

The author of Hebrews has just told his readers that they need to grow up and move beyond the basics. Then he encouraged them by saying they would do just that God willing. He followed that with one of the severest warnings in Scripture. *⁴ For 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, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and 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 6:4-6 The author is not pulling any punches. He has told them of all the blessings they have in Jesus and encouraged them to walk in those blessings of rest in God's accomplished work and access to God through prayer. He had just previously warned them that they are showing signs of backsliding. They were dull of hearing and not maturing in their faith. Now he is putting before them a real wake up call to have them examine their faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

This is a passage that has been frequently debated. Those who believe that salvation is a gift that one can reject after having received it have their best argument in this passage, but it isn't so clear a case as some would have us believe. I will attempt to lay out both sides of the issue from the wording and other passages. Those on the eternal security side, who believe "once saved always saved," which we will call the Calvinist position, really have a tough time with this passage.

The Arminian position is that a person can freely receive salvation and can later choose to reject the gift they have received through apostasy, turning away from godliness to sinfulness. Of course both camps have many nuances and a variety of differences within their groups. Both claim to have come to their conclusion through the Scriptures. I will not try to defend either interpretation because, in my opinion, their theology dictates their interpretation instead of the other way around. **Our interpretation of Scripture should always be based on the wording of Scripture and other related Scripture passages,** not the stance of the organization to which we may identify.

The verses we just read tell us these Hebrews were born-again believers. In chapter three verse one he called them holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). They could not be holy, or be the author's spiritual brothers, or share in the heavenly calling if they were not born-again. In our passage the author writes that it is impossible for those who were *enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,* to fall away and then be restored to salvation. Each of these descriptions can be applied to anyone who has been born-again.

He writes, "once been enlightened." The author uses the same word when reminding them in 10:32 that they endured persecution after they were enlightened. The fact that they were enlightened had the effect of enduring persecution. Paul prayed that the eyes of the hearts of the Ephesian believers would be enlightened to see the hope to

Commented [PW1]: 2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 10:32 (ESV)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

which we are called (Ephesians 1:18). Some would claim that this just means they had been taught the Scriptures, but without the insight of the Holy Spirit, there is no enlightenment. Before salvation, the Holy Spirit only enlightens us of our fallen condition and need of Jesus.

They tasted the heavenly gift, which is salvation. Jesus told the woman at the well that if she knew *the gift of God* and who was speaking to her, she would have asked Him for living water (John 4:10). Paul tells us *the gift of God* is eternal life (Ephesians 2:8). The heavenly gift these Hebrews experienced was eternal life.

The shared in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit indwells those who are born-again. And they tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. The Holy Spirit in them helped them see the Word and gave them gifts of the Spirit. These are only things that are available to those who are born-again.

The counter argument would be that to "taste" and "share" in something does not mean that you have received it. Calvinists would claim this just means they shared in the experience of the body of believers. The Greek is much clearer. The word for "taste" can be translated "to eat," which is "to take in or experience." To "share" is better translated "to be a partner." A careful look at those words along with 3:1 referring to them as holy brothers convinces me that these are born-again believers who are being addressed. That point must be made because Calvinists would claim that the author is not writing about someone who is born-again, but merely someone who came under conviction of the Holy Spirit. They need to use other passages to make their case. Calvinists, before you walk out, wait till the next conclusion and you'll see I'm an equal opportunity doctrine smasher.

So it is impossible for those who were enlightened, tasted both the heavenly gift and the goodness of the Word, partnered with the Holy Spirit and experienced His power, *⁶ and 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 6:6 They will not come to repentance again. We confess our sins and repent on a daily basis (1 John 1:9), but the initial repentance for our sinful nature is a one-time experience. Now the Arminian has trouble, for many of them would have us come to the altar and receive salvation again and again.

These verses are interpreted as telling us one of three things. Some would say the recipients of the letter hadn't yet come to salvation and were in danger of never being saved. We've seen the descriptions given don't match that interpretation. Some would suggest this is telling us we can't lose our salvation because you can't get resaved, but then why warn about it if it can't happen? Others say that if you "fall away" (from adherence to the realities and facts of the faith),¹ there is no hope for restoration. It would be like crucifying Jesus all over again. If His sacrifice for you was not enough for you, there is no second chance to repent again from the fallen nature to which you have returned and receive Christ a second time as Lord and Savior of your soul.

