

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 13, 2023 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



SAVED, SURE AND SECURE
A Study on Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security

The Problem with Falling Away
Hebrews 6:1-6

“When we speak of the eternal security of the believer, what do we mean? We mean that once a poor sinner has been regenerated by the Word and the Spirit of God, once he has received a new life and a new nature, has been made partaker of the divine nature, once he has been justified from every charge before the throne of God, it is absolutely impossible that that man should ever again be a lost soul. Having said that, let me say what we do not mean when we speak of the eternal security of the believer. We do not mean that it necessarily follows that if one professes to be saved, if he comes out to the front in a meeting, shakes the preacher's hand, and says he accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, that that person is eternally safe. It does not mean that if one joins a church or makes a profession of faith, is baptized, becomes a communicant, takes an interest in Christian work, that that person is forever secure. It does not mean that because one manifests certain gifts and exercises these gifts in Christian testimony, that that person is necessarily eternally secure.” -Dr. H.A. Ironside

- (1) What do you think about this quote? Do you agree or disagree with the quote on the surface? Why or why not?
- (2) Dr. Ironside defines eternal security with these words, “Once a poor sinner has been regenerated by the Word and the Spirit of God, once he has received a new life and a new nature, has been made partaker of the divine nature, once he has been justified from every charge before the throne of God, it is absolutely impossible that that man should ever again be a lost soul.” Is this a good definition of the doctrine of eternal security in your opinion? What do you see in this definition that helps to qualify the doctrine of eternal security?
- (3) Notice several things in the definition that Dr. Ironside says are not “meant” when we speak of eternal security, “Let me say what we do not mean when we speak of the eternal security of the believer. We do not mean that it necessarily follows that if one professes to be saved, if he comes out to the front in a meeting, shakes the preacher's hand, and says he accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, that that person is eternally safe. It does not mean that if one joins a church or makes a profession of faith, is baptized, becomes a communicant, takes an interest in Christian work, that that person is forever secure. It does not mean that because one manifests certain gifts and exercises these gifts in Christian testimony, that that person is necessarily eternally secure.” (about 10 things listed)
- A profession that one is saved -
 - Walking an aisle – “comes out in front of a meeting
 - Shaking the pastors hand – “shakes the preacher’s hand”
 - Saying, you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior – lip service, a profession the lips
 - Joining a church -
 - Making a profession of faith –
 - Getting baptized -
 - Takes the Lord’s Supper – “become a communicant”
 - Takes an interest in Christian work-
 - Become one seems gifted and even uses those gifts in service –
- Why are these poor or inadequate evidences or proof of salvation that is eternally secure?

The remarkable thing about this doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is that many of the greatest men of God who have ever lived have believed in it. John

Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, C. H. Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, Dr. R. A. Torrey, Dr. A. C. Dixon, Dr. Billy Graham, Dr. John MacArthur, Dr. R.C. Sproul, Dr. John Piper, etc.

On the other hand there are some great men of God who believed that one could lose their salvation. Men like Martin Luther, the great reformer and father of the protestant reformation. John and Charles Wesley, both great men of God who helped spark the great awakening that swept 2 continents. Some lesser known yet current respected scholars and theologians are Roger E. Olson, Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at Baylor University, F. Leroy Forlines, Robert Picirilli, J. Matthew Pinson, Thomas Oden, Ben Witherington III, David Pawson, Christian Apologist. Holiness movement theologians Henry Orton Wiley, Carl O. Bangs and J. Kenneth Grider, theologians and Bible scholars B.J. Oropeza, Keith D. Stranglin, Craig S. Keener, Thomas H. McCall and Grant R. Osborn

Many theologians say you can lose your salvation, and many claim you cannot. This doctrine of eternal security is sometimes referred to as “the perseverance of the saints” or “once saved, always saved.” Today, however, many believe a Christian can lose his or her salvation. Such a person is considered to have backslidden – to have fallen away from Christ.

It is a heartache to me as a pastor to realize that so many Christians lack assurance of their salvation and have embraced the idea that they could possibly lose what God has given to them. They lack confidence that their sins are truly forgiven and their place in heaven is eternally secure.

Just to give you an idea of how controversial and debated the subject of eternal security and losing one’s salvation in among main-line Christian denominations I gave you this chart a few weeks ago as we began this study that indicates that the majority of mainline Christian denominations hold a view that salvation can be lost, or that one can lose her or her salvation...

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS EMBRACING ETERNAL SECURITY

<input type="checkbox"/> Methodist	<input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran	<input type="checkbox"/> Catholic
<input type="checkbox"/> Episcopal	<input type="checkbox"/> Nazarene	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Southern Baptist
<input type="checkbox"/> Church of Christ	<input type="checkbox"/> Holiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Mennonite Brethren
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Evangelical Free	<input type="checkbox"/> Assembly of God	<input type="checkbox"/> Pentecostal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian	<input type="checkbox"/> 7th Day Adventist	<input type="checkbox"/> The Christian Church

And even among those denominations that are “Baptist” by name, there is disagreement. The following chart lists several of the different know Baptist denominations.

BAPTIST DENOMINATIONS EMBRACING ETERNAL SECURITY

<input type="checkbox"/> American Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> North American Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> Free Will Baptist
<input type="checkbox"/> General Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> Missionary Baptist
<input type="checkbox"/> Primitive Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/> Landmark Baptist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Southern Baptist

These two charts may give us an indication of just how controversial this subject is and a need to understand the issue from a Biblical perspective. **What does the Bible really say/teach on the issue?** As we continue in our study on the subject of the eternal security of the believer it is important to understand as much as we can about both sides of the issue. The fact that many believe that you can lose your salvation, means we need to at least investigate the debate. Is the idea of “falling from grace” biblical? Where do we get the idea of “once saved, always saved” and is this concept taught in Scripture? This study will take a closer look at the debate and where the idea of losing one’s salvation may possibly come from. In our last study you were given three key passage that are often used to support the teaching that one can lose his or her salvation. These passages reflect the only places in Scripture where the language of “falling from grace” and “falling away” from the faith appear. That means we must give diligent to what the passage are actually saying.

3 Key Controversial Passage for Study and the Questions They are Asking:

<u>PASSAGE</u>	<u>QUESTION</u>
-----------------------	------------------------

- (1) **Galatians 5:1-6** = **“Is it possible to fall from grace?”** a phrase used only here in scripture. Someone in this passage is falling from grace... again the phrase is used here. It is a biblical term/phrase. The question is “who” is falling from grace?
- (2) **Hebrews 6:1-6** – **“Is it possible to fall away from the faith?”** a phrase that is used only here in the Bible. This passage also raises the question, in my mind, **“If you could lose your salvation, would it be possible to get it back (be resaved)?”**. Clearly in this passage the possibility is raised. Someone here in this passage is “falling away,” but who? These are some issues that must be raised and answered biblically.
- (3) **Hebrews 10:26-29** – **“Is it possible for a Christian to sin so much that the sacrifice of Christ runs out and you lose your salvation?** This passage

addresses the subject of one losing his or her salvation by raising the question, “Is it possible that a Christian can sin so much that no more sacrifice remains to cover that sin and therefore he or she becomes re-lost? In other words the sacrifice of Christ runs out. If this passage is dealing with losing one’s salvation it does seem on the surface to indicate one can sin so much that the at some point the sacrifice runs out.

Last time we looked at the Galatians passage in Galatians 5:1-6. Let me give you a few reminders and conclusion we were able to draw from our study on this passage before we move on...

4 Important Conclusions We Can Draw from Galatians 5:4:

- (1) **This verse is actually dealing unbelievers** – Those it is speaking of as “falling from grace” are actually not believers at all, but those who are trying to be justified or saved by what they do and have never actually experienced genuine salvation
- (2) **This verse is not dealing with the subject of eternal security but rather how a person is saved** – Any discussion of eternal security would only apply to a genuinely saved person. This verse is actually talking about a person who has not been saved, but rather is trying to be justified (saved) by what he or she does, the law, good works, religion, etc.
- (3) **This passage is not teaching that a believer can lose his or her salvation** – Again the passage is not about a genuinely saved person/believer. The person in the passage is not saved, and you can’t lose what you don’t have.
- (4) **This passage is teaching that a lost person who is trying to be saved by works is moving farther and farther away from saving grace** – The tragic understanding of this passage is that a person that is trying to be saved or justified before God by what they do, by good works, by being a good religious person, by observing rules and regulation, the law is actually moving further and further away from the very thing they seek... God’s grace.

This study is going to focus on the second and perhaps the most misunderstood, debated and controversial of these passages, Hebrews 6:1-6, and a deeper understanding of just what this passage, that is often used to teaching one can lose their salvation, is saying.

Just for review let’s remind ourselves of some of the reasons why people may lack assurance and doubt their salvation... in other words, why they may have a hard time believing in the eternal security of the believer.

5 Reasons People Often Lack Assurance:

- (1) **Doubting the reality of one's commitment to Christ** – No evidence/commitment in their life and it causes them to doubt
- (2) **Questioning the correctness of a procedure one followed (*when saved*)** – Can't pin point a specific time, didn't follow the right procedure, don't think they did it right the first time... these are the common pitfall especially among those who were perhaps saved in a faith setting where a large emphasis is put on a particular "plan," or "prayer," or "procedure" that must be followed when one accepts Christ is saved.
- (3) **Disbelief in the possibility of eternal security** – That is, those who do not believe in the biblical doctrine of eternal security or the perseverance of the saints... those who do not believed "once saved, always saved" will be more susceptible to the possibility that they could lose their salvation. Especially for those who are young in the faith and may still struggle with sin in some areas, or with a lack of confidence in their faith this may be a sure pitfall. If you don't believe in "eternal security" you must always wonder if you are really saved or still saved.
- (4) **Sin** – Sin in a believers life will always lead to doubt if it remains unconfessed. And especially in the life of a believer when a particular sin hangs on and we continue to struggle with it the enemy may gain a foot-hold in our life to cause us to question the legitimacy of our salvation experience. "If you were really a Christian, you would still be struggling with this same sin over and over!"
- (5) **A lost condition** – For that one who is having doubts or lack of assurance of their salvation they should check it out and be sure they are saved because some who doubt have reason to... they may indeed be lost. That is they may have never truly entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, making Him Lord and Savior of their life. They may be a church member, a good person, a religion person, and yet have never truly been saved.

As we continue in our study on the subject of the eternal security of the believer it is important to understand as much as we can about both sides of the issue. The fact that many believe that you can lose your salvation, means we need to at least investigate the debate. Is the idea of "falling from grace" biblical? Where do we get the idea of "once saved, always saved" and is this concept taught in Scripture? This study will take a closer look at the debate and where the idea of losing one's salvation may possible come from.

CLAIMS OF THOSE ADVOCATE THE IDEA OF FALLING FROM GRACE OR LOSING ONE'S SALVATION

3 Claims That Have To Be Made For a Believer to Lose their Salvation:

1. **Salvation must be conditional** – That is based on something that we do or have done.

Rebuttal: Scripture teaches that **salvation** is “**unconditional**” in nature and indeed doesn't depend on anything that we do or have done.

- (1) **Ephesians 2:8-9** - *“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
- (2) **John 3:16** - *“¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*
- (3) **Romans 6:23** - *“²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

2. **Man must maintain salvation** - Since God has saved us, we will maintain our salvation as we continue to match up with God's standards. If we fall to match up at any point we lose our salvation

Rebuttal: Man could never **match-up** to **God's standard** according to Scripture. Man could never be good enough to match up to God's standard.

- (1) **Isaiah 64:6** – *“⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”*
- (2) **Romans 3:10, 23** – *“¹⁰ As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’ ... ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
- (3) **Matthew 7:21-23** - *²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

3. **Salvation has to be based on a works** - The teaching that one can fall from grace must always insist that salvation should be seen from a works-righteousness perspective.

Rebuttal: Scripture clearly teaches that we are **“not” saved by works**. This claim would be in direct violation of Scripture.

(1) **Ephesians 2:8-9** - *“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

(2) **Titus 3:5-7** – *“⁵ He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGE ON FALLING AWAY – HEBREWS 6:1-6

The second of the three more controversial passages of scripture that must be properly interpreted is, as already stated, perhaps the most hotly debated and controversial... and misunderstood of the three – **Hebrews 6:1-6**. One Biblical scholar (Dr. Steven J. Cole) has said, **“This (Hebrews 6:1-6) is arguably the most difficult passage in the New Testament to interpret.”** This is the only place in the Bible where the words “fall (or falling/fallen) away” appear (*Remember that Galatians 5:4 is the only place in Scripture where the words “fall from grace” appear*). That necessitates an accurate understanding of exactly what scripture is saying and not saying in this passage. This is one of those passages that many have turned to in order to support the idea that one can fall from grace or lose their salvation. Before we get into the interpretation of this passage let's be reminded of some of the principles to remember when interpreting a passage... particularly one like this.

Some Things to Remember When Interpreting a Passage:

1. **Always interpret a passage within its context** – A verse or passage of Scripture must be interpreted in context... both immediate and broader context. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that is possible to “fall from grace”, but what does it say when it is read in the context of verses 1-6 and in the broader context of the book of Galatians?*)
2. **Always interpret a passage with an understanding of its background** – Historical background, literary understanding (type of literature... remember Scripture is filled with historical narratives, poetry, letters, prophetic and apocalyptic literature, etc.), grammatical background and understanding (remember Scripture was originally written in three languages; Hebrews, Greek and Aramaic, also grammatical issues, sentence structure, etc. are important in getting at a correct interpretation). (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that it is possible to “fall from grace,” but understanding the type of literature that the*

book of Galatians, the historical background about what was going on and what Paul was dealing with, and looking at grammatical issues in the passage may reveal something quite different)

3. **Always read the passage in light of what the rest of Scripture says** – Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. No text of Scripture (properly interpreted in its context) will contradict another text of Scripture. When contradictions seem to exist, it is the task of the interpreter to explain the seeming contradiction. He must never seek to do so by ignoring or denying any part of the truth that is revealed in Scripture. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 may indicate that it is possible to “fall from grace” but Jude 24 says He (Jesus) is about to “keep you from falling”... an apparent contradiction that can only be cleared up through careful interpretation of the whole of Scripture... remember Scripture does not contradict itself*)

4. **Remember that there is really only one proper interpretation of Scripture... God’s** – The Apostle Paul told us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that, *“¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (2 Timothy 3:16). The word translated in that verse as “*inspiration*” means “*God-breathed.*” So literally the Greek translates this way, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God...*” In other words it comes from Him, therefore, you cannot hope to arrive at a correct understanding of Scripture independent of God, through the person of the Holy Spirit. The illumination of Scripture can only come from the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says, *“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”* Because the author of Scripture – God the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, *“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*) – resides within the child of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.”*), he or she is in a position to receive God’s illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10-11, *“... God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”*). And, indeed, the Spirit of truth not only provides insight that permeate the mind, but also provides illumination that can penetrate the heart. This is why when we go to

trying to understand and correctly interpret Scripture we must ask for the Holy Spirit to teach us, show us, guide us, direct us, guard us, in understanding the truth. We are not the final say on His Word, God is!

