

## No Second Salvation

4 For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

7 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; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned. (Heb. 6:4-8)

Some companies advertise their goods with the phrase, “Try before you buy!” Car companies let you take a test drive, mattress companies let you sleep on their mattresses for 100 days, food stores let you taste samples, some clothing companies will let you wear clothes for a week or two before buying. You don't have to commit until you're satisfied you will like it. *Try before you buy* works for some things, but it definitely wouldn't work for others. You could never try before you buy with toothbrushes, or soap, or petrol.

For that matter, there are many areas of life where you can't try before you buy. You can't try before you buy when it comes to parenting. You can't have a child, try it out, and then return the lad or lass if you're not happy. You can't try before you buy when it comes to marriage. But in fact, that's exactly what thousands of people do when they choose to simply live together before marriage. They even justify that with the words, “We need to know if we're compatible!” So they treat marriage as a “try before you buy” deal – give it a try, and if it doesn't work out, at least you didn't buy into it and are now stuck with something you don't want. They don't realise a very deep principle of creation: when it comes to covenants, there is no try before you buy. You either enter in, and join, or you don't. Those who try before they buy often find very bitter consequences lingering into their marriage years later.

The covenant of marriage is a symbol for another covenant union: our relationship with God through His Son. And like marriage, when it comes to knowing and loving God in a covenant relationship, there is no try before you buy. You enter in, or you don't. But you cannot deceive yourself that you can be half in and half out.

This passage is a warning that a relationship with God cannot be treated that way. Remember the first readers of the book of Hebrews. There were people reading and hearing this book who thought that Christianity was something you could try before you buy, something you could dabble in, and then step out of for a while, and step back into. Perhaps some thought of faith in Christ like a kind of membership in a club: you can join, and then when it isn't working out, let your membership lapse, but then re-join whenever you want. This passage is there to say to them, and to us: you cannot do that with the things of God. It is a warning to those people who think they are Christians, and a warning to those people who are still dabbling with being an almost-Christian. In one sentence this passage simply means: when it comes to Messiah, there is no turning back, because there is no second chance.

This passage is one of the most disputed passages in all the New Testament. It may even be the most disputed. One of the reasons for that dispute is because of the frightening warning that this passage contains. Indeed, warnings are meant to induce fear.

This is the third warning passage of the book, and as you know, each of the warnings becomes more and more severe, as the intensity of rejection grows more severe. In chapter 2, we are warned against drifting from the Word, in chapter 3 and 4 it is a warning against doubting the Word. Here it is a warning against dullness towards the Word. We'll see in chapter 10 and 12, there'll be warnings against despising the Word, and ultimately departing from the Word.

But at the heart of this warning is a simple idea: no one can be saved twice, so we must either buy

and go forward, or reject. There is no try before you buy, no wavering between faith and unbelief.

This passage is a warning to go forward and not backwards because of the impossibility of a second chance at salvation. So we'll see three parts of that impossibility: the impossibility stated, the impossibility explained, and then the impossibility imagined.

## **I. The Impossibility Stated: No Second Salvation**

To see this impossibility, you have to start in verse 4, stop just after the words *for those*, and pick it up again in verse 6, after the comma. 4 For *it is* impossible for those, to renew them again to repentance.

Here it is plainly: it is impossible to renew someone to repentance. This is the main idea of the passage: *to state the impossibility*. The main idea of the passage, grammatically speaking, is the words, "It is impossible to renew them again to repentance". The main point of verses 4-6 is not whether people can lose their salvation, whether apostates were once true believers. The main point is simply this: it is impossible to be renewed to repentance should you fall. You cannot be saved twice. No second salvation.

He uses this word *impossible* four times in this epistle. Once here, three other times used to describe something that did not and cannot happen – God to lie 6:9; blood of animals to atone (10:4), please God without faith (11:6). This doesn't merely mean something unlikely, or like some have tried to wiggle out of, "impossible for me, but possible for God." No, he clearly means this situation is impossible.

What is impossible? To renew again, to make something afresh. The Greek word itself has the prefix 'ana', meaning 'again' (as in anabaptist), but then he adds the word again, just to make sure we know, he is not talking about regular repentance. This is someone wanting to come back to salvation, someone who has had a first salvation, and now needs a second one.

Notice what that main idea is supporting or explaining: *to encourage maturity*. Verse 4 begins with the word "for" which means it is actually an explanation or an application of what went before.

What just came before?

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. (Heb. 6:1-3)

What just came before was the exhortation to go on to maturity, and not to regress to first principles. The passage has been about immaturity and dullness. In support of the idea of going forward, and not regressing, he gives this warning about the impossibility of second salvation. He is not talking about how we must never sin again. He is not talking about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. He is talking about why going on to maturity is essential.

As Hebrews keeps telling us, in Christianity to not go forward is to go backward. To not hold fast is to cast away. To not draw near is to draw back. And he is saying, you must go on to maturity, because if you fell back, there is no second salvation.

There is no way for a once saved, then lost person to be saved a second time. He then tells us why.

## **II. The Impossibility Explained: No Second Crucifixion**

“ since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.”

Why is there no second salvation? For someone to be saved again, it would not simply be a case of going to Christ for more forgiveness. No, that is the experience of a believer who has sinned, and can return to the Lord again and again, for the same once-for-all substitution to be applied to his sins.

Here, the person is in a situation where first salvation appears to be forfeited, so now the person must come to the cross for salvation again. But Jesus substitutes for us once, one at a time. For a second salvation, there would need to be a second crucifixion. Jesus would need to be crucified again for those people. He would need to again be put to the open shame of the Cross, humiliated and tortured all over again. The word open shame is similar to the word used for what Joseph did not want Mary to go through, open disgrace. And since that is not going to happen, God is not sending His Son for a second atonement, it means it is impossible for these people to have a second chance.

So that leads us to the main question – whom does this apply to?

### **III. The Impossibility Imagined: Saved Apostates**

those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away

Here are four descriptions of these people, combined with the words fall away.

The real debate is whether or not the passage refers to genuinely saved people who lose their salvation, or whether it refers to unsaved people who come close, but end up denying Christ before they are saved. So let me give you the four main theories for explaining this passage.

The first is the classic Arminian view that this refers to saved people who apostatise, deny Christ, and therefore lose their salvation. Now a consistent Arminian admits that the passage teaches that such a person cannot re-gain his salvation, while inconsistent ones ignore that, and simply use this as a scare passage. The difficulty with that interpretation is how many clear and univocal passages make it clear that nothing can destroy a true work of God in a believer. Passages like Romans 8, and Philippians 1:6, and Ephesians are not unclear passages. And like we saw a few weeks ago, we must use clear univocal passages to help us with less clear equivocal passages.

The second is the more Calvinist idea that this refers to people who taste the things of God, but never become one of the people of God, and eventually they deny their original profession. They are apostates, like Judas, like Simon Magus. The weakness of this theory is that it really does seem like the writer is speaking of truly saved people.

The third is the idea that what is lost here is not salvation, but service, that someone can backslide and be rendered useless and fruitless, and people are being exhorted that since they cannot begin again, they must go forward. I think the passage is clearly dealing with eternal life, and not usefulness. And I don't think this theory adequately explains the severity of the warning.

The fourth is the idea that the writer is painting a hypothetical scenario for the sake of argument to teach his main application. But as critics argue, why warn people with hypotheticals?

Now I confess I don't fall into any of those exactly. Indeed, as I read commentator after commentator, I kept getting the feeling that they were trying to force square pegs into round holes, twisting and turning the evidence to fit into their existing theologies. I wouldn't dare to claim I have

more insight than they, and I was helped by them all. But I say that to point out it is very tempting for Arminians to use this passage to say more than it does, and it is very tempting for Calvinists to make this say less than it does.

So who are the people referenced here? Notice four descriptions of them in verses 4 to 6.

*First, they were once enlightened.* This is the word used in Hebrews 10:32 32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, (Heb. 10:32). Paul uses it in Ephesians 1:18 18 the eyes of your understanding<sup>1</sup> being enlightened; (Eph. 1:18). It refers to the opening of spiritual understanding, the darkness of sin chased out by divine light.

*Second, he says that these had tasted of the heavenly gift.* This word for gift is used 4 times in the book of Acts, each time it refers to the Holy Spirit. Paul uses the same word in Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 9 and refers to salvation as a whole. Either way, these people had tasted, experienced the heavenly gift of salvation or the Spirit.

*Third, they had become partakers of the Holy Spirit.* This word partakers is used in this epistle to refer to believers.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, (Heb. 3:1)

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, (Heb. 3:14)

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (Heb. 12:8)

*Fourth, they had tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come.* They had experienced God's Word, and experienced the powers of the Heavenly kingdom coming.

