

Hebrews 6:4-6 "Are We Really Secure In Christ?"

HEB 6:4-6 "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Over the years I have run into many Christians who, when reading this particular passage, go into nothing short of a panic thinking that they may fall into this category sometime in their life, or that they are presently in this category because of sin which they fell into.

The thought that the possibility even exists that one could lose their salvation and not be able to repent and be brought back is a devastating consideration. There are two main groups who deal with this situation in two different ways. Those who believe you can lose your salvation would use this and a couple of other proof texts to prove their point. The other group who believes you cannot lose your salvation would take much of what Jesus Himself said concerning His sheep, together with other portions of God's word, and build the case that a true believer cannot ultimately be lost.

My position on this will soon become quite clear. But instead of looking at what both groups believe and commenting on that I prefer to let our text speak for itself. Because with proper exegesis we will see the beauty of a passage like this as it accomplishes what the Holy Spirit intended in speaking to the hearts of both believers and unbelievers.

I will be the first to admit that at first glance this portion of God's word seems to be straightforward. If you've been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and you turn away from Christ it will be impossible for you to be renewed again.

But, one of the first rules of Bible study is to take any particular verse or verses and study them in connection to the context in which they're found and if there still seems to be confusion allow God to explain Himself in other portions He's given us which relate to the same subject.

A common rule is that we allow the less clear verse to be explained by the more clear verse. And the more clear verse may not necessarily be found in the context. It may be found anywhere else in the entire word of God. Keep in mind that the Bible is one book made up of a number of parts. And yet it is all the mind and will of God and so we don't neglect any part of it when searching for God's truth.

And so the question you may have is, 'well, what is the truth concerning my salvation and my eternal security or lack thereof?' And the answer to this question will make a great difference in the way you live your life for God.

The group who believes that you can lose your salvation would accuse the other group that the mind-set of eternal security will only foster a lax attitude and allow all sorts of sin to enter the picture. After all, they say, if we can't lose our salvation then it doesn't make any difference how we live.

The group who believes in eternal security would criticize the other belief, of the possibility of losing one's salvation, in contributing to unnecessary fear, of striving in the flesh to make sure you don't do anything to jeopardize your salvation. They would say such a belief system ultimately puts your salvation in your own hands. The outcome is ultimately up to you.

But again, the issue before us this morning is what does our text say and what does it mean? Let's look at these verses again.

HEB 6:4-6 "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

The context in which this is found takes into consideration that some Jews wanted to go back to the old ways of the Old Covenant with its rules and regulations. To go back to the old and reject the New, which is the New Covenant in Christ, is to reject Jesus outright in favor of a more earthy approach to God.

After all you can't touch Jesus or see Him except by faith. But you can physically experience the Law. You could physically go to the temple. You could physically offer sacrifices. You could

physically observe certain days as holy. You could physically partake in circumcision. It didn't take much faith to participate in the ritual aspect of Judaism. And so for many who longed for something they could touch and feel it was much easier and much more convenient to go back to the old ways.

But to go back to that which produced only death in favor of life in Christ reveals much about such a profession in the Messiah. It reveals there was no life at all if the life-giver can be rejected and turned away from that easily. Don't forget that what our writer is talking about here is not a mere falling into sin or what some call backsliding, (a term I don't care for), but rather a total willful rejection of Christ.

In verse four our writer speaks of a person who has once been enlightened and has tasted the heavenly gift. On the surface we might conclude that only a Christian could fall into that category. The question must be raised; can an unbeliever be enlightened and taste the heavenly gift without truly being born again?

First, we must understand something of the human condition. When God made man He put into man the ability to recognize certain things concerning God. Speaking of man in general Arthur W. Pink says, "A man could not love God unless he had in him the faculty of affection -- a stone could never love God! So a man could never understand spiritual things unless he had the faculty of understanding. With the elect, the Holy Spirit "renews" the understanding; but with the non-elect, He only enlightens it."

Paul makes this plain when writing in ROM 1:18 -21 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, ***because God has made it plain to them.*** 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

By nature the natural man, the man who has not met Jesus Christ and embraced Him by faith, does not have the spiritual desire to seek God diligently or to live his life in a way that can please Him,

thereby bringing glory to His name. Paul says, "they knew God, but they didn't glorify Him or give thanks to Him."

Their knowledge of God, however, was not intimate, it was superficial. And yet even that knowledge was the result of the Holy Spirit enlightening their minds. That's what Paul is saying in Rom.1:19 "since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."

The Greek word for enlightened in our text is *photizo* and it means to shed rays or to brighten up. It's where we get our English word photo.

In a camera light enters the shutter and an image is placed on the paper, or these days, the micro-ship, thus a photo. Light may enter into a person's life, but having an image of God and having a relationship with God are two different things.

One is a two-dimensional copy of the person. The other is the person who was photographed. They may look the same but try and carry on a relationship with a photo.

Our writer in Hebrews is making the distinction between a photo and the real thing. The Holy Spirit may give a person a photo of God, in a sense, but the true born-again believer isn't satisfied with a photo, he wants the real thing.

On the other hand the unbeliever is more than happy to carry around a photo and even show it to all his friends. Some respond, you're very fortunate to have met God in this way. And they're content to carry God in their wallet, if you will, as God has enlightened Himself to them in this way. But, as we'll see even for the unbeliever, this kind of relationship doesn't really satisfy. The question is, will they seek to know the person or will they go back to their old ways as they reject the true God whose image they carry around with them?

But how does an unbeliever taste the heavenly gift and share in the ministry of the Holy Spirit? It's not as uncommon as you might think. But we must say here that what this implies is much more than a casual association with the things of God. Tasting the heavenly gift implies a personal involvement with the things of God.

I like the way Dr. Donald Guthrie puts it. "The idea of tasting the heavenly gift implies more than just knowledge of the truth. It implies experience of it. 1Pet.2:3 contains the same idea. There is

a development between knowing about food, even liking the look of it, and actually tasting it. No one can merely pretend to do the latter. Of course, not all tasting is pleasurable, and in the hypothetical case which the writer is supposing, it clearly was not so."

An unbeliever can taste the things of God as they experience the love and joy and grace and mercy that is found among the people of God. They can taste the fellowship of the saints. They can taste the truth of God's word. They experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are operating in the Body of Christ.

An unbeliever can even taste the first-hand experience of seeing someone come to Christ. They can be involved in ministries in the church where they taste the goodness of God reaching out to someone who is hurting and in need of God's touch. They can even taste the goodness of God reaching out to them.

The problem is that their conception of God and their understanding of what it is to have a relationship with God is nothing more than pulling out that photo to see if He's still there. They may understand it as personal, but that's what the natural man's heart will do to the real thing. It deceives itself into thinking it has the real thing when in fact it's holding on to shadows and vanishing images.

And so they see themselves as our writer says in HEB 6:5 " who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,..."

Once again, they can taste the goodness of God's word. They can sit through a sermon and be blessed. They can understand that God is there for us and wants to encourage us. But that's not the same as trusting God in those times when it looks like He's not there. Faith in God follows Him even through the valley of the shadow of death because our faith allows us to stand on the Rock knowing He will be with us even there.

And so, they may taste the Word of God, but they cannot say with Jeremiah JER 15:16 "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty." Tasting is not eating. And in this way they practice more of a spiritual bulimia than being nourished by the Holy Spirit in true life.

The natural man will not stand the test of time and persevere to the end. It's too much work. The natural man must work very hard to keep those good feelings going and to psyche himself up enough to continue with the program. That is unless of course he surrounds himself with others just like himself. The blind leading the blind.

But if such a person is around truly born-again believers who love the Lord and don't compromise the word of God there comes a point where the arrows pierce his heart and he will do one of two things; repent of his sin and truly embrace Christ by faith, or flee and reject the One who extends life.

But what about this idea of tasting the powers of the age to come? We may think that the powers of the age to come has more to do with the future. The age to come certainly has to do with the future but it doesn't exclude the present. The age to come speaks of a new age of life with Christ. That new age or new covenant broke into history when our Lord came into this world as it was inaugurated with His earthly ministry. That's what our Lord meant when he said in MAT 12:28 "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

This Kingdom of God came in with power and continues to go forward with the power of God. And even unbelievers can taste that power as they see the Lord work in the lives of people. But simply tasting it, as opposed to embracing it by faith, is not a true sign that one knows the God who works in power.

This also why Jesus said in MAT 7:22-23 "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 perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

People will avail themselves to the things of God for all sorts of reasons. Unbelievers will do so because they believe it to be expedient and in their best interest. But once God doesn't seem to be needed any longer they go their own way until, again, they find that God may be necessary in their lives.

This was often the case with rebellious Israel.

PSA 78:34-37 "Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. 35 They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. 36 But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with

their tongues; 37 their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant."

Their situation caused them to seek God, but their hearts were never really united with His. They were not loyal to God, they were only loyal to themselves.

Pink comments on this by saying that "a conscience terrified with the prospect of hell, will cause a man to seek Christ after a natural way. It is but the instinct of self-preservation at work. Add to this, the craving for happiness which self-love ever seeks, and hearing that such happiness is to be found only in Christ, it is little wonder that multitudes seek Him now for what they can get from Him, as of old they sought Him for the sake of the loaves and fishes."

And so the picture we have here in our text is a picture of a person who has been in the middle of what God is doing in the lives of people. This person sees the advantage of being united to the works of God and yet not truly being united to God Himself.

With this in mind our writer then says that with all of the evidence this person has and all the information which is at his disposal, and all of the experiences he has witnessed, if this person, who is now much more informed than most, turns away from the things of God and rejects Christ, in spite of what he has seen, then this person will find it impossible to be renewed again to repentance.

Those may sound like rather harsh words, but they are true none the less. Again, I remind you that this person is not just dabbling in his search for God. This is not a real believer who has found himself getting off the path for a time. This person has done a complete 180 degree turn. When the Bible talks about repentance it is talking about a complete turn-around in one's thinking and attitude toward God.

