

What Is The Point Of Hebrews 6:4-6?

Hebrews 6:4-6 (NIV)

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted of the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subject Him to public disgrace."

Many have read Hebrews 6:4-6 and interpreted it to mean that someone can be saved, choose a sinful life, and then can never recover their salvation. However, a close examination of the surrounding scripture makes it clear that what the author of Hebrews was saying has nothing to do with the impossibility of returning to God.

Is the passage about losing salvation?

Whether or not one can lose salvation is an age-old debate and has caused much dissension within the Church. It is possible to come up with many convincing verses for both sides, if one is willing to read them in a certain light. It is not the intention of this article to try and answer that question once and for all for all mankind. You likely have made up your mind already about this polarizing topic, and it is unrelated to the real point of this passage, anyway. The fact is that whether or not you can lose salvation, this passage is about something else entirely.

This passage, like most Scripture outside of the Gospels, goes beyond the issue of salvation. Most of the New Testament is about the fact that once they have become saved, different people have different levels of success in their walk with God. The New Testament consists mostly of letters written by Paul and others to Christians. For the most part, Paul's letters aim to tell believers, "OK, now that you've begun this journey, here's how to live it." The whole thought process is how to grow as a Christian. Never is there any thought given to the idea of becoming a non-Christian.

Before Paul, of course, there was the Lord Jesus Himself, and many times He made it clear that our heavenly Father wants to take us back if we do stray. One of many examples is the story of the Prodigal Son. This illustrates the point well, because as Jesus tells the story, we see one very important thing: the son never ceases being his father's son. The fact that he is His son tells us that he symbolizes a Christian, a child of God.

The story of the Prodigal son should always be kept in mind when considering the meaning of Hebrews 6:4-6. If that passage truly means that one cannot leave, and then return, to a relationship with the Lord, then the story of the Prodigal son has no place in the Bible, because leaving and returning to a relationship with our heavenly Father is exactly what that parable is about.

So what about the word impossible?

So let's go back to Hebrews 6:4-6. Why does this passage say that it is "impossible" to be brought back to God? The truth is, it doesn't. The statement is that it is impossible to be brought back to repentance. While it is true that one must repent to become a new Christian, one need not be a new Christian to repent. The key phrase in the NIV is 'brought back', NLT is 'to bring back', but King James and NKJV say it is impossible to

'renew them again'.

The question is, who's doing the 'renewing' or 'bringing back'? It may be impossible for you or me to bring them back, but that doesn't mean that God cannot. This idea of what is 'impossible' shows up in the Gospels, when Jesus is talking. Take for example the following verses, which are parallel: Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27 and Luke 18:27. The Luke verse tells us: "Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with men is possible with God.' " So don't let the word 'impossible' fool you into thinking that this passage in Hebrews means that there is no way a saved person can leave God and come back. It happens all the time. It is God, working through His Holy Spirit, who brings His lost sheep back.

So what does the passage mean, then?

So if this passage isn't about the loss of salvation, what is it about? A key to the answer to that question is in the second half of verse 6, which says 'since they again crucify Jesus'. This is where the context is useful. Please take a look at the end of Chapter 5 through the first two verses of Chapter 6. A modern paraphrase might be, "OK, enough talk about the simple issues of salvation; because we could go on and on and talk about resurrection, eternal judgment, the laying on of hands, etc. But there are deeper issues to discuss in order for you to see measurable growth in your Christian walk." It is important to keep in mind who he was writing to. The recipients of this letter were Hebrews (hence the title of the book), a group of folks who had a hard time getting rid of the concept of salvation by works, because it was something they grew up with. The writer is imploring the Hebrews: Jesus paid for your sins with His death, now accept it and move on. Bottom line: this passage is about performance-based Christianity, a line of thought we all need to be careful not to fall into.

Let's look at a modern example: You and I are driving around on a hot summer day. We decide a cold drink of some kind is in order. We see a convenience store, and we go in and each get a cold soda. I offer to pay for both.

If that episode played out as I just described it, you most likely would accept my offer as a gesture of friendship and thank me for it, and we would go on about our business. But if you were to accept my free gift and then turn around and try to pay the clerk anyway, even after I had paid, you would be defeating the purpose, nullifying my gift to you.

I would think to myself, "Wow! I just wasted a buck on this person. Well, I'm sure not paying for anything for him again. I already did it once, and it's paid for." This is what that part of verse 6 is saying when it says we are crucifying Jesus all over again. We don't need to get stuck on our works, or on performance, because Jesus has paid for our salvation. It's a done deal. It is finished. Quit trying to pay for your own cold soda when it's already been paid for!

The writer says in verse Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, . . ." In other words, let's stop going on about the fact that faith, not works, is what gets you salvation, let's talk about how to grow in Christ now that you have become a child of God.

The frustrating thing for the author of Hebrews is that once these people have

accepted salvation as a free gift, some have fallen back into their old ways of thinking that works is what saves you, and that is the 'falling away' mentioned in verse 6. The author is warning them (and us) that once someone gets the whole idea of salvation as a free gift, and then blows it off, then that person is going to have a hard time growing in Christ.

Verse 8 contains a word which would lead some to think the writer is talking about Hell. The word is 'burned'. The fact is that not every Biblical reference to burning has to do with eternal damnation. I could give several examples, but the one that fits best here is found in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3:12-15:

"Now if any man build upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, as through fire."

Key point being that he is still saved. There are many passages, verses, and phrases about which Christians may disagree, but there is no other way to interpret that past phrase, "but he himself shall be saved . . ." except to say that he is still saved. Here is a clear case of burning being associated with someone who is still saved.

Actually, that set of verses in 1 Corinthians 3 is life-altering when understood clearly. The burning in Hebrews 6:8 is not talking about a believer going to Hell because he fell away. It is, however, talking about a believer who will 'suffer loss'.

Bottom line is that the intended point of the writer of this portion of Scripture (Hebrews 6:4-6) is that those of us who have tasted what the Lord offers should not let ourselves get caught up in the idea that our works are what saves us, because it is a slap in the face of the One who died for us. Rather, we should concentrate on maturing as believers so that we can reflect Him more.

Unfortunately, the whole idea of 'Performance Christianity' is more prevalent among Christians than we think. It is true that almost all believers will say that they believe salvation is a free gift, most of us at one time or another still fall into the trap of believing we can get more of God's love by performing, and that we risk the very existence of our relationship with Him based on our actions.

God doesn't like our failures, but when we don't fail, it is because of Him and the abilities that He has put into us that enable us to move forward in our Christian walk. Thank God daily for His free gift, try to be more and more like Him, and tell others the good news!