- 5. Use available tools and resources** – This may be the most simplistic yet practical help in interpreting a passage. Use good tools are resources that are readily available to a student of Scripture. Good and reliable Bible Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, Biblical Commentaries, Biblical language helps, varying reliable translations, etc. are extremely helpful in getting at a right interpretation of Scripture. A word of caution here... be sure that you are using a “good” and “reliable” source. There are many Bible helps out there that are not theologically and doctrinally sound. Also remember that, there are just man made tools and should not be substituted for Scripture itself. They are helps! Scripture should still be interpreted using the above mentioned criteria.

So we to the writer of Hebrews very difficult and debated words in Hebrews 6:1-6 Let’s look at it, really focusing on verse 6 **(READ: Hebrews 6:1-6)**

“¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³And this we will do if God permits. ⁴For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if 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.” – Hebrews 6:1-6 (NKJV)

Let’s recall some of the helpful background material to the book of Hebrews that might be help to keep in minds as we rightly interpretation this somewhat controversial passage...

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON HEBREWS

Timeline for Hebrews



Key Background Information for Galatians:

(1) Authorship: Unknown – The author of Hebrews is unknown. He knew Timothy (according to Hebrews 13:23). He was not an eyewitness of Jesus (see Hebrews 2:1&3). This has led many to speculate that Paul may have written the letter. Other candidates suggested for authorship are Peter, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla and Clement of Rome.

However, the most likely candidate is Paul. Remember he was martyred about A.D. 67 which would fit the timeline for Hebrews. He possibly would have written this just prior to his death. There is still much evidence that Paul wrote the letter. The most compelling comes from Scripture itself. Remember that Peter wrote to the Hebrews (that is, the Jews; see Galatians 2:7, 9 and 1 Peter 1:1). Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:15, “*Just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.*” In that last verse, Peter is confirming that Paul had also written a letter to the Hebrews! The theology presented in Hebrews is consistent with Paul’s. Paul was a proponent of salvation by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9), and that message is strongly communicated in this epistle (Hebrews 4:2, 6:12, 10:19-22, 10:37-39, and 11:1-40), indicating that either Paul wrote the epistle or the writer was trained by Paul. Although it is a small detail, this epistle makes mention of Timothy (Hebrews 13:23), and Paul is the only apostle known to have ever done that in any letter. Church tradition teaches that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, and until the 1800s that issue was closed. However, though a vast majority of Christians scholar still believe Paul wrote the book, there are some tempting reasons to think otherwise. This is all just speculative because the book itself bears no inscription just an inside trail to follow and it isn’t really necessary to name an author, although it was likely Paul. We’ll just say the author is “unknown.”

(2) Date: A.D. 60-67 – The letter was probably written before A.D. 67. This is significant as mentioned already because it raises the possibility of authorship by Paul, who was martyred just after this. This certainly was a active and difficult period of time in the world. Nero, a brutal and irrational dictator of the Roman Empire that held control of ancient world at the time was reeking havoc across the New Testament world from Rome to Jerusalem with ruthless persecution of both Jews and Christians. The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and Paul was martyred in about A.D. 67. It fits with the purpose and message of Hebrews

(3) Recipients: There are three groups... (1) *Jewish Christians*, (2) *Gentile Christians drawn to the Jewish religion*, and (3) *Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles attracted to Christianity but ultimately rejected Christ* – Early

manuscripts bear the title “To the Hebrews,” which reflects the ancient assumption that it was perhaps primarily written to Jewish Christians as well as Gentile Christians who previously had been drawn to the Jewish religion. The author knew his readers and wanted to see them again (Hebrews 13:19).

➡ The late **Dr. Walter Martin**, founder of the Christian Research Institute and writer of the best-selling book *Kingdom of the Cults*, quipped in his usual tongue-in-cheek manner that “**The Book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews.**” In truth, many of the early Jewish believers were slipping back into the rites and rituals of Judaism in order to escape the mounting persecution. This letter, then, is an exhortation for those persecuted believers to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ.