Now it seems to me that you have to go out of your way to try to say that these descriptions do not refer to true believers. As Spurgeon said when teaching on this passage, “for a child reading this passage would say that the persons intended by it must be Christians. If the Holy Spirit intended to describe Christians, I do not see that He could have used more explicit terms than there are here!”

But now comes the difficulty. He says, if these people *fall away*, it's impossible for them to be saved a second time.

This word for *fall away* occurs only here in the New Testament, which adds to the interpretive challenge. It's a compound word meaning “to fall beside”. It does occur five times in the Greek version of the Old Testament, all in the book of Ezekiel. There it means unfaithfulness, trespass. Most likely, it means what we usually mean by apostasy: someone who renounces Christ, turns his back on the Lord and gives it up.

So the statement looks like this: if someone who was truly saved, who had been illuminated and tasted of the Holy Spirit and the Word and Heaven, and experienced the Holy Spirit, then denied and rejected Christ, it would be impossible for such a person to be saved again.

The writer is imagining saved apostates, a category that is an oxymoron. You see, I believe the writer is mixing two mutually exclusive categories for the sake of his argument. It's precisely because they are never mixed anywhere else in Scripture that causes all the confusion. But here he is mixing them to imagine a situation that would be impossible to solve.

In Scripture, an apostate is not saved. An apostate is an unbeliever who claims membership with the people of God, but either theologically or practically denies the Gospel.

He is an unbeliever, like Judas, like Simon Magus, like those described in Jude, who may join

themselves to the church, and make professions, but they never have come to saving faith. But some of them can be at some point. In fact, even a denier of Christ can be saved. Cultists have come to Christ, even after years of denying the Gospel. Peter himself denied Christ, but was not unsaved for doing so. According to Jude, such people are dangerous and contaminated, but they are not saved who have become unsaved. Some of them get to a place where it looks like they will never get saved, but that's still where they are: unsaved. Only God knows which of them have become like the man in Bunyan's iron cage: Esau who cannot repent, even if they see the need for it. They need to be saved. Apostates as usually described in Scripture would not re-crucify Jesus, because they've never been united with him once.

Conversely, in Scripture, saved people don't apostatise. You don't have to go very far in this very book to confirm that idea. Saved people are precisely those who don't apostatise but persevere: but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb. 3:6)

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, (Heb. 3:14)

Now it's important to note that passages like Hebrews 3 make it clear: you don't *become* a Christian by enduring to the end and not falling away. You are *already* a Christian if you endure to the end and don't fall away. That's the clear meaning of the parable of the soils. Perseverance is based on preservation: being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; (Phil. 1:6)

It's not that whoever makes it to the end is a Christian, because all the other Christians lost their salvation along the way. That would be what we call a tautology, like saying, a living person is one who hasn't died. It is that only Christians make it to the end, because they were the only Christians in the first place.

So apostates aren't saved. Saved people don't apostatise. So what is going on here? Here the writer wants to make his point: no second chances. No second salvation. So he mixes the two categories for the only time in Scripture.

I think the evidence is that it is impossible to have a saved apostate comes in two forms in this passage. First, he uses the word "those". While he gives this warning, he doesn't think any of his readers will fall into this situation. That's unlike any of the other warnings. Back in chapter 2, he said, "How shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" In chapter 3, he wrote, "12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of *you* an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; (Heb. 3:12)" Even in chapter 10, he is going to say, 26 For if *we* sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (Heb. 10:26)

25 See that *you* do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if *we* turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, (Heb. 12:25) But here, there is no reference to we, us, or you. It is entirely a group called "those".

Second, in verse 9 he tells his readers, but this is not you. Notice verse 9. 9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. (Heb. 6:9)

And in fact, he says, this is not for anyone who is saved, because he says, we are confident of better things that accompany salvation. He doesn't think any of his readers are saved apostates. Maybe some of them are saved. Maybe some are apostates. He doesn't include the brethren he is writing to, or to other true Christians.

He essentially asks, what would happen if we had a truly saved person, who then well and truly adopted the posture of an apostate and turned his back on Christ? Well, this has never happened,

because it's two mutually incompatible categories. It is impossible to have such a thing.

But were it possible to un-apply the blood of Christ to oneself, such a person wouldn't be saved anymore, but he would then find himself in the impossible place of needing salvation a second time and unable to get it. And what is the implication of that? You can't try before you buy.

