

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A SAVED PERSON EVER TO BE LOST?

Hebrews 6:4-6

“For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

THIS IS, by all odds, the most difficult passage in the Bible for an interpreter to handle regardless of his theological position. Dr. R. W. Dale, one of the great minds in the earlier field of Conservative scholarship, wrote: “I know how this passage has made the heart of many a good man tremble. It rises up in the New Testament with a gloomy grandeur, stern, portentous, awful, sublime as Mount Sinai when the Lord descended upon it in fire, and threatening storm-clouds were around Him, and thunderings and lightnings and unearthly voices told that He was there.” Every reverent person has come to this particular passage of Scripture with awe and wonder, and every sincere person has come to this passage with a sense of inadequacy—and certainly that is the way in which we now approach it.

In moving into the heart of a study of these verses we are immediately confronted with the amazing fact that commentators, generally, have avoided this chapter. Even such a man as Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the prince of

expositors, has completely bypassed it in his book, "God's Last Word to Man." However, when we do come upon the interpretations available and summarize each, we can well understand why men have chosen to remain clear of this scene of confusion.

SEVERAL INTERPRETATIONS

In the interest of an honesty of searching after the evident meaning of these verses, let us examine some of the interpretations. In the First Interpretation—to me the most unsatisfactory of all given—we find that the teaching suggested is that the Christians mentioned are Christians who are lost—that is, they were once saved and have lost their salvation. There are many who hold that position and, for the most part, they are real born-again Christians themselves—but, in holding this position, they are just as uncomfortable in this belief as I am when making a trip by plane. Now I am just as safe on that plane as anyone there, but I do not enjoy it as does the pilot. There are many folk today who are not sure about their salvation, therefore, they are not enjoying it. Nevertheless, they are saved if they have fixed their trust in Christ as their Saviour. Now these folk in this general category of interpretation, turn to this passage of Scripture more than to any other since they deny that we have a sure salvation which cannot be lost, and that the Believer is safe in Christ.

But let me state that we do have a sure salvation and Scripture is abundantly clear on that point. Paul says in Romans 8:1—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" and, my friend, he expands that great truth to the triumphant climax of such a bold statement as, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). The Throne of God is back of the weakest, humblest man who has come to trust Christ and today there is not a created intelligence in God's Universe that can bring a charge against one of these who is justified through faith in His blood.

Paul continues in verses 34-37: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Drink these verses into your very soul as he continues to build this mighty wall of assurance!—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

And if further assurance be needed, read verses 38 and 39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here we are given the guarantee that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing that is seen, nothing that is unseen; nothing that is natural, nothing that is supernatural can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE SUPREME ASSURANCE

The Lord Jesus Himself makes this tremendous statement of our absolute security: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-30). Thus it becomes a question, not of our ability to hold on to Him, but of His ability to have secure hold on us. My friend, He says with the infinite wisdom and full authority of the Godhead that He CAN hold us and that they who trust in Him shall NEVER perish.

*Is your hope fixed in a God who is all-powerful,
or in a God who may suffer defeat?*

The foregoing passages are only a few of the many clear cut statements of the keeping power of our Lord. And just here may we give you a rule that folk need to know: Never use a doubtful passage of Scripture to contradict a clear cut passage of Scripture. This passage which we have under discussion is doubtful only because of the interpretations which have shrouded it with confusion.

A SECOND METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

This brings us to another interpretation in which there is a great deal of merit. There are those who contend that a hypothetical case is presented to us here—"if" they shall fall away—and this "if" here is just an "if" of possibility. That is, the writer here does not say that it happens, but "if" it were possible. Those who thus contend say that it is the "biggest if" in the Bible, and to that we say a hearty Amen!

But the interesting thing is that there really is no "if" there in the Greek. It is a participle and can be translated "having fallen away." There is merit to the interpretation of those who hold that the ones to whom the writer refers are "professors, but are not genuine Believers." They "profess" to be Christians. Personally, we cannot accept this view though such scholars as Matthew Henry, Dr. Grant and Dr. Darby hold this thinking, as does Dr. C. I. Scofield in his excellent Reference Bible—a Bible which we feel every Christian should own—however, we do not feel the interpretation given in the notes to be the final interpretation of the passage.

A REASON TO DIFFER

If we differ from this reasoning, then we should state the grounds upon which we differ. Now, my beloved, there are passages that refer to "professors" who are not genuine Believers. We feel that Peter, for instance, is referring to this general type when in II Peter 2:22 he says: "It has happened unto them according to the true

proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire." Those are "professors," not genuine Believers, but here in Hebrews 6 we find genuine Believers, because they are identified in too many ways to indicate them as such. If you will move back into chapter 4 to get the entire passage, you will notice that it is said of these people that they are dull of hearing (Hebrews 5:11)—it does not say that they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Were they unsaved they would be dead in trespasses and sins and not as described in Hebrews 6.

Then it says in Chapter 5 verse 12 that when by reason of the time when they ought to be teachers of the Word that they also need milk. Now, beloved, an unsaved person does not need milk, what he needs is life. It is only after you are born that you need milk—and he tells them that they need milk.

In chapter 5, verse 13, they are called babes for he says that everyone that useth milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness and is a babe. And finally in chapter 6 we see in verse 1—"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ"—"Here, the urge is for Believers not to make a stopover at the commencement of the Christian experience, but to press on into a life of fruitfulness." "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). An unbeliever has certainly never experienced a beginning and is not on the foundation at all.

In verse 4 we read: "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit." This language clearly is used of those who are born again folk. There are those who take the position that the ones spoken of here are the Jewish people. For instance if they were enlightened and tasted and then fell away (then verse 6) it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, "seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh." Those who hold this reasoning say that he is talking to Jewish Christians and warning them about returning to the sacrificial system for in so doing they are returning

to that which would crucify the Lord Jesus Christ. We will follow that further a little later on.

There is still another group which would stress the word "impossible." It is impossible to renew them—the thought being that it is impossible for man, but it is not with God. You will remember that the Lord Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven . . . It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye—that, of course, is physically impossible. Now while it is physically impossible, and certainly humanly impossible for a man to be saved—it is not divinely impossible, and they put the emphasis there.

So then we have many interpretations of this passage, but there is one which has been a real blessing to my heart, and I trust that you will follow me patiently, thoughtfully and without bias as we look at it.

This is not original with me, and I would not have you gain that impression at all. In fact, this comes out of much continued study on the part of Dr. J. B. Rowell of the Central Baptist Church in Victoria, B.C., Canada. Since this has been such a blessing to me I want to pass it on to you. We have given Dr. Rowell's interpretation many times in our studies over the radio and there has always been an immediate and almost unanimous response of "it is the only interpretation that has ever satisfied my heart."

First of all he would have us note that the writer of the Hebrews is not discussing the question of SALVATION at all. The whole tenor of the text reveals that he is speaking of REWARDS that are the result of salvation. He is talking about the fruit of salvation and not about salvation. The key verse therefore is verse 9 of chapter 6 of Hebrews: "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak:" He is speaking of the fruit of the Christian's life, and the reward that comes to him as the result, and he discusses the possibility that because of their life there is a danger of them losing their reward—that is the whole tenor of this passage.

Now let us see if the passage will confirm that at all, for we know that Scripture deals with these two great

subjects of salvation and rewards. The Epistle to Titus in which Paul, writing to this young preacher, says to him very carefully in Titus 3:5, "Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us." From this, one might be inclined to think that Paul is not going to have much regard for good works, yet down in verse 8 of that same chapter you read the words: ". . . that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works. . . ." Good works do not enter into the matter of salvation, but when one becomes a Christian works assume supreme importance.

When a student in the University an argument was raging relative to which was the more important in a man's life—heredity or environment? To this my professor of psychology gave a rather stimulating answer—he said that before you are born, heredity is the more important. After you are born environment is the major thing. Let us carry that general line of thought over to our present study: before you are born again, works do not enter in—you cannot bring them to God, but after you have been saved works become all important in a Christian's life. Therefore, we see that Paul is emphasizing the fruit of salvation. Peter follows along in the same current of truth, "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (I Peter 2:9). Here he is talking about those who have been saved that they might "show forth" by their good works before the world that they are redeemed of God. Therefore the Christian has something to show forth and that is the thing that is to be judged and not his salvation.

THE HEART OF THE STUDY

"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is

impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."

"IF THEY FALL AWAY"

ONLY USE IN NT.

In reading these verses—4, 5, and 6—we are brought to the very center of the study. Let us look at the contrast of meaning. "For it is impossible if they shall fall away." Now the word "fall away" is an interesting word—it is parapipto and, as used in other places in Scripture, simply means to fall down, to stumble, it would be impossible to give it the meaning of "apostasy." You will find this word, parapipto, used in speaking of our Lord when He went into the Garden of Gethsemane, and going a little further "fell on His face" and prayed. The word means to stumble or fall. Peter fell but he was not lost. The Lord Jesus said, "I have prayed that your faith might not fail"—he suffered loss but was not lost. Then there is the example of John Mark—he had failed so miserably on the First Missionary Journey, and when his uncle Barnabas suggested that he wanted to take John Mark along again the Apostle Paul would have none of it, he as much as said never, this lad has failed and as far as I am concerned, I am through with him. Thank God, He was not through with him; God is not through with any man that stumbles and falls. Just so He was not through with John Mark, and before the Apostle Paul died he acknowledged that he had made a mistake in his judgment of John Mark for in the very last Epistle that he wrote he said ". . . take Mark and bring him with thee; for he is useful to me for ministering." So the word used here speaks only of the fact of falling down, just stumbling, and has nothing in the world to do with anyone losing their salvation.

RENEWING AGAIN UNTO REPENTANCE

Now if we will go back to the first verse of the 6th chapter we will see that Paul is talking to the folk here about repentance from dead works. And you will re-

member that John preached this to the people also—bring forth the fruit that is worthy of repentance. He is talking about that which is the evidence of repentance. Repentance today does not mean just the shedding of a few tears—it means turning "right-about-face" toward Jesus Christ which means a change in our way of living.

"CRUCIFIED THE SON OF GOD AFRESH"

Many of the Jewish Believers were returning to the Temple sacrifice at that time, and the writer to the Hebrews was warning them of the danger of that. Before Christ came, every sacrifice was a picture of and pointed to His coming, but after Christ came and died on the cross, that which God commanded in the Old Testament now becomes sin. Were you, today, to offer a bloody sacrifice you would be sacrificing afresh the Lord Jesus because you would be saying that when He died 1900 years ago it was of no avail—that you still need a sacrifice to take care of your sin—therefore you would not have faith in His atonement. Some one has said that today, we either crucify or crown the Lord Jesus by our lives. Today we either exhibit a life of faith or a life by which we crucify Him afresh.

THE CLOSING ARGUMENT

Now to fix this whole matter in our thinking let us read verse 7:

"For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God." (He is speaking about fruit there, is he not?) —then verse 8: "But if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned."

What a picture that presents! Here we see the ground which, in one particular case brings forth herbs, or a fruit, which pleases and receives the blessing of God. Then on another occasion it produces thorns or a fruit that displeases and is to be cursed of God.

Dr. Vincent, one of the greatest Greek scholars of all time says that we see here the contrast in two classes of Christians who, under equally favorable conditions, produce opposite results.

In the Upper Room, the Lord Jesus said to them, "I am the vine, ye are the branches" and it is the desire of my Father and me that ye bear much fruit. Then He added that if ye do not bring forth fruit the Father will step in and prune the branches and, in some cases, will actually cut the branch. If in this unfruitful condition you are cut off and taken to heaven, then you will not have any works to present to God at all. My friend, do you see what he is talking about here? Paul discussed it when he spoke of the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, etc. (Gal. 5:22). These things are the result of the Christian life, that which comes because we have loved and trusted Christ as Saviour.

SO HERE WE HAVE THE TWO ENDS IN VIEW

- 1—That of those who live for God
 - (a)—Whose lives CROWN Him
- 2—That of those who do not live for God.
 - (a)—Whose lives CRUCIFY Him.

We see then, that salvation is not being discussed in this passage. In verse 8 we note the word "rejected" which, in the Greek, is disapproved. Paul said that in his life he kept his body under control in order that he might not be disapproved—he never once thought that he might lose his salvation, but he did wonder about losing his reward. And when he got to the end of his life he said, "I have finished the course"—I have gone where God wanted me to go—I have done everything He wanted me to do—as best I could—I have been in the will of God. That is the thing the writer is discussing here, and how important it is for a Christian to stay in the will of God.

And finally we must look at those sublime words in John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal

life . . ." "Hath" everlasting life—that is the present tense—and he shall not come into judgment but is passed from death unto life. We have been made partakers of the divine nature, and have become members of the body of Christ. Someone said to a dear old Scotch lady, "You talk about your salvation as if it is sure; aren't you afraid that you will slip through the fingers of Jesus?" She said, "No, I am not, for I am one of His fingers."

How grateful we should be today amid the shifting scenes of life, the sinking sands, the instability and failure of friendships, that we have a Saviour who saves to the uttermost those who come to God through Him. We have in Him a fixed and sure salvation.

MICHAEL FARADAY STILL SPEAKS

In the year 1791 England gave to the world a great chemist and physicist and a stalwart of the faith—Michael Faraday. As he lay in his last moments a reporter was permitted to enter his room and stand by his bed. As he looked down at the great scholar he asked: "What are your speculations now?" Faraday became singularly alert for the moment and said: "Speculations? I have none. I thank God I am not resting my dying head upon guess work—I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to guard me against that day."