Well, that can work both ways. This person in our text has repented of his involvement with the things of God. This person has repented that he has even been associated with Christ. The attitude is, 'I'm sorry I ever got involved.' And in so doing he is "crucifying to himself the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." as our text says in verse 6.

What does that mean? Dr. Guthrie puts it this way. "It is said that they crucify the Son of God, and the compound verb used shows that the writer is thinking of the repetition of the crucifixion. He could not have expressed the seriousness of the apostasy in

stronger or more tragic terms. As he thinks of what the enemies of Jesus Christ did to him, he actually sees those who turn away from him as equally responsible.....

..... He may be thinking that such apostates would be more culpable than those who originally cried out 'crucify Him', who had never known anything of the wonder of God's grace through Christ. Anyone who turned back from Christianity to Judaism, would be identifying himself not only with Jewish unbelief, but with that malice which led to the crucifixion of Jesus."

That kind of malice and rejection or apostasy is what holds our Savior in contempt. They have willfully and with full understanding made this choice to repent of their association with God and have replaced it with contempt for God.

This is why it is impossible for them to repent once again, to turn back to God. The reason is that once they have decided that God is no longer the answer, God is no longer an option for them. The impossibility comes because of the hardness of their own hearts. They will not seek God, because they do not want God. They have turned away.

Boy, this sounds pretty bleak for these people. And from a human standpoint it is. But there's something we should consider about salvation. You see there are two sides to this coin. There is the human responsibility for all men to repent of their sin and turn to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. And yet there is the truth that only God can truly turn the heart.

What we are seeing here in our text is one side of the coin. The side we are seeing is the side of man which has made the choice to not only not embrace Christ but to actually reject Him in the face of having our Lord's grace and mercy and power be tasted by this individual.

From a human stand-point it is impossible to turn back to God once you've eliminated Him, with malice, as an option. And though our writer doesn't flip the coin over at this stage it's important to understand that the whole counsel of God's Word does.

Let me share the "human" side of an attempt to embrace Christ through the eyes of one particular individual.

MAT 19:16-24 "Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why

do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.' 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

This is the way of man. Wanting to enter into a relationship with God on man's terms. The heart of the natural man will always do this. Jesus would imply that this rich man will never come to God on God's terms because the things of this world are much too enticing. It would seem an impossibility. In fact, it would be easier for a camel to "go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Now your question at this point might be the same question the disciples asked Jesus.

MAT 19:25 "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" They concluded that if this is the heart of the natural man who is rich then this is certainly the heart of all men.

And Christ agrees. But where you and I would throw our hands up into the air and despair of all hope and say, 'well there is no hope then.', God breaks through. Here's what Jesus said of this impossible situation.

Mat 19:26 "Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Even the hardness of man's heart against God can be overcome, but as only God could overcome it. Just ask an embittered Pharisee who hated the things of Jesus Christ, who was willing to put to death those who sought Christ. This man's heart was hell-bent on destroying the church of Jesus Christ. His name was Saul.

For all intents and purposes it would have been impossible for Saul to have repented and turned to the very One he was persecuting. And yet as impossible as it was for Saul to repent, with God it was very possible. And that angry, bitter young man was turned around by the grace of God and that Pharisee turned out to be one of the greatest servants for Jesus Christ in all of history.

This portion of Hebrews may appear to be a hopeless proposition, but only from man's perspective. God can still turn the heart. This is not to minimize the seriousness of such a turning away from Christ. And this is not to be a non-issue for true believers in Christ. This is a warning from God Himself to the church not to take our salvation for granted or to think that it makes no difference how we live and represent Christ in this world.

Andrew Murray correctly says, "Scripture speaks most solemn words of warning in regard to the possibility of receiving the grace of God in vain, of beginning well, and then falling away from grace." The parable of the seed on different types of soil shows this clearly.

But, for you and I who have embraced Christ by faith, and still mess up at times, it does not mean that we have lost that gift which was received in gratitude and thankfulness. Dr. Guthrie points this out when he says, "Some have been deeply troubled lest they have committed such a sin, but no one with a state of mind so hardened as to hold up the Son of God to contempt would ever be concerned about a question like that. The concern itself is evidence that the Holy Spirit is still active."

Praise God that your conscience still fears that you may have displeased your most Holy God during those times. It's when sin no longer is seen as sinful that we must worry. But if we are believers in Christ and truly desire to seek God, even in those times we've sinned against Him, we know without a shadow of a doubt that He will be there for us.

1JO 2:1 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

JOH 10:28-30 "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

JOH 6:38-40 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

ROM 8:37 "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

These are but a few of the many passages that deal with the believer's assurance and hope in Christ. But with so great a hope should come a great desire to serve and please and love the one who gave us life and this is why Paul says in ROM 6:12-13 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

The Spirit of God who has sealed us for the day of Redemption is the same Spirit who enables us to accomplish God's will to His glory and hold us to the end. Praise God!