★ The Book of Hebrews actually addresses three separate groups: believers in Christ, unbelievers who had knowledge of and an intellectual acceptance of the facts of Christ, and unbelievers who were attracted to Christ, but who rejected Him ultimately. **It’s important to understand which group is being addressed in which passage. To fail to do so can cause us to draw conclusions inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.** The writer of Hebrews continually makes mention of the superiority of Christ in both His personage and in His ministering work. In the writings of the Old Testament, we understand the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism symbolically pointed to the coming of Messiah. In other words, the rites of Judaism were but shadows of things to come. Hebrews tells us that Christ Jesus is better than anything mere religion has to offer. All the pomp and circumstance of religion pales in comparison to the person, work, and ministry of Christ Jesus. It is the superiority of our Lord Jesus, then, that remains the theme of this eloquently written letter.

(4) Literary Type: Circular Type Letter – Some say that Hebrews is a sermon that Paul preached that Luke wrote down and sent out to churches across the New Testament World

(5) Purpose: Two primary purposes for Hebrews... (1) *To encourage Christians to endure, and (2) To warn Christians not to abandon their faith in Christ.* The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better, Christianity is superior, and Christ is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation. The author encourages faithfulness, love, and sound doctrine. He does so by carefully teaching the OT in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

(6) Theme: The superiority of Christ for salvation – Jesus Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant practice. Christians must not forsake the great salvation that Jesus has brought about. They must hold on by faith to the true rest found in Christ, and they must encourage others in the church to

do the same. The author shows the superiority of Christ and his new covenant over angels, Moses, the OT priesthood, and the OT sacrificial system. These are so inferior to Christ that it is futile to return to them—or to go anywhere else. Rather, believers should hold fast to their faith, because that faith is grounded in the most superior revelation. The background of such exhortations must have been the readers' need to continue enduring amid persecution and the trials of life (e.g., ch. 12). They appear to have grown less attentive to Christian instruction (5:11–14), and some apparently have ceased regular attendance at their meetings (10:25). The author reminds them of their past faithfulness and love despite persecution (10:32–34). Ultimately, the author's words of encouragement and exhortation are rooted in his teaching about Jesus Christ. The Son of God became the heavenly high priest, who offered himself as a sacrifice once for all. Christ obtained salvation for all who approach him in faith (6:1; 11:6; compare 4:2), and such faith perseveres until it receives the promised eternal reward (6:12; 10:22, 38–39).

A Closer Examination Hebrews 6:1-6 and Falling Away:

Let's look at our passage again in Hebrews 6:1-6, and this time I want to look at it in several different translations... at least three (NKJV, ESV, NIV). Here it is...

¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³And this we will do if God permits. ⁴For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if 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.” – Hebrews 6:1-6 (NKJV)

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And this we will do if God permits. ⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once

again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” – Hebrews 6:1-6 (ESV)

“¹Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so. ⁴It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.” -Hebrews 6:1-6 (NIV)

The focus seems to be on the words in **verse 6** of our passage where the writer says, *“⁶if 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.”* The question is the “they,” “Who is falling away?” in this passage. Let’s examine the question in light of some of the differing view that have been offered up for this difficult and debated passage...

While there are dozens of views on the various details of the text, there are basically four major views when it comes to the overall interpretation.

Initial Statements On the Four Major Interpretive Views of Hebrews 6:1-6

⋮

- (1) **Two of these views (in my opinion) may be dismissed without much discussion, since they contradict the preponderance Scripture**
- (2) **The other two views have merit, with some Scriptural support and interpretive validity**

Let’s look at each of these views...

The Four Major Views of Hebrews 6:1-6:

- (1) **The Arminian View: True believers lose their salvation if they fall away from Christ – (see Calvinism vs. Arminianism handout) True Arminianism denies the eternal security of the believer and the perseverance of the saints. These are not completely synonymous doctrines. The doctrine of eternal security teaches “once saved, always saved.” If a person believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, he receives eternal life at that instant and he cannot lose it. The**

Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints agrees that if a person is *truly* saved, God will keep him saved unto eternity, because salvation is from the Lord, not from men. But Reformed theologians draw a distinction between a person's *decision* to receive Christ and God actually saving a soul. People can make decisions apart from God's regenerating power that is necessary to bring a soul from spiritual death to spiritual life. When a person makes a decision to trust Christ, the question is, *did God supernaturally raise that person from death to life?* Did God give him a new heart? The Reformed view is that time will tell. As the parable of the sower shows, the stony ground seed and the seed among the thorns looked good for a while, but did not bear fruit to eternal life (Matt. 13:20-23). In other words, the Reformed view is that there is such a thing as false faith. The false believer seems to be saved for a while, but later reveals his true condition and falls away. Consistent Arminians, however, teach that salvation depends on man's will to believe in Christ. Since man does it, man can undo it. Serious sin (Arminians are hard pressed to determine *which* or *how much* sin) results in a loss of salvation. **They say that Hebrews 6 describes a believer who loses his salvation. But they have two big problems.**

2 Big Problems with This View in Regard to Hebrews 6:1-6:

- 1. The bulk of Scripture teaches that salvation is forever and cannot be lost** - First, many biblical texts teach that true believers cannot be lost (John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:28-39).
- 2. This passage teaches that if one can lose their salvation, they can't get it back** - Second, if true believers can be lost, then our text teaches that it is impossible for them to regain their salvation. Most Arminians do not want to go there!