You see, he is dealing with people who think that it is possible to go back and forth between religions. He has readers who are under the impression that you can embrace Christ, but then if the persecution or pressure gets too much, you can back away, and go back to Judaism, which to them, was really just an older edition of the same religion. So you can go forward, and then back, you can hold fast your confidence, and then cast away your confidence, you can draw near, and then draw back. You can be a member of Christ, let it lapse, renew your membership. He says, it doesn't work that way.

The fact that he is giving us an impossible end result, second salvation, should tell us that he is also speaking of an impossible cause: a truly saved person apostatising. But why would he use an impossible situation to warn us? Scripture often suggests the impossible to make a point in the realm of the possible. Paul imagines having all knowledge, faith to move mountains, speaking every possible human and angelic language, but all without love, and asks what would it profit? He wants to make a point about love. Jesus tells the Jews in Capernaum that had He appeared in Tyre or Sodom, they would have repented – even though it's impossible to do that now. He wants to make a point about culpability.

James points out that the man who wants to keep the Law must keep the whole Law and not offend in one point, or else he's guilty of all of it. He wants to make a point about self-righteousness.

We all use imagined scenarios to teach real lessons. Parents say to their children, “What if Mommy and Daddy were taken away – would you then be thankful for a bowl of food? Do you want to end up sleeping on the street? What happens to people who don't do their homework and don't study?”

But though he is dealing with an impossible situation and an impossible outcome, he is doing it because of the very real possibility that some of his readers may apostatise. And it is a very real possibility that someone here today may apostatise.

It is possible that someone here, with a rock solid sense of being a true believer, could turn around one day and abandon the faith. And so it will turn out that you were a person who had been trying Christianity for years, without buying.

He then illustrates it with an image from nature.

7 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; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.

What is this image? It is an image that says the underlying nature of the soil will reveal the result on the surface. Ground which is good, like in the parable of the soil, uses rain and produces fruit, and God blesses it. But if the ground receives the same rain, and produces thorns and briars, it reflects the curse of Genesis 3:17-18. Like the worthless field of Isaiah 5, it is fit to be destroyed.

So the heart which believes and endures is good ground. It hears the Gospel, receives it, and with a good and noble heart brings forth fruit that remains.

But the unbelieving heart receives the same Gospel, and it might give initial signs of promising life, but it turns out to be the thorns and thistles of drifting, doubt, dullness, and eventually departing and despising. That unbelieving heart, after having had the merciful rain of the Gospel again and again,

is ultimately fit only for destruction, for God's fiery retribution.

If you have ever backslidden, you know how close you can come to despising and departing from the Word. The Bible becomes distasteful. God's people become the problem. Prayer becomes empty. You find more problems in the things of God than blessings. The world grows in attractiveness. There's a strong desire to cast off this whole thing. And maybe you're thinking that you could leave Christ for a while and come back. Maybe you could rest in the doctrine of eternal security, and experiment with the world, try it for a while, try unbelief before you buy.

Hebrews says, if you are a true Christian, then you will endure to the end. But don't experiment with unbelief, or you might just find that it fits. If you drift back into dullness and eventually despising and departing, it will reveal you were never truly saved. You can't actually be saved and deny him. If you could, that would be the end for you. So because there is no second salvation, you must go forward, forward to maturity. And the only way you will know that you have the real deal is that you do not remain in dullness, but you go on to maturity.

Hebrews says, if you are not a Christian, you may come close to Christ, and then turn away. You might deny what you think you once believed. The closer you get before you turn away, the harder it will be to come back. So don't dabble. Don't dabble with Christ, and pull back when it suits you. If you truly trust Christ, then it is all Christ, all the way, one way, forward only to maturity. No turning back. You can't hedge your bets. If you turn and deny Christ, you were never saved. The closer to Christ you came before you turned away, the harder your heart will be after turning away, and the less likely to come back. Beware, he says. This is no game. And if it were possible for you to be saved and deny Christ, you could not get saved again. Count the cost of following Christ.

Here is the striking implication: If you don't go on to faith in Christ and maturity, you risk apostasy. If you don't draw near and hold fast, you risk drawing back and casting away your confidence. There is no neutral gear in a Christian car. You are either driving forward, or in reverse. No stasis, no hovering, no anchored and still. You are rowing or you are drifting. When it comes to Christ, you cannot try before you buy.

23 Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. (Lk. 9:23-24)