

## Hebrews 6 If they shall fall away... verses 4-6

These verses continue to be troubling to many Christians and many think that they can lose their eternal life because of what these verses say. Others say that these are not true Christians that the author is writing about, but merely professing Christians who did not really put their faith in Christ.

This letter to the Hebrews was inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to the church for her benefit. There are many riches in this letter that are given to us to build us up in the the faith that we might live obedient, victorious lives for God. It is spiritual food for us for our nourishment. It is important for our spiritual health and growth. Because of some of these difficult passages however, it is often avoided. And chapter 6 verses 4-6 are often cited as the most difficult of the passages in Hebrews.

Now, to start off, we have promises from our Lord about eternal life.

John 3:16 says:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* NKJV<sup>1</sup>

And John 5:24 says:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.* NKJV

We see in these passages that Jesus says that anyone who believes in Him has everlasting or eternal life. To believe in Him means to put our faith in Him. In fact, John 5:24 says that the person who believes in Him has already passed from death into life. We may think that eternal life is something that we get in the future, but don't have yet. But this says that we have passed into life now! That means that we have it now! It is not a matter to be determined later. We already have eternal life. We may think that we will be judged later and that that judgment will determine if we will have eternal life. But in this verse Jesus says that the one who believes in Him will not come into judgment. We truly have eternal life now and forever if we have put our faith in Him.

In John 10:27 – 28 Jesus says:

*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* NKJV

Jesus says here that His sheep will never perish. That is the promise of the Son of God, who died for us. I think that we understand that we do not deserve eternal life. Because of that we may find it hard to believe that God would give it to us if we just put our faith in His Son. Yet, this is the promise that Jesus gave us. We need to put our faith in Him, not in ourselves.

In Romans 3:23-24 Paul says:

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;* NASB<sup>2</sup>

Justified means that we are counted as righteous. Paul says in this passage that God counts us as righteous. The phrase “*as a gift*” in the previous verse comes from a word that means “freely given, as a gift, without payment, gratis”.<sup>3</sup> This is a free gift from Him because of what Christ did on the cross. He paid it all for us. I do not deserve eternal life. I have sinned in the past and will sin in the future. I will never be good enough on my own to deserve eternal life. But, since I have been counted as righteous by God as a gift, I have eternal life. I did not earn it. I cannot earn it. It is a free gift. And, Jesus said previously in John 10:28 that His sheep will never perish. Do we believe Him? Do we believe what He said? That is what faith is about, putting our faith in Him to save us.

So, it is important to realize by what we just read, and by many more passages in scripture, that we cannot lose eternal life if we have truly put our faith in Christ.

So, now, let's look into the letter to the Hebrews.

First of all, who is Hebrews written to?

Let's start with Hebrews 3:1

*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,* ESV<sup>4</sup>

He addresses them as “holy brothers” in this verse. Who is he writing to? If we look at the previous verses it will help us understand who the “holy brothers” are here. So, let's look at chapter 2 verse 11.

*For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,* ESV

The word “sanctifies” in verse 11 means “makes holy” as the NIV translates it below.

*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.* NIV<sup>5</sup>

So, he says that these brothers he is writing to in 3:1 were made holy. How were they made holy?

Later in this same letter, in 10:5-7, he says:

*Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,  
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.  
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”* ESV

The will of God spoken of here is Christ dying for us on the cross.

Then, in verse 10 he says:

*And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*  
ESV

*In the NIV it is translated:*

*And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*  
NIV

The people he addresses in 3:1 are called holy brothers. How did they become holy? It was by the sacrifice of Christ. This only takes place when a person puts their faith in Christ. So, we see that these people whom he is addressing are truly believers.

So, let's look at another part of this letter.

Hebrews 10:32-34

*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*  
NIV

They had “*received the light*”. They stood their ground “*in the face of suffering.*” They knew that they “*had better and lasting possessions.*” This shows that they had assurance of their salvation.

The author of Hebrews is here reminding them of who they are and what they had done in earlier times. They had been actively standing for Christ in the midst of suffering. This is a wonderful testimony of their faith in Christ!

Now, looking at another place, it says in Hebrews 10:19-22:

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*  
NIV

This is clearly a call to true Christians to draw near to God. We have “*confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,*”. We “*draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,*”

Ephesians 4:11-12:

*according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*  
NKJV

We must have faith in Him to enter into His presence. It is a call to us to draw near to God.

Hebrews 12:1-2:

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*  
NKJV

Here is an exhortation to the people he is writing to to run the race. This is clearly something I would say to a believer. If I speak to someone who is not a believer, I need to give him the good news that Christ died for him and rose again, and that he needs to put his faith in Christ for eternal life. An unbeliever is not even in the race yet! Do I tell a person who is dead in trespasses and sins to start living the Christian life? They can't. They don't have life. They need to put their faith in Christ for eternal life. God will then give them a new heart and a new spirit and put His Spirit in them. Then they can and should start running the race.

Certainly, in a congregation where this letter was being read, there may have been and probably were people who were not yet born again. What they needed is the good news of Christ and the cross. But in the letter to the Hebrews the exhortations are to hold on and move forward, not to put faith in Christ for salvation.

Then, in Hebrews 12:5-6:

*And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?  
“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.  
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

ESV

He asks this question of them, speaking to them as sons. He is addressing them as believers.

Again in verse 7:

*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*  
ESV

Again, the author speaks to them as sons.

*God is treating you as sons.*

An unbeliever is not a son. He is outside of God's family. He is clearly speaking to them as believers here.

Verse 12:

*Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet,...*  
ESV

Here is exhortation to live the Christian life. If I say this to someone who has not yet believed in Christ,

I am giving that person the wrong message. They need to put their faith in Him. If I exhort someone who is not a Christian to live the Christian life, that person may deceive himself and think that he actually is a Christian even though he has not put his faith in Christ.

Hebrews 12:28:

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”* NIV

The author here says that we are receiving a kingdom. Only believers receive the kingdom. Unbelievers are excluded from it, so I cannot say this to them. I cannot say to someone who has not yet believed, “let us be thankful that we have received a kingdom”, because I would not be telling them the truth. I would be deceiving them.

Hebrews 13:5-6 says:

*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say:*

*“The Lord is my helper;*

*I will not fear.*

*What can man do to me?”*

NKJV

This is a great encouragement to believers. It is a treasure. But, an unbeliever cannot lay hold of these promises. They need to have eternal life first.

So, we can see that the people the writer is writing to are true believers. There is great encouragement to us in this letter. But there are warnings in it that are written to us also. But, does that mean that Hebrews 6 is written to true believers? Also, are the people he is writing about in 6:4-6 true believers or false professors?

So, let us look at the verses before Hebrews 6 to see who this section is addressed to.

In Hebrews 5:11-14, speaking of Jesus and His high priestly ministry he says:

*of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* NKJV

The author says that they had become dull of hearing. This is spiritual hearing, spiritual understanding. He says that the ministry of Jesus as high priest was hard to explain to them because they had changed. Instead of growing up in their Christian life, they had gone backwards. They could not understand spiritual things of that depth because they were no longer able to hear them. It does not say that they had always been dull of hearing, but that they had become dull of hearing. At one time they were able to hear and understand spiritual things, but they were no longer able to do so.

There is a passage that is very similar to this one that can shed some light on the people spoken of in 5:11-14. It is 1 Corinthians 3:1-5.

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?* NKJV

There are a lot of similarities between Hebrews 5:11-14 and this passage. In both passages they are referred to as "babes". They both needed spiritual milk instead of solid food. In 1 Corinthians Paul says that they were not able to receive the solid food of spiritual teaching. In Hebrews 5, the writer says that the people were dull of hearing. This made it difficult for him to explain to them the teaching of Jesus as the high priest. These are obviously people in very similar spiritual states. In 1 Corinthians Paul says that they were babes in Christ. They were Christians. In 1 Corinthians 1:4-8 he says:

*I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* NKJV

The people mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3 are the same people mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1. They were definitely born-again Christians. The testimony of Christ was confirmed in them.

Later, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul says:

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.* NKJV

These are the same people that Paul was writing to in chapters 1 and 3 of 1 Corinthians. There is no question who he is writing to. They were "washed", "sanctified", and "justified". They are born-again Christians.

But, they were carnal. Carnal means fleshly or worldly. The flesh includes everything that we inherited from Adam. In John 3:6 Jesus says:

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* NKJV

When we are born naturally, everything about us is considered flesh. That definitely includes the things that we would think of as sinful. But the term flesh speaks about everything that I am naturally. Everything we are naturally came from Adam. Even the things in us that we think of as good things are considered flesh and are in opposition to God.

Romans 8:6-8 says:

*For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* NKJV

I don't believe that this means that the people in 1 Corinthians 3 had no spiritual influence in their lives. I think Paul is saying that their lives were dominated by their natural thinking and inclinations. There are many things in 1 Corinthians that indicate what kind of things these were. They were using human wisdom to attempt to learn spiritual things. They were exhibiting strife and envy which are works of the flesh.. I believe that they were attempting to live their Christian lives in the wisdom and power of the flesh, their natural selves, rather than the Spirit. I believe that the Spirit was convicting them of sin, and leading them in a limited way. But, this points to Christian people who are not dependent on the Spirit, but on the flesh to live their lives.

The parallel between 1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 5:11-14 is unmistakable. The people the writer to the Hebrews is addressing were Christians, who had not grown as they should. They had a great beginning as seen in chapter 10. But, they had not continued to grow in their Christian lives. They had not denied the Lord, but earlier warning passages indicate that they were in danger of turning their backs on God. There was a temptation to go back to the way things were before their conversion. Or, perhaps, to be silent about their Christianity, to not create problems with their families and the society around them. As we saw in Hebrews 10, life had been very hard for them after their conversion years before. One of the warnings is in Hebrews 2:1 which says:

*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* ESV

Another warning is in Hebrews 3:12-13:

*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* NKJV

There is a danger of slowly drifting away from God. We can be active in the church, going to Bible studies, doing good things for people, but still slowly, unknowingly, drifting away from God. As seen in 3:12-13, our hearts can become hardened to God because of the deceitfulness of sin in us. These two warnings are very real. We must not shrug them off as something we don't need to be concerned about. It can be happening to us, or to people we know in the Church that we see every week. It is possible to be in church and do the various activities associated with it, and even teach a Bible study or preach from the pulpit, but be slowly drifting away from God.

So, that is who the writer to the Hebrews is addressing in 5:11. They were babes in Christ. They needed to grow. The writer was concerned about their spiritual condition as Christians. There is no statement questioning whether they were Christians or not. The concern was their maturity.

Chapter 6 verse 1 starts out with:

*Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity,...* NASB

The writer's aim was to bring the readers to maturity. That is his goal throughout this letter. It is not

about questioning whether they believed in the first place, or whether they had eternal life. It is about continuing to put their faith in Christ day by day. It is about having faith in Him to live the Christian life as they should. Faith is not just about believing in Christ for eternal life. It is also about believing in Him to enable you to live the Christian life in whatever circumstances you are in every day. The writer does not call on them to doubt their conversion. He repeatedly calls on them to have faith in Christ so that they can have confidence and live obedient, victorious Christian lives. Notice that chapter 11 is written to the same people as in chapter 6 and is about believers who were examples of being obedient to God by faith. In their walk, they were responding to what God wanted them to do, and obeyed Him by faith. This had to do with how they lived. This is what the writer is attempting to do, to get them to “*press on to maturity*”.

Chapter 6 verse 3 says:

*And this we will do, if God permits.*

NASB

The writer has stated his goal of helping his readers “*press on to maturity*” in verse 1. But he sees a potential problem. There may be some people who are reading this or hearing this read who cannot be brought to maturity. Something about them will prevent that. God may not permit that to happen. And this is where verses 4-6 come in. The first question is: Who are these people he is referring to in verses 4-6? Then the question will be: What is he talking about in verse 6? As we will see, verses 7 and 8 will also shed light on this.

First, verses 4 and 5 give a description of these people.

Hebrews 6:4-5:

*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

NASB

Before we look into the meaning of these two verses, let's look at the verse following verse 6.

Hebrews 6:7:

*For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;*

NASB

Verse 7 starts with the word “For”. This word ties the picture of the ground drinking in the rain with the statements previously made in verses 4 and 5. The writer means for us to understand this as an explanation of verses 4-6. The picture he portrays in verse 7 has the ground drinking in the rain. What do the ground and the rain represent? In light of verses 4 and 5 the ground represents a person that is part of the group of people he is talking about in those verses. That ground, or person, drinks in the rain which often falls on it. The rain in verse 7 corresponds to the benefits that person has experienced from God that are listed in verses 4 and 5. The point of those verses is to show how much God has done for him. God has “showered” him with these wonderful, spiritual experiences. This is not dry ground which has not experienced much from God. This person has often had rich spiritual experiences. He could give true testimonies of what God has done for him and for others.



Let's break down the list of experiences in verses 4 and 5.

They *“have once been enlightened”*,  
*“have tasted of the heavenly gift”*,  
*“ have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”*,  
*“ have tasted the good word of God”*, and  
have tasted *“ the powers of the age to come”*.

As we go through these five experiences, we will be looking to determine if the people the writer is talking about are believers or unbelievers.

There are three words in this list that we need to look at. They are “enlightened”, “tasted” and “partakers”. Also, these words are all used in other places in this letter which will help us understand what the writer means here.

The first experience these people have had is stated in verse 4. They “have once been enlightened”. The meaning given in one source is to *“figuratively make clear, cause to fully know, cause to understand;”*.<sup>6</sup> Another source has *“enlighten, give light to, shed light upon”*<sup>7</sup> Other sources give similar meanings.

Later in this letter, in chapter 10 verse 32 - 34 it says:

*“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.”*  
NASB

The writer is referring to the time that these people heard the good news of Christ, believed it, and endured persecution as a result of their belief. This enlightenment was their understanding of the good news of Christ. These people demonstrated that they were believers by their actions and their attitude. Notice that they *“accepted joyfully the seizure of”* their property.

The next experience listed in 6:4 is that they *“have tasted of the heavenly gift.”* What is this heavenly gift? I think that it is referring to eternal life, but it is also possibly the gift of the Holy Spirit or the gift of the forgiveness of sins. In any case, this has to do with what they experienced. The word taste has to do with experience. The definition in BDAG, (a Greek lexicon), for the word translated taste is *“to experience something cognitively or emotionally, come to know something”*<sup>8</sup> when it has a figurative sense, as it does here. In Louw Nida, (another Greek Lexicon), it has the figurative meaning of this word as *“to experience, probably focusing on personal involvement—‘to experience.’”*<sup>9</sup>

The idea expressed by taste is to experience something. For example, in this same letter to the Hebrews, the author uses this word when speaking about Jesus and His death on the cross. In Hebrews 2:9 it says:

*But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*  
NASB

From this verse we see that Jesus actually experienced death for everyone. There is nothing detached about this. This was a real experience. The writer of this letter uses the word translated taste to show that Jesus experienced death for every person. He uses the same word to describe what the person in 4:4-6 experienced. His use of this word in 2:9 is important in that it shows his understanding of it. He understands it as indicating a real experience.

In 1 Peter 2:1 Peter says:

*as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.* NKJV

Here, Peter uses the same word that was translated taste in Hebrews 2:9 and 6:4-5. He uses it here to speak about experiencing God's graciousness.

There are three experiences listed in Verses 4 and 5 where the writer uses the word tasted when describing them. It says that they "have tasted of the heavenly gift", "have tasted the good word of God", and have tasted "the powers of the age to come". They are not simply people who have heard a gospel message and never believed. These are not experiences of non-believers, but believers. The point of this passage is to point out the benefits these believers have received from God. Like the rain that falls on the ground in verses 7 and 8, these people have had significant experiences with God. They were not people who professed faith but never believed or went any further with God. The word of God was not just a book to them, it was real. They had experienced it. They had experienced the powers of the age to come, themselves.

In verses 4-6 there is one more experience listed. It says in verse 4 that

*they have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,* NASB

*those who ... have shared in the Holy Spirit,* ESV

The word translated partakers or shared in is defined as "sharing/participating in" in BDAG.<sup>10</sup> In Louw Nida it is defined as "one who shares with someone else as an associate in an enterprise or undertaking —'companion, partner.'<sup>11</sup> In Mounce it is defined as "partaker".<sup>12</sup>

This word is used in Hebrews in 1:9, 3:1, 3:14, 6:4 and 12:7. It is also used in Luke 5:7 for business partners. In Hebrews 1:9 it is translated "companions". In 3:1 and 3:14 it is translated "partakers" in the NASB and "sharers" in the ESV.

Hebrews 3:1

*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling,* ESV

It does not mean that they are simply hoping to go to heaven or trying to get there but that they actually share in this calling.

Hebrews 3:14

*For we have come to share in Christ,* ESV

In this verse, it is saying that they share in Christ. It could also be translated “partners”, as people who are in fellowship with and working together with Christ. This does not speak of seekers, but of true, believing, disciples.

Also, in 6:4, when it says that “they have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,” as in the NASB, it does not speak of an action that they had taken, but of something that God had done for them and to them. They were “made partakers of the Holy Spirit”. It does not say that being a partaker of the Holy Spirit was something that they were attempting to do. The statement is passive. They were the recipients of the Holy Spirit. God made them partakers of Himself, the Holy Spirit. This is hardly the same as being convicted by the Spirit or being moved by the Spirit. This can only describe a person who has been born-again.

So, based on the descriptions of the blessings in verses 4 and 5, he is writing about true, born-again, believers. His emphasis, however, is not to prove that they are born-again, but that they have also had all of the experiences that the writer listed. As we will see, these experiences correspond to the rain that falls on the ground in the illustration in verses 7 and 8.

So now, after the list of these experiences, verse 6 says:

*and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.* NASB

So, here is the issue. These people who have had all of these great experiences from God have fallen away. What does it mean here to “fall away”?

It is defined in one Greek lexicon as literally “to ‘fall beside’, then ‘go astray, miss’.” And later it has “to fail to follow through on a commitment, fall away, commit apostasy”<sup>13</sup>. In another lexicon it is defined as “properly to fall beside a person or thing; to slip aside; hence to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wander:” Later in that lexicon it has “In the Scriptures, to fall away (from the true faith): ... from Christianity, Heb. 6:6.”<sup>14</sup>

The literal meaning is to fall beside. This makes me think of a person walking on a path and instead of continuing on the right path they stray off to go some other way. It is similar to the warning in Hebrews 2:1:

*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.* NKJV

The danger in this verse is that they might drift away. I believe that the writer is talking about drifting away from fellowship with Christ. This can happen to us if we live our day to day lives without paying close attention to Christ and His word. We can be attending church and slowly drifting from Him as we go through the motions of Christianity. We may not even be aware of that happening. Suddenly we realize that we are not walking closely with the Lord. We don't know how to get back to where we once were. That is a dangerous place to be.

Another warning listed before this one is in Hebrews 3:12:

*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* NKJV

In this verse, they are warned to make sure they were not departing from God. This is similar to the idea of drifting in 2:1. The cause for this departure is being hardened through sin. Sin is deceitful. Sin is devastating to our spiritual lives. We may think that it is a small thing. But the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins so that we will confess them to God so that they will be forgiven. He wants to bring us back into full fellowship with the Himself. But, if instead I refuse to repent of my sins, I then harden my heart to the Holy Spirit. The more I do that, the harder my heart will be toward God, and the harder it will be for me to hear Him and respond to Him. This is tied with unbelief. My faith toward God to live the Christian life will diminish when my heart becomes hardened toward Him. I will not believe what He can do in me. So, I do not obey Him, and harden my heart even more.

This was the situation with these believers in Hebrews 6. The writer has already warned them that they could drift away from God. He later warned them that they could depart from God. Now, in chapter 6, he speaks of the case of those who have gone that far. They have drifted away. They have departed from God. They have gone off the right path that God laid out for them in their lives. They are hardened to the Holy Spirit. So, they may not be able to move forward in their Christian lives. I believe that that is the concern of this writer when he warns them that they will not be able to move ahead if they have gone off the right path or fallen away. They have gone so far that they cannot respond to the Holy Spirit.

So, in Hebrews 6:6 it says:

*and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.* NASB

It says that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Someone who has turned away from God needs to be renewed so that they can repent of their departure from Him and return to walking with God. In the context of this letter, the writer had said that he intended for the readers to move on to maturity if God permitted. But if someone has gone so far as to fall away from God, their heart may be so hardened that they won't be affected by the teaching that the writer is going to give them in the next sections of this letter. He has already said that they have "come to need milk and not solid food" in 5:12. In that same verse he said that they "have become dull of hearing". But, he believed that they could move on to maturity if they had not gone too far. The context of "it is impossible" is the statement that they should move on to maturity, if God permits. I believe that this is a case where it is not possible for someone to counsel this person and bring him back to a place of fellowship with God.

In Galatians 6:1 it says:

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.* NKJV

Here it talks about restoring someone who is overtaken in a trespass. Although it is ultimately God who restores someone, the spiritual person who is mentioned here is also used in that process. He is a fellow member of the body of Christ whom God is using to bring that person back to a place of fellowship with Him.

But, in Hebrews 6:6, in the NASB, it says that "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." I think that the same idea is expressed here as in Galatians 6:1. In Galatians 6:1 it speaks of a spiritual person restoring someone. I think the idea in Hebrews 6 is the same, except that the spiritual person writing the letter to the Hebrews won't be able to restore or renew the person spoken about in verses 4

through 6 because he has gone too far.

But, I think that there is the possibility here that God may be able to work in that person's life to bring them back to Himself.

In Luke 18:27 Jesus says:

*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.* NKJV

In Luke 18 the context is about who can be saved, but the statement Jesus makes in verse 27 is a general statement that I think can apply to the situation in Hebrews 6.

Now, this does not mean that the writer to the Hebrews is saying that this person is lost, or has lost his salvation. He simply does not say that. We would have to read that into the passage for it to have that meaning. We need to take the passage here as it is written. But we tend to think that it may have an unspoken meaning. We tend to think that surely if someone has turned away from God they cannot have eternal life. We may take the English translation “fallen away” to mean that we have fallen away from salvation or eternal life. But the original word does not have “away” as part of its meaning. As we saw earlier, it is defined in one Greek lexicon as literally “to ‘fall beside’, then ‘go astray, miss’.” In another dictionary it is defined as “properly to fall beside a person or thing; to slip aside; hence to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wander:”

I'm not saying that it isn't serious, or that it does not have serious consequences. But the word indicates that the person has deviated from the right path. The seriousness is further stated by the rest of verse 6 where it says:

*they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.* NASB

By their actions, they are crucifying to themselves the Son of God. Jesus is put to open shame because of what they are doing. People look at this person who had been known as a Christian and now they speak evil of Christ and Christianity because of his actions. He is now working against the kingdom of God, whether he knows it or not. As Christ is working through the church to reach the world with the gospel, Satan uses this person's lifestyle against the testimony of Christ. Yes, this is a very serious thing, and God takes it seriously. But, the question is, what does God do?

The next two verses help to explain the previous three. They are a key to understanding verse 4 – 6. In Hebrews 6:7 and 8 he gives us an illustration:

*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.* NKJV

That word “For” that starts verse 7 indicates that this is an explanation of the previous verses. This is an illustration of a section of ground that is supposed to bear herbs. It makes me think of a farmer's field. The rain falls on it, and the ground takes it in. Comparing the illustration to verses 4 – 6, this would be a picture of the benefits that God gives that person in the different experiences he has. It says that the rain often comes upon it. This indicates that the person had a lot of experiences from God. It is not indicating that the ground did not have enough water, but that it had plenty of water to produce the herbs it was supposed to bear. Also, it mentions that the ground is cultivated. It is not just wild, left to itself. It reminds me of John 15:1 where Jesus says that “My Father is the vinedresser.” In John 15 the

Father takes care of the vine and everything it needs to grow and produce fruit. In this illustration it only mentions that the ground is cultivated. I think this is indicating that God is cultivating this field. This would also include those people in the church who teach, encourage, rebuke and build up believers. So, in this case, the person mentioned in verses 4 – 6 has had God taking care of him.

So, in the illustration, it says that if the ground bears useful herbs, it receives a blessing from God. But the opposite is also possible. It talks about the ground bearing thorns and briars instead of useful herbs. The illustration does not say that it is different ground, or that it has not had the rain it needed, or the cultivation it needed. It had all those things. But it does talk about the ground bearing thorns and briars. This would be like the person who turns away from the right path. He has drifted from God. He is no longer producing fruit for Him. He is producing the opposite from what God intended.

It says that if the ground produces thorns and briars it is rejected. The basic idea of this word translated 'rejected' is that it is not approved. In one lexicon it is defined as “‘not standing the test’, then unqualified, worthless, base.”<sup>15</sup> Another has “‘not standing the test, not approved’”<sup>16</sup> When we see the word 'rejected', we may think that he is saying that God has rejected that person. We may think that this means that he has lost his salvation. But it does not say that. What it does say is that he is not approved. God expected to see fruit in his life, but instead there were thorns and briars. This reminds us of John 15 where it talks about the branches bearing fruit. That is what we are supposed to do.

Now it says that this ground is near to being cursed. Notice that it is not cursed, but near to it. What happens to this ground? Its end is to be burned. Now this is another place where we might think that he is talking about judgment in hell. When we read about fire, we think of hell. But, we need to pay attention to the illustration. There is a field with thorns and briars all over it. What does a farmer do with such a field? He could abandon it. He could give up on that field and say that nothing good is ever going to grow there. But he doesn't do that. What he does is burn the field. Have you ever seen that done? I have. The farmer burns the field down to the ground. He does that to clear the field. What is he burning when he does that? He is burning the thorns and briars. He burns what the ground produced. Sure, the ground is scorched, but it is still there. When he has finished burning the field, he may plant something else there and hope he can get a good crop from it. This is a great illustration of what God does with us. I think that this can happen both in this life and at the judgment seat of Christ. In this life, God can take away the things that we have depended on, or the things that turn us away from Him. He may do this so that we will repent and turn our hearts toward Him. Even though it may have been impossible for someone to renew this person to repentance, God may be able to bring him back after removing some of the things that have kept him from repenting. This could also refer to the judgment seat of Christ as in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*  
NKJV

This judgment will take place when the Lord returns for His church. He will test our works, what we have produced in our lives. It says that they will be tested by fire. Just like the thorns and briars in Hebrews 6:7, the wood, hay and straw will be burned up in this judgment. It says that 'If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss;'. The word translated 'burned' could be translated 'burned up', or 'burned down', as if all the work is burned. This would be like the field being burned in Hebrews 6:7.

But it also says “but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” This is quite clear. This person's work is burned up. However, he himself is not! He is saved, yet so as through fire. This is important to see. A saved person can have his works burned up, but he is still saved. It is not a light thing though for someone to have his works burned up. It says that he will suffer loss. This is no small thing. He won't be standing there before the Lord saying, “Well, I don't care about rewards anyway.” He will have a new nature. It says in 1 John 3:2:

*...we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

NKJV

The most important thing for us at that time will be to please the Lord. It is clear that having your works burned up at the judgment seat of Christ will not please Him. We may not care about it now, but it is clear that we will care very much when we are standing before Him giving account of ourselves before Him. Romans 14:12 says:

*So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

NKJV

Those rewards will represent what we did for Him in our lifetime. If we stand there with our works burned up before the one who died for us on the cross, who gave His all for us, we will come to our senses and realize what we threw away. We will wish at that time that we had lived our lives for Him. On that day our hearts will have been changed so that the most important thing for us will be to please Him. Also, those rewards will represent those opportunities to share the gospel with others, build up other believers and live lives that demonstrate God's character. I think that we will realize that there could be people who are not there, because we did not do what God wanted us to do. I don't think that I need to say that that is a hard thing to think about. It certainly is for me. I cannot change the past, but I can repent, confess my sins to Him, and ask Him to help me live for Him the rest of my life. While we still have breath, we have time to do that.

What does this passage tell us? It is a warning to us. It is easy to think that it is talking about someone else and that I don't need to think about it. But, this is a real warning. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says:

*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

NKJV

And Hebrews 2:1 says:

*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

NKJV

The concern is that we continue to walk with the Lord so that we please Him.

- <sup>1</sup> New King James Version. (1982). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- <sup>2</sup> New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.
- <sup>3</sup> δωρεάν acc. of δωρεά used as adv. (since Hdt. 5, 23 [δωρεήν]; ins, pap, LXX; PsSol 7:1; TestSol; Joseph.).
- ① pert. to being freely given, as a gift, without payment, gratis ... receive or give without payment Mt 10:8 (cp. Sextus 242; of an emissary who paid his own traveling expenses IPriene 108, 165); cp. Rv 21:6; 22:17; δ. εὐαγγελίσασθαι 2 Cor 11:7. δικαιούμενοι δ. justified, made upright, as a gift Ro 3:24. οὐδὲ δ. ἄρτον ἐφάγομεν παρά τινος we have not eaten bread with (or from) anyone without paying for it 2 Th 3:8.
- ② pert. to being without contributory fault, undeservedly, without reason/cause ἐμίσησάν με δ. they hated me without reason J 15:25 (Ps 34:19; 68:5; PsSol 7:1; cp. Ps 118:161; 1 Km 19:5).
- ③ pert. to being without purpose, in vain, to no purpose (Job 1:9; Ps 34:7) δ. ἀποθνήσκειν Gal 2:21; ITr 10.—DELG s.v. δίδωμι. M-M. s.v. δωρεά. TW.
- Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 266). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., pp. 266–267). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>4</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>6</sup> Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words [5894] φωτίζω phōtizō

