

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

INTRODUITION

Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult and controversial passages in our New Testament. If you search the web and check out the commentaries on this passage, written by respected evangelical pastors and theologians, you will find that (in the vernacular) “they are all over the map!” So for me to stand there today and tell you that I am going to tell you definitively what this passage teaches, would be both impertinent and prideful of me.

I can tell you definitively what this passage does NOT say. And I can tell you what, in my most studied and prayerful opinion, I believe that it does teach us. So, borrowing the words of the Hebrew author which proceeds this passage (6:3): “And this we will do, If God permits.”

2 KEY PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

There are two key principles of Biblical interpretation that have always helped me in understanding the Scripture. And I encourage you to both remember and utilize them in your own study.

1. INTERPRET CONSISTANT WITH THE CONTEXT

In other words, let the passages immediately before and after inform and direct the meaning of the passage in question.

2. INTERPRET THE OBSCURE BY THE OBVIOUS

In other words, let those principles that are clearly taught in other passages inform the interpretation of the more difficult passage.

EXAMINING THE CONTEXT

PRECEDING: The Hebrew author has been encouraging believers to mature in their faith and not be drifting (2:1) or doubting in unbelief (3:12). Most recently, in 6:1-3, he has been urging believers to build on the foundation of the Christian essentials they have and should have learned. As we have been teaching, one of the overall keys to understanding Hebrews is that it is about the perseverance of believers in their faith.

FOLLOWING: In 6:9 the author will say “But beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.”

So, the context would suggest that the passage would be speaking to believers regarding perseverance in their faith. And, we would expect that whatever is said is something different than how the author believes his believing readers will respond.

EXAMINING THE OBVIOUS

For many this passage questions the doctrine of eternal security, as they interpret it to be saying that believers can fall away to the point of it being impossible for them to renew their faith and return. And others see this passage teaching that there is a sin or sins committed in this life that cannot be forgiven. To this we must examine the obvious and clear teaching of Scripture on these issues to interpret the more obscure teaching of this passage.

ETERNAL SECURITY I can say definitively that eternal security is a clearly taught Biblical doctrine. That is, once you are truly saved, born again, transformed, given eternal life – however you want to say it – you are eternally secure in your salvation and you cannot and will not lose that salvation. Yes, there are some who disagree and teach otherwise, but the Biblical evidence is too strong and obvious in favor of eternal security and makes this doctrine obvious to me. I won’t take long to defend it, but I will give you three of the Scriptures that teach it clearly:

a. **John 5:24** [Jesus:] *Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

b. **John 10:27-28** [Jesus:] *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

c. **Romans 8:29-30** [Paul:] *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren. And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

Bottom line, I find the doctrine of eternal security – “once saved, always saved” – to be a clearly taught and obvious doctrinal, Scriptural truth. This will help inform today’s passage.

NO SIN BEYOND GOD’S FORGIVENESS I can also say definitively that there is no sin that one can commit in this life that cannot be forgiven by God if there is true repentance and receiving of God’s forgiