



## Examining Hebrews 6

by Keith L. Andersen

### Hebrews 6

Context:

Because of the heavy reflection on Judaism (1:1, 1:5, 1:6, 1:7, 1:9, 1:11, 1:13, 2:6-8, 2:13, 2:13, 3:2-5, 3:7-11, 3:15-19, 4:3, 4:4, 4:7-10, 5:1-4, 5:5, 5:6, 5:10, it leaves little doubt that the letter is being directed towards Jewish Christian's (3:1, 3:12-14, 4:1, 4:3) but the principles apply to all believers.

The writer spends a great deal of effort connecting OT scripture to Jesus as the Christ. Additionally, the writer gives strong warnings about falling away (2:1, 2:3, 3:12, 3:14, 4:1, 4:11)

In chapter 5 the writer's intention comes into view;

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

It appears that the writer's audience has become disinterested in God. They are indeed in danger of falling away (unbelief). Nothing up to this point indicates that they "have" fallen away.

Now we come to chapter 6. The writer starts with "Therefore" which indicates he's heading for a conclusion to his thoughts on the matter or a solution to the state these believers find themselves in.

1 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.

The writer in 5:12-13 infers that they should be teachers of God's word by now rather than having to be taught all over "the first principles of the oracles of God" which the writer just exhaustively went through. Those "principles of the oracles of God" point to Christ as the Savior. Here now he references leaving the discussion of the "elementary principles" of Christ.

What does this mean? What is causing this "going backwards" in their understanding? Doubt? Influence by other Jews? Prosecution? Complacency? Whatever the reason, the writer is convinced that they should be believers who are firm in their faith in Christ!

The writer calls the audience to move on to "perfection". The Greek word is teleiōtēs "the state of more intelligent". In other words, get to where you should be. Where you were "meant" to be. Seek it. Pursue it. This fits perfectly with 5:12-13 where the writer accused them of not desiring to grow and mature spiritually. They were apparently content with their status.

The writer states that there is no need for them to have to re-lay the foundation of fundamental teachings of Christ. Here mentioned are the teachings of repentance, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptisms, the laying on of hands, eternal judgment and the resurrection of the dead. None of these were specifically targeted or

mentioned in the previous five chapters which undoubtedly the writer considered foundational principles. Therefore it is more likely the writer is referring to New Testament principles and foundational teachings. It must be said though that all of the aforementioned are also teachings and principles found in the Old Testament. But it really doesn't matter in what testament they are found. The writer considered them foundational principles that need not be taught again to them at this point in their spiritual lives.

### 3 And this we will do if God permits.

The writer rightly and humbly respects and defers to God's complete authority in the matter. Paul was talking about helping them to get to this state of spiritual maturity.

#### Recap:

Baptized believers have died to sin. We have been resurrected with Christ unto a new life. Into Christ's righteousness and perfection - not our own.

Jesus is our King, we are his subjects.

Paul expects the believer to grow, mature in knowledge and wisdom (application of knowledge) thus increasing their faith and glorifying God in the process. This centers around who we are daily serving - Jesus or Self (flesh, worldly desires etc.).

As we live our christian lives, **we will sin**. Scripture is clear on this point. But....it should be less and less and less as we grow in faith. The fruit of our life should reflect this. This side of the return of Christ, we will not come to a point where we do not sin. Our "sanctification" is completed when Jesus returns and renews all things.

Jesus says that we should forgive 7x70.

Are we living in and for Christ... or living in and for Self (flesh, the world)? (Romans 8:13)

**4 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 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.**

**7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.**

**8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.**

First, Paul is most certainly addressing believers here. Logically who else would he be chastising for being so spiritually immature in the faith? Therefore, the "they fall away" clearly indicates a full fledged believer. You can't "fall away" from something you weren't a part of. Also, you are renewed through repentance when saved, otherwise there is no renewal.

So what is the cause of this "impossibility" of being "brought back to repentance" that is akin to "crucifying Christ again"? Falling away. But what does Paul mean?