Commented [PW4]: Ephesians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Commented [PW5]: John 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Commented [PW6]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Commented [PW7]: Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words

⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. Hebrews 6:7-8 The author uses the analogy of a field that receives rain and produces a good crop as opposed to one that produces weeds. One is blessed. The other is burned. One has responded to all the cultivation and rain, as should be expected. The other is a major disappointment. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruit." (Matthew 7:20) Both fields represent people who have received the same input but produced different results. One is blessed, the other is worthless and near to being cursed. Its end is to be burned. The Hebrew believers had received the Word and been nurtured by their founders who were martyred. Would these believers end up producing weeds and near to being cursed?

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 7:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Imagine the shock in that church as the letter was read. There must have been some serious soul searching taking place about the choices before them (2 Corinthians 13:5). It challenges us to take a look at the fruit in our lives. What is our field producing? Thankfully, the next verse gave them and us hope.

Commented [PW9]: 2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. Hebrews 6:9 Either side of the discussion can claim this verse. It could be read as saying that they are saved, so the author expects good fruit. In other words, it is impossible for them to take the direction they were considering, because saved people bear good fruit. The other side would say, "But the author says "in your case" which means there are others who will not bear good fruit in spite of having a born-again experience.

The author believed they would not fall away because he saw good fruit in their field.

¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. Hebrews 6:10 This church had and still were expressing a love for the body of Christ by serving the saints. God would not forget that. It would be unjust of Him do so, and He can't be unjust. If you want to show love for Jesus and lay up your treasures in heaven, serve the saints. They are Jesus' body in the earth today. To wash their feet is to wash His (Matthew 25:40).

Commented [PW10]: Matthew 25:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Hebrews 10:33-34 give us some possible insight into what the author was referring to.

These believers partnered with other believers who were exposed to reproach and affliction. They also had compassion on those in prison, which probably means they provided food and fellowship at the risk of being imprisoned themselves. They were still acting in this courageous, loving way. That is what assured the author that they were not going to go down that road of compromise.

Commented [PW11]: Hebrews 10:33-34 (ESV)

³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, Hebrews 6:11 "We" in this verse may refer to the apostles or the author and the church from which it was written. Their desire is the same desire we should have for other believers. Show the same earnestness in serving others, in bearing good fruit, of being that field that produces a harvest; then you can

have that assurance of hope until the end. Keep serving. Keep loving. Keep laying up your treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). That is something only the redeemed will continue to do. Keep serving the saints.

There are a many retired Christians in our town. I have heard some say they served their time and are now done. It is contrary to this verse. We never retire from service to the Lord. We'll be serving Him in heaven (Revelation 22:3 KJV)! It may be that they have confused the idea of serving an organization with serving the Lord. Serving organizations can become tiring, but serving the Lord should never get old. It comes with the joy of the Lord, as well as that assurance the author mentioned.

¹² *so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* Hebrews 6:12 The author said they were sluggish listeners (Hebrews 5:11). But now he is saying they should keep up their earnest work in serving the saints so they don't grow sluggish in service. Instead they should imitate those who have gone before, who through faith and patience inherited the promises. They stayed strong to the end, obedient to the Holy Spirit. Chapter eleven is all about these saints who were strong to the end. It doesn't matter how young or old we are; God has work for us to do. He wants us to be investing in our eternal future.

While our age makes a big issue of whether or not one can lose his or her salvation, the author's point is that they not turn back like their ancestors did at the border of the Promised Land. His emphasis is that they better keep pressing forward in service. They couldn't give up their salvation for a while to slip into the Jewish community and then get saved all over again when the threat of persecution passed. The author didn't know anything about our present day debate. His concern was that these believers not walk away from the faith because of fear. Simply put, he was warning them it would be an irreversible choice.

The Calvinist thinks the Arminian can just plan on sinning and get saved again immediately after. The Calvinist rightly points to the Scriptures that tell us the Jesus will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). No man can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:27-28). And as I have heard so many times, "and that includes yourself, for you are a man." Does the Scripture not say that He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6)? Can we separate ourselves from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39)? How could it be eternal salvation, if we only have it for a while?" they ask. How can one be unborn-again? Did not Jesus say He keeps all the Father gives Him (John 17:12)? Is He not our Good Shepherd? Are we not new creations when we are saved (2 Corinthians 5:17)? If to sin is to lose your salvation, there is no hope for anyone to be eternally saved! So a Calvinist would say that those who don't endure were never truly born-again.

The Arminian would say that the Calvinist thinks they can live any way they want because they can't lose their salvation. They would say the Calvinist is ignoring all the "ifs" in Scripture, like the one in our passage today that says if you fall away its impossible to be restored (Hebrews 3:6; Revelation 2:10). How could the author even

Commented [PW12]: Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Commented [PW13]: Revelation 22:3 (KJV)

³ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

Commented [PW14]: Hebrews 5:11 (ESV)

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Commented [PW15]: Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Commented [PW16]: John 10:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Commented [PW17]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW18]: Romans 8:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [PW19]: John 17:12 (ESV)

¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Commented [PW20]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [PW21]: Hebrews 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Commented [PW22]: Revelation 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

say, "if they fall away" if that is not a possibility? Can't you return a gift you receive. If I say I don't want the gift and give it back, is it still mine or have I forfeited a right to it? Do we not have freewill to accept and even after accepting then reject the gift of salvation? Yes, Jesus keeps us, but He did say that He lost Judas (John 17:12). If Judas chose to reject the gift, can't others do so as well? "If we endure to the end we will be saved," Jesus said (Matthew 24:13). So what of those who don't endure? The Arminian would say that they lost their salvation.

I hope I'm not confusing you. Both sides of this issue will be upset with me because I didn't stress their point of view, which of course is the only right one. I was raised a Calvinist and studied with Arminians. I see what each is saying. I like what someone has said, "If you are worried that you aren't strong enough to endure, and fearful that Satan will lure you into a trap from which you won't escape, then be a Calvinist and know you are safe with your shepherd Jesus who is able to keep you. On the other hand, if you think you are saved and now can live like you want and not worry about judgment, then you should be an Arminian and be concerned that to reject the grace of God may result in rejecting the salvation you have been so graciously given."

This gives us the best of both perspectives, fear of the Lord to keep us from sin (Proverbs 14:27) and assurance of salvation to comfort our hearts. Don't you think Jesus meant to comfort the weak when He encouraged us that He would be with us to the end of the age and assured us that no one can pluck us from His hand (Matthew 28:20; John 10:28)? And don't you think He meant for us to have the fear of the Lord regarding the consequences of sin when He told us it was better to pluck out our eye or cut of our arm if they cause us to sin, lest we end up in hell (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus emphasized both doctrines, and we should too. God is more than able to keep us safe, but we'd better not test God by intentionally entering into sin.

When we get to heaven, God can explain it to us. Perhaps it is only then that we will fully be able to understand. Until then, appreciate the Scriptures each side uses to make their points. **Let us live with the assurance of the grace of God to help us in our time of need. But let us also know that compromise is dangerous.** Let's not argue over which point of view is the right one, but recognize the helpful points of each. Either way you look at it, we are to persevere in our faith (Hebrews 3:6). We are to care for our fellow believers and show our love in action. We are to go on growing in sanctification and cooperate with the Holy Spirit. If that is your focus, you'll have the assurance of salvation and the fear of the Lord that keeps us from sin. Let our emphasis be there.

Questions: 1 What are the two camps and their beliefs?
 2 Are the recipients of the letter born-again?
 3 How does the author describe their salvation experience?
 4 Why does the Armenian have trouble with 6:6?

5 How does the physical analogy apply?
 6 What does the author expect from them? Why?
 7 Make the Calvinist case.
 8 Make the Arminian case.
 9 What is the author's point?
 10 What was one solution?

Commented [PW23]: John 17:12 (ESV)

¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Commented [PW24]: Matthew 24:13 (ESV)

¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Commented [PW25]: Proverbs 14:27 (ESV)

²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Commented [PW26]: Matthew 28:20 (ESV)

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Commented [PW27]: John 10:28 (ESV)

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Commented [PW28]: Matthew 5:29-30 (ESV)

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Commented [PW29]: Hebrews 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.