(2) Non-Lordship Salvation View: Genuine Christians can deny the faith and yet remain saved, although they lose their rewards in heaven - **Zane Hodges** (*Bible Knowledge Commentary, Hebrews* [Victor Books]) and the **Grace Evangelical Society** are the main advocates, along with **R. T. Kendall**. They hold to a decisional view of salvation and they reduce saving faith to a more notional ("mental") or academic assent (agreement, acceptance) that does not include repentance. Once a person believes in Christ, he is eternally secure no matter what his subsequent life is like. He may later become an atheist or he may live in gross sin for the rest of his life. But because he once "believed," he is eternally secure. The problems with this view are too numerous to deal with in this message. **The biblical books of James and 1 John, and John MacArthur's *Faith Works* [Word] refute this view.** The Bible is clear that a true believer may sin grievously (David & Peter are examples) and yet be restored. But it is also

clear that some profess to believe and yet are not truly saved (Balaam, Judas, Simon Magus, 1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 6:1; 13:5; Titus 1:16). 1 John 2:3-4 says, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). A person who falls away and crucifies again the Son of God, putting Him to open shame, who cannot be renewed to repentance, gives evidence that he was never saved and is not a believer who loses his rewards! He or she was never a believer at all.

- (3) **The Hypothetical View:** In this view the writer of Hebrews (in Hebrews 6:1-6) is speaking of something that **cannot happen**, but is using it as a **warning to press on** - The impossibility is variously interpreted as either apostasy or getting saved again. Dr. Ryrie explains (and seemingly advocates) this view in the footnote in *The Ryrie Study Bible* [Moody Press]: “To ‘fall away’ is impossible (since, according to this view, true believers are eternally secure), but the phrase is placed in the sentence to strengthen the warning. It is similar to saying something like this to a class of students: “It is impossible for a student, once enrolled in this course, if he turns the clock back [which cannot be done], to start the course over. Therefore, let all students go on to deeper knowledge.” This view has the advantage of understanding the phrases in Hebrews 6:4-5 to refer to genuine conversion, which they certainly seem to be describing. Charles Spurgeon advocated a version of the hypothetical view (*The New Park Street Pulpit* [Baker], 2:169-176, “Final Perseverance,” although different than Ryrie’s view), because he could not accept that the phrases in 6:4-5 describe false believers. He explained that, “True believers *cannot* fall away because God keeps them from doing so. But Paul (whom he thinks wrote Hebrews) is arguing that the reason they cannot fall away is because it would negate the efficacy of Christ’s atonement on the cross. Thus restoration would be impossible.” Others argue that the hypothetical warning is not against falling away from the faith, but against going back and starting the Christian life all over again (“relaying the foundation,” 6:1-2, which is impossible). Some reject this view because of two rather peripheral and marginal reasons:

2 Reasons Some Reject This View:

1. **Confusion** - First, some consider this view an utterly confusing way to make the point. Their reasonings... “Why would the author explain something in such a convoluted way?” The context, background and the circumstances of the book of Hebrews and the recipients of the letter were going through may explain why this “hypothetical” is being projected.

2. A **hypothetical warning is not a warning** - Second, those who question this view say a hypothetical warning is no warning at all. If it is impossible to do something, you don't need to warn me not to do it. Spurgeon's counter to this objection is that God is using the warning ("you can never be restored") to prevent Christians from falling away. He uses the illustration of a deep precipice (abyss, cliff, height). God tells His children, "If you fall over this precipice, you'll be dashed to pieces." This leads the believer to cry out, "Father, hang onto me so that I don't fall over!" The warning keeps the believer in holy fear and dependence on God, because he knows that if he were to fall over the edge, there could be no restoration (p. 175).

(4) **The False Believer View: The writer of Hebrews is speaking of those who are associated with the church and its blessings, but are not truly saved** - This view recognizes at least the possibility that not everyone who goes to church, and claim to be saved is, and that the people described in Hebrews 6:4-5 are in the Hebrew church and appear to be saved. But at some point, usually a crisis, their true colors come through. They repudiate their faith in Christ, go back either to Judaism or to the world, and side with those who crucified the Son of God. **In so doing, they put Christ to open shame. In effect, their lives, if not their words, say to people, "I tried faith in Christ, but it didn't work! It was a sham! I was on the inside, so I know what I am talking about. The Christian faith is worthless!"** For such apostates, the writer of Hebrews says, "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." They have hardened their hearts against the truth that they were exposed to. Although they looked for a while as if they were saved, their lives now show that they never were saved. There are some who see a couple of issues with this view...