If Paul is warning them that it is possible that they (full fledged believers) could move themselves to a state where they fully reject belief in the sacrifice on the Cross and that state is such that they refuse God's call to

repentance and their state brings public shame and rejection of Jesus like that which had him nailed to the cross...then salvation is no longer available to that person(s).

To fall (sin) is different from falling away.

Here's the key. As Paul so often does, Paul is using hyperbole to drive home the point. He is playing the tape to its logical conclusion.

In this life, when a believer sins, they can repent and ask for forgiveness and God promises us it will be forgiven. Notice - this does not "crucify again" Jesus.

To Paul, the journey of a believer from belief to rejection of Jesus has its origin in a lukewarm faith. Jesus drives this home to the Church in Laodicea.

**Revelation 3:**

15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

What do you think Jesus wanted to convey when he said "I am about to spit you out of my mouth"?

In Revelation 3:19, Jesus tells them to repent. After death, the method and opportunity to take care of our sin has expired. As far as has been revealed to us, after death the ability to repent and or accept the gift of salvation is unavailable.

I believe what Paul was referring to when he spoke of "crucifying Christ again" is the person that he described above accepted the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as the redemption of his sin debt and therefore, rejecting Jesus, which is characterized by unbelief (falling away), is unforgivable. It is the unforgivable sin mentioned in Matthew 3:29. Biblically, unbelief has always equated to not being saved. Spiritual death.

I believe James makes things clear.

**James 1:14-15**

14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

We are dragged away when we live for Self - not living for Jesus. Living for Self breeds and gives birth to sin. When we continue living for Self and gladly participating in sin that serves us, that continued living for Self breeds and gives birth to DEATH. The DEATH is rejection of Jesus (unbelief). James plays the tape to the end to drive the point home.

In these two passages, James is clear that the phrase "when sin is full grown" refers to "living for Self" (flesh, world). If one continues this trajectory, its natural end is rejecting Jesus (unbelief). The Cross stands as proof of this.

Paul has warned them about falling away (rejecting Jesus, unbelief) and has bluntly pointed out that their condition is worse than being lukewarm. They were disinterested in the things of God. They were moving towards a state where rejecting Jesus (unbelief) becomes easy.

I believe that the New Testament clearly points to a condition (brought about by the believers own free will) that a believer can move to where they reject God and cultivate a life that has no desire to return to him. There are examples in this very letter (2:1, 3:12, 4:1, 4:11, 6:12). That condition is unbelief. What moves the believer to

that end? The warnings abound (2:1, 3:8-12, 3:16-19, 4:1-3, 4:11-12, 5:12-13). Matthew 7:21-23 also bears this out. See also Romans 11:19:-21, John 15:6, Matthew 23:12-13, 1 Timothy 6:20-21, Revelation 3:11,

That being said, the writer warns, "you don't want to be one of **those guys**" and here's why in verses 4-7. The writer appears to be playing out their aforementioned condition to it's logical conclusion. He plays the tape to the end, sorta speaking.

Note verses 7-8. It speaks of land that is farmed. If you are attentive to your duties and work hard preparing the land it produces good fruit. It is blessed by God. However, if the farmer is inattentive and lazy and makes little effort to prepare the land, it will yield a poor crop of thorns and thistles. In the end, it is useless and will be burned.

Paul's audience was the lazy farmer.

It is for these reasons I believe the "those" mentioned in v4 that cannot be brought back to "repentance" are those that have so severely fallen away and God knows the heart is irreparably hardened - repentance is "IMPOSSIBLE" for that person. I'll leave you with one more passage from 2 Peter 2:20 that I feel backs up my belief.

20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are **overcome**, they are worse off **at the end** than they were at the beginning.

Where Peter says "at the beginning" he is referring to their state as an unbeliever before turning themselves over to Christ. This makes it all the more ominous that Peter says that if they have rejected Jesus after having submitted to him..... they are worse off than an unbeliever! If in not believing in Jesus one goes to hell.....what could possibly be worse than that?

And while Jesus accepts our repentance and offers forgiveness while we are still alive, there exists a condition of man that renders him with zero ability to acknowledge Jesus in any way. This condition is described as **unbelief** brought about by the believer wilfully submitting to "falling away", being "unrepentant" or an unrepairable "hardened heart".