<sup>7</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1074). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. φωτίζω

<sup>8</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1074). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. γεύομαι

<sup>9</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 807). New York: United Bible Societies. γεύομαι<sup>c</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1074). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. μέτοχος

<sup>11</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 446). New York: United Bible Societies. μέτοχος<sup>b</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words [3581] μέτοχος metochos

<sup>13</sup> Παραπίπτω ... lit. 'fall beside', then 'go astray, miss' (Polyb. 3, 54, 5 τῆς ὁδοῦ; fig. 12, 12, 2 τῆς ἀληθείας; 8, 11, 8 τοῦ καθήκοντος); abs. (X., Hell. 1, 6, 4; Polyb. 18, 36, 6=make a mistake) and in the sense to fail to follow through on a commitment, fall away, commit apostasy (Wsd 6:9; 12:2; Ezk 22:4) Hb 6:6 (s. KBornhäuser, Empfänger u. Verf. des Hb '32). Also w. acc. of inner content (cognate; B-D-F §154; Rob. 477f) ὅσα παρεπέσαμεν whatever sins we have committed 1 Cl 51:1.—M-M. TW.

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 770). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>14</sup> Παρα-πίπτω ... prop. to fall beside a pers. or thing; to slip aside; hence to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wander: τῆς ὁδοῦ, Polyb. 3, 54, 5; metaph. τῆς ἀληθείας, Polyb. 12, 12 (7), 2 [(here ed. Didot ἀντέχρηται); τοῦ καθήκοντος, 8, 13, 8]; i. q. to err, Polyb. 18, 19, 6; ἔν τινι, Xen. Hell. 1, 6, 4. In the Scriptures, to fall away (from the true faith): from the worship of Jehovah, Ezek. 14:13; 15:8 (for ἡγή); from Christianity, Heb. 6:6.\*

Thayer, J. H. (1889). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti (p. 485). New York: Harper & Brothers.

<sup>15</sup> ἀδόκιμος, ον (Democr. et al.; also Polyb. 6, 25, 8; 16, 14, 9; ins, pap; Pr 25:4; Is 1:22) 'not standing the test', then unqualified, worthless, base of pers. (X., De Rep. Lac. 3, 3; Plut., Mor. 4c ἀνθρώποις ἀδοκίμοις ἐγχειρίζουσι τ. παῖδας; Herodian 7, 7, 5; Jos., C. Ap. 2, 236 ἀ. σοφισταί; Did., Gen. 122, 6) 1 Cor 9:27; ITr 12:3. 2 Cor 13:5–7 (on the self-affirmation cp. Demosth. 18, 111); ἀνήρ ἀ. ἀπείραστος a man who is not tempted is unproved Agr 21. W. indication of the respect in which the test is not met ἀδοκίμοι περι τὴν πίστιν 2 Ti 3:8; πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἀ. unfit for any good deed Tit 1:16.—Of things (Philo, Conf. Lingu. 198; PCairZen 176, 64 [III B.C.] of money) barren soil Hb 6:8. Of the gentile νοῦς in a play on words w. οὐ δοκιμάζειν Ro 1:28.—DELG s.v. δοκάω. TW. Spicq.

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 21). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



<sup>16</sup> ἄ-δόκιμος, -ον, (δόκιμος), [fr. Eur. down], not standing the test, not approved; properly of metals and coin, ἀργύριον, Is. 1:22; Prov. 25:4; νόμισμα, Plat. legg. v. p. 742 a., al.; hence, which does not prove itself to be such as it ought: γῆ, of sterile soil, Heb. 6:8; in a moral sense [A. V. reprobate], 1 Co. 9:27; 2 Co. 13:5–7; νοῦς, Ro. 1:28; περὶ τὴν πίστιν, 2 Tim. 3:8; hence, unfit for something: πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἀδ. Tit. 1:16.\*

Thayer, J. H. (1889). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti (p. 12). New York: Harper & Brothers.