2 Problems Some See with This View:

1. **The passage sounds like it is talking about true believers** – Some feel like the terms in Hebrews 6:4-5 sound as if they are describing true believers, not false believers. Why would the author pile up all of these terms if he is describing false believers? Answer...These perhaps miss the point that he is describing a person who has heard and enjoyed the knowledge of religious things, and the blessing of those who are saved, but has never truly been saved.
2. **If they are not truly saved, what are they falling away from?** – The second problem some have with view is that if they were not truly saved, then what is there to fall away from? How can they be *renewed* to repentance if they never truly repented in the first place? Answer... These are falling away from what truly saves, not religious expression and activity, not religious knowledge and religious claims. Those who embrace these as a

means of salvation are falling further and further away from Christ and can't see the necessity of repentance at all.

As you can see, no view is problem-free. You have to pick the problems you can live with, and what Biblically lines up. Some principles for interpreting these verses that must be held tightly. These two principles may indeed help to answer and solve these two objections.

How do we decide which view is correct? 2 Main Factors to Consider:

(1) Which view best fits with the argument, context, and situation that the Book of Hebrews addresses? - As we've seen, the Book of Hebrews was written to three separate groups: Jewish and some Gentile believers in Christ, Jewish (and some Gentile) unbelievers who were perhaps devout in their religious faith and had knowledge of and an intellectual acceptance of the facts of Christ, and unbelievers who were attracted to Christ, but who rejected Him ultimately. **It's important to understand which group is being addressed in which passage. To fail to do so can cause us to draw conclusions inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.** The author is arguing for the superiority of the person and work of Jesus Christ. To abandon Christ for the old Jewish system is to turn from God's supreme and final provision in His Son to that which is inferior.

- In Hebrews chapters 3 & 4, the author used the negative example of Israel in the wilderness (from Psalm 95) to warn these Hebrew Christians not to fall away because of an evil, unbelieving heart (3:7-12, 15; 4:3, 5, 7). He urges them not to fail to enter God's rest through disobedience and unbelief (3:18; 4:6, 11).
- He tells them, ***"We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end"*** (3:14). Remember the entire nation had put the blood on their doorposts, which is analogous to saving faith. They all passed through the Red Sea, which is a type of baptism (1 Cor. 10:2). They all ate the same spiritual food and drank water from the rock, which was a type of Christ. They all lived under the illumination and protection of the cloud and the pillar of fire. They all enjoyed these many spiritual benefits, and yet most of them were not genuinely saved.
- In his wrath, God laid them low in the wilderness and they did not enter His rest.
- They had the gospel preached to them (4:2, 6), but it did not profit them because of their unbelief and disobedience.

- There are many parallels between Israel's experience in the wilderness and the terms that the author uses in 6:4-5. They had been "enlightened," in the sense of being exposed to God's ways and to the gospel. They had "tasted the heavenly gift," spiritually in the deliverance from Egypt, and physically in the manna that God provided.
- Probably in Hebrews 6:4 "*heavenly gift*" refers to salvation, or to Christ Himself.
- To be "partakers of the Holy Spirit" means to be sharers in the Spirit, probably with reference to the blessings of salvation and the gifts of the Spirit that were manifested in the Hebrew church.
- Israel in the exodus corporately experienced the miraculous signs of the plagues and the other miracles connected with that momentous time.
- To taste the "*good word of God*" refers to His good promises to His people, especially in the gospel.
- Again, this was a *corporate* experience of Israel in the wilderness. All of them had tasted God's good word of promise by coming out of slavery in Egypt. But not all were saved through *personal* faith.
- They also had tasted "*the powers of the age to come.*" Israel experienced many miracles, both in the deliverance from Egypt and in God's sustaining them in the wilderness.
- In the Hebrew church, it refers to the miraculous sign gifts that God gave to confirm the gospel (2:4). But it's possible even to perform miracles and yet be lost.
- Jesus predicted that many on judgment day will say to Him that they had cast out demons and performed miracles in His name, and yet He would say, "*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*" (Matt. 7:22-23).
- The analogy that the author uses in Hebrews 6:7-8 to explain Hebrews 6:4-6 is a major key to interpreting this text. He talks about ground that drinks in the rain (symbolic of God's blessings). If it bears a crop, it fulfills its purpose and is blessed by God. But if it yields thorns and thistles, "*it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.*"
- This fits with the story of Israel in the wilderness and the point of his warning in Hebrews 6:4-6. God poured out His blessings on the nation in the exodus and during their wilderness experience. Their lives should have brought forth the fruit of faith and obedience. Instead, they were faithless and disobedient, threatening on several occasions to return to Egypt.