***The believer moves from a mind governed by the Spirit, to a mind governed by the flesh.***

#### **Romans 8:5:8**

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

And just so you don't think Paul is referencing "unbelievers" here, consider:

#### **Hebrews 10:26**

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,

27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Without question - Paul believes and teaches that believers can move from belief in Jesus to rejecting Jesus (unbelief). Saved, to rejecting salvation.

### Continuing on in Hebrews 6...

9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Paul now switches to encouraging terms.

10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Here in v9-10 the writer says "Yes it's a scary reality what we just said, but we're confident you can turn this around. Salvation is still available. God still loves you."

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, Again, Paul has the end in view here. Remaining faithful until Jesus returns.

12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Remain faithful until the end! Faith requires action.

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

God has promised you that if you remain faithful until the end you will receive salvation. The writer points to God's keeping his promise with Abraham as an assurance..

16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,

18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Here the writer is doubling down on the assurance we have in our loving, just, sovereign God fulfilling his promise of salvation to those who **remain** faithful.

### Objections / Alternative views:

The most common objection or alternative interpretation is that Paul here is talking about non-believers in v4-6.

The second is that if you fall away (into unbelief) then you were never "really" saved.

Let's address the first one - **non-believers**. The text itself refutes this claim. This view is tendered so as not to violate a doctrine of "once saved always saved". Some believe that once a person has committed themselves to Christ - they are eternally saved and can never walk away from Christ thus giving up salvation or as many refer to it as "losing" one's salvation.

**1st** - Paul is addressing believers. He has brought to their attention their lackadaisical lukewarm faith and their need to move to spiritual maturity. Why would he then give them a lesson and warning of what could happen to non-believers? Why bring up a condition that could never affect them? How would that help them in changing their current condition?

**2nd** - A non-believer is by definition unrepentant, has not acknowledged the Cross nor partaken in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ into newness of life. How then, can they recrucify Christ having not acknowledged it or partaken of it in the first place? Additionally, there is no bringing them to "repentance" AGAIN.

**3rd** - Paul references "fallen away". This implies that you were part of or partaking in something. For example, in Jesus's rebuke of the church in Ephesus it is clear that it is the BELIEVERS that have fallen away. Jesus threatens to remove them as members of the body .....

**Revelation 2:5 NIV —**

Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

In Revelation 1:20 we find Jesus threatening a severe judgement for having fallen away. Think about this. The "lampstand" was a symbol. It designated them as a church. A part of his church. Believers. Part of the body of all believers. What then is one to think happens if the "lampstand" were to be removed?

Without a doubt, they had time, and opportunity, to repent before this occurred. But, it remains that Jesus would do it in judgement if they didn't repent!

Without doing too much mental gymnastics, removing their "lampstand" removed their designation as Jesus's Church. They would then be indistinguishable from the world. His presence and influence would be removed from them.

A scary revelation to be sure! It tells us there is a condition of the heart that man can gravitate to (fall away)....that rejects Jesus completely! Because of this, Jesus removes his presence and influence.

Could this be the condition Paul and Peter speak of? I believe the answer is - yes.

The text strongly implies that a believer's heart can become hardened to a point where Jesus is totally rejected and that there is no thought or desire to repent. Thus Paul's hyperbolic "IMPOSSIBLE" stems from the condition of the individual.

Look at these warnings against a hardening of one's heart which is a product of falling away:

**Hebrews 3:13 NIV**

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

**Hebrews 4:7 NIV**

God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Now let's address the 2nd common objection or interpretation - **"they were never a believer in the first place"**.

I think this could be applied to some people, but it would be a mistake to apply it broadly to "every" instance of falling away. Additionally, Paul does not bring this up as a possibility or probable underlying motive.

I think the evidence put forth above goes against a blanket application of this to all falling away instances. Charles Templeton, written about in Lee Strobel's book, "The Case for Faith", certainly supports my position. Templeton was a devout Christian and pastor who served for over 50 years. In the end his inability to reconcile suffering with a loving God drove him to walk away from Christ and denounce him.

It is an improbable and problematic interpretation primarily posited to be supportive of the once saved always saved doctrine.