough." He said again, "What he has reason to fear is that some among them who have professed Christian faith, enjoyed Christian fellowship, and engaged in Christian witness may prove to be hypocrites and enemies of Christ and by turning away from the light they have known, show that they do not belong to Gods people at all."*

Puritan John Owen sums it up: *"[The] person's here intended are not true and sincere believers."*

The 17th century writer, William Gouge, called Hebrews 6:4-6 a passage about falling into apostasy and said verse 4 described *"five steps on which apostates may ascend toward salvation without ever receiving it."* And he described the people in this passage as *hypocrites*.

The noted prophecy student and consulting editor for the Scofield Reference Bible, William L. Pettingill, bluntly stated: *"This passage does not refer to Christians at all."* While he understood it to primarily reference Israel as a nation, he did add, *"...the principle is also true of the Gentiles."* In his question and answer book he said: *"The things mentioned in Heb. 6:4-6 are not the 'things that accompany salvation' (see verse 9)."*

- 6) The words used in verses 4-6 **are never** used in the rest of the New Testament to speak of one who is saved. Should we then understand them in this way?

"First of all, we should notice that this passage makes no reference at all to salvation. There is no mention of justification, sanctification, the new birth, or regeneration. Those "who have once been enlightened" are not spoken of as born again, made holy, or made righteous. None of the normal New Testament terminology for salvation is used. In fact, no term used here is ever used elsewhere in the New Testament for salvation, and none should be taken to refer to it in this passage." John MacArthur, Commentary on Hebrews, page 123, vs. 4-6

- 7) The illustration of verses 7 and 8 underlines this understanding of the passage. Those who respond to the gospel (vs. 7, "bring forth herbs") receive blessing from God, are saved. Those who bear thorns and briars are rejected or not saved and will end up in hell.
- 8) Verse 9 seems to clinch the understanding that this passage is speaking to unsaved people.

For *it is impossible*

The people who knowingly reject the truth and go back to their old religious system cannot be saved.

for those who were once enlightened,

"The word translated 'once' (Greek, hapax) is literally 'once for all.' As Alford notes, 'indicating that the process needs not, or admits not repetition.' If once in the sense of *occasion* had been meant, the Greek *pote* would have been used. *Hapax* is the same word used later in the book to describe the 'once for all' sacrifice that Christ made to put away sin (9:26,28), the finality of death (9:27), and the end of the world (12:26,27). It is simply saying that the Holy Spirit, whose purpose and ministry it is to to convict the lost of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11), had perfectly done His job. He had so enlightened hearts and minds that they thoroughly knew and understood the gospel, the 'so great salvation' spoken of earlier (2:3)." Robert L. Sumner, Hebrews, page 147

Dean Henry Alford, after giving the usage of enlightened said, "In all these places the sense is to *bring to light, or cast light upon*...Here it implies, *taught by the preaching of the word of God*." The Greek Testament, Vol. 4, pg. 108; italics in original

W.E. Vine, wrote "These facts would be true in regard to all those Hebrews who had been influenced by the testimony and power of the gospel, but had not done more than make a profession of faith, and were inclined to return to Judaism, the power of which remained very strong among the people. There is nothing in the details in (verses 4 and 5) but what could take place in the experience of one who was drawn to Christianity without being born again and becoming possessed of eternal life. To be enlightened comes short of conversion. To taste of the heavenly gift is far short of receiving it in its fulness. To be a partaker of the Holy Spirit is not becoming indwelt by Him through faith in Christ." W.E. Vine, The Epistle to the Hebrews: Christ All Excelling, page 56

and have tasted of the heavenly gift,

These people only tasted they did not drink. It did not have its full effect.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 Timothy 4:10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

partakers is metochos {met'-okh-os}

Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are **partakers** of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise **took part of** the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

"**partakers** of flesh and blood" - κοιωνεω koinoneo, koy-no-neh'-o - to share with others

"**took part of** the same" - μετεχω metecho, met-ekh'-o - to share or participate

Luke 5:7 (partners); 1 Corinthians 9:10,12; 10:17,21,30, Hebrews 1:9 (fellows); 3:1,14; 12:8

It simply means one who has participated with another in a common activity. This is how they were partakers of the Holy Spirit. These Hebrews readily listened to the word of God (but were not saved) and were brought under conviction by the Holy Spirit.

John 16:8-11

- 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:
9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;
10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;
11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Acts 7:51

- 51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

2 Peter 2:20-22

- 20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.
21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.
22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

And have tasted the good word of God,

As above they only tasted.

and the powers of the world to come,

These Jewish people had seen miracles through the ministry of Jesus (possibly) and the Apostles.

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

If they become apostates they can't be saved.

- 7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:**
8 But that which beareth thorns and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned.

Israel was primarily an agrarian society. Thus, it is very common in scripture to have agricultural illustrations to explain truth. This illustration confirms the understanding that this is addressed to unsaved people.

Isaiah 55:10-11

Jeremiah 4:3-4

Matthew 13:1-9