- Some in the Hebrew church were in danger of precisely the same sin. They had participated in a corporate sense in God's abundant blessings of salvation, but now they were tempted to return to Judaism. But to do that would be to fall away from Christ, and even worse, to join those who had crucified Him! In so doing, they would be crucifying Christ all over again, and putting Him to open shame by agreeing with the unbelieving Jews that He is not their Savior and Messiah. To do that would put them close to being cursed, and if they died in this state of renouncing their faith, they would face the fires of eternal judgment.
- Verse 9 reinforces this interpretation, when the author says, "We are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation...."
- The word "and" is epexegetical, or explanatory. It may be translated, "that is." "Better things" most likely refers back to the five things mentioned in Hebrews 6:4-5 (Wayne Grudem, in *Still Sovereign*, ed. by Thomas Schriener & Bruce Ware [Baker], pp. 158-159; Grudem's 50-page treatment of the Hebrews warning passages is the most comprehensive defense of the false believer view that I read).
- The implication of Hebrews 6:9 is that the terms in Hebrews 6:4-5 refer to those who do not possess genuine salvation.
- The question remains, "But if they did not possess genuine salvation, why does the author say that it is impossible for them to be *renewed* to repentance? If they had never repented in the first place, why talk about renewal?" Here we turn to the second factor:

(2) Which view best fits with other biblical texts and examples? - There are many other biblical texts that talk about insincere repentance.

- Balaam seemingly repented when the angel confronted him, but it was not a repentance unto salvation (Num. 22:34; 31:16; compare 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11).
- Judas felt remorse for betraying Jesus and even returned the silver, but his "repentance" was not unto salvation (Matt. 27:3-5).
- Peter condemned the apostates who according to 2 Peter:2:20-21, "After they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them" (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Thus I believe that both the broad and immediate context of Hebrews, plus other biblical texts and examples about apostasy, support the view that the writer of Hebrews is talking here about false believers who were associated with God's people and the blessings of salvation, but who were not truly saved. **To fall away means deliberately to reject and repudiate the substantial light that they have been given about Christ and the gospel.** In so doing, repentance becomes impossible—not for God (Matt. 19:23-26), but rather, it is *morally* impossible because by this deliberate rejection of the truth, they harden their hearts and place themselves beyond repentance.

Thus we can sum up the main idea of our text: **Repentance becomes impossible when a person has been fully exposed to the blessings of God's people, but falls away through deliberate unbelief and denial of Christ.**

APPLICATIONS FROM THE CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGE ON FALLING AWAY – HEBREWS 6:1-6

4 Applications from Hebrews 6:1-6:

- (1) It is dangerous to traffic in Christian matters, but to reject or disobey the light that God has graciously given to us** - One reason that the author piles up these many terms that sound as if these apostates were converted is to warn us about how far we can go in matters of the faith and yet not be genuinely converted. I remember when I first read Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* [Banner of Truth], although I had been a pastor for many years, it caused me to examine my own heart to make sure that I was saved! It also opened my eyes to the fact that many in evangelical churches "profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him" (Titus 1:16).
- (2) It is dangerous to profess faith in Christ but to have no evidence of fruit in your life** - God is raining His blessings all around, but each of us needs to ask, "Am I bringing forth thorns and thistles, or fruit unto God?" Read through the lists of the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23) and ask, "Which most characterizes my life? Am I progressively denying the deeds of the flesh and growing the fruit of the Spirit?"
- (3) It is dangerous not to practice frequent repentance** - Repentance isn't a one-time thing that you do at conversion and then move on. Nor is it simply a change of mind, not of behavior. Turning from sin ought to be a chief identifying mark of the believer. As I've said before, in Eastern Europe, unbelievers call evangelicals "repenters." That's not a bad label! If you're in God's Word daily, it confronts you with ways that you are not pleasing to God. Repentance is the proper response.

(4) **It is dangerous not to worry about this warning if your heart is callused, or to worry excessively about it if your heart is tender** – Do you get what I’m saying? Again, one reason that the writer of Hebrews uses such strong terms is to shock those whose hearts are becoming callused so that they wake up before it’s too late. This isn’t just a warning to believers to grow up in their faith (although it *is* that). It’s a warning to those who *think* that they are believers, but are not, not to fall away into eternal judgment. True believers do not go back to their old way of life. True believers persevere in faith and obedience. We will see the same thing emphasized again in 10:36, where he tells them that they have need of endurance. Believing the best about them, he says, “But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (10:39).

In other words, there is only one way for those who have truly believed in Christ as Savior and Lord: to move ahead in faith and obedience, even in the face of trials or persecution. To give up the Christ who sacrificed Himself on the cross and go back to the pleasures of this evil world or to the empty shell of religion is extremely dangerous and possibly spiritually fatal!

If your heart is tender towards God, and you are striving daily against sin, then you should be concerned about this warning, but not *excessively* concerned. Keep walking with the Lord and He will bring you safely into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18)!

CRITICAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER IN THE DEBATE

It is important to remember, in the ongoing debate over the subject of the eternal security of the believer, certain biblical truth facts. These are also key truth about salvation itself, that will keep you grounded.

3 Truths Worth Remembering About Salvation:

- 1. Salvation is always and only the work of God** – It is never the work of man. Man can in not way save himself. We are helpless, desperate, and totally in need of a Savior... God’s work.
- 2. Salvation is always and only a free and undeserved gift** – We can never work for it, earn it, purchase it. There is nothing within our power to secure our own salvation. And the good news is, we don’t have to earn it or be deserving of it. If that was the case, we would never get it.
- 3. Salvation is the gift of always and forever eternal life and right standing with God -**