

Difficult Scriptures on Secure Salvation

(Revised August 2010)

Prepared by Michael J. Ghiglia for Share the Son Ministries

1. Hebrews 6:4-6

1.1 Hebrews 6:4-6 (NIV)

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 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.

1. Those who believe Christians can lose their salvation use Hebrews 6:4-6 as a proof text to defend their position. Those who hold to the adage "once saved always saved" argue that those who "fall away" or apostatize were by logical necessity never truly saved to begin with. However, the "sticking point" for believers on both sides of the debate is the *impossibility* for apostates "to be brought back to repentance." The *nature* of the apostasy then becomes critical to our understanding of this difficult passage.
2. The apostasy mentioned above is tantamount to "crucifying the Son of God all over again"; it is not a mere indifference to the Christian way of life or an embracement of worldly passions and desires of the flesh. Rather, it is an absolute and utter rejection of the Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ, the likes of which harks back to the Jews who "killed the author of life" (Acts 3:15, NIV). The impossibility of being "brought back to repentance," therefore, is not because the apostates *can't* return to Christ, but because they *won't* return to Christ. That they already had an intimate knowledge of and experience with Christ and His gift of salvation only reinforces this point. To be sure, there is nowhere else to go for repentance once one has rejected Christ in such a manner.
3. Christians who do in fact return to Christ have distinguished themselves from the apostates above by virtue of their decision to return. In this objective sense, then, *the nature* of their apostasy is dissimilar. Subjective dissimilarities (i.e. their motives for apostasy and return), however, are likely to involve matters of the heart that only God can rightly discern (e.g. 1 Kings 8:39).

Interestingly, Guthrie posits the *possibility* of a return to Christ for those who "fall away." He points out that "enlightened," "tasted" and "shared" (a string of aorist tense verbs indicating the completeness of action) are set in contrast

to “crucifying” and “subjecting” (two present participles indicating the incompleteness of action). Therefore, “Hebrews 6:4-6 does not negate the possibility of the fallen reversing course in the future” (**George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary–Hebrews*, 1998, p. 220**).

2. Hebrews 10:26-27

2.1 Hebrews 10:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

1. The aspect of this passage that concerns many Christians is “if we deliberately keep on sinning.” There are at least two reasons for their concerns. First, what Christian can honestly say he has never deliberately repeated any sin? Second, the author does not explicitly identify which sins, when deliberately repeated, lead to condemnation. Viewed in this light, it’s no wonder many believers unnecessarily wait in “fearful expectation of judgment.”
2. It is no coincidence that this alarming passage appears *after* Hebrews 6:4-6 (the difficult passage dealt with in section 1). This is because when the author writes “if we deliberately keep on sinning” he is referring back to the sin of absolute and utter rejection of the Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ, by those who had “once been enlightened” (6:4a)—“after we have received the knowledge of the truth” (10:26) in the present text.
3. Further evidence that the apostasy of 6:4-6 is the sin the author has in mind in the present text is given in 10:29: “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Once again, there is nowhere else to go for repentance once one has rejected Christ in such a manner.
4. Therefore, unless professing Christians commit *the kind* of apostasy about which the author of Hebrews warns his readers in 6:4-6, any “fearful expectation of judgment” appears to be unwarranted, at least as far as this difficult text is concerned.

3. 2 Peter 2:20-22

3.1 2 Peter 2:20-22 (NIV)

²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are

worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.²² Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

1. What many Christians fail to recognize is that the "they" Peter refers to here are "false teachers" (2:1a) who "have left the straight way" (2:15). Worse still, they are apostates who "secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2:1b; see also James 3:1 regarding Christian teachers). Moreover, Peter gives no evidence that the false teachers/apostates ever repented and returned to Christ. It appears then that *the nature* of the apostasy Peter warns of here parallels the one the writer of Hebrews warns of in 4:6-8 and 10:26-27.
2. To sin in ignorance, as the heathen do, is one thing; to sin deliberately when "the way of righteousness" is known and to spurn the gift of salvation is to be far more culpable. In this sense the false teachers/apostates were much worse off than they were before they knew the Lord Jesus. Jesus taught a similar principle as it applied to the demon-possessed (e.g. Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26) and to the Jews in Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (e.g. Matthew 11:21-24; note again that there is no evidence of repentance).
3. Therefore, unless professing Christians commit *the kind* of apostasy about which Peter and the author of Hebrews warn their readers, any "fear of swift destruction" (2:1b) on "the day of judgment" (2:9) appears to be unwarranted, at least as far as this difficult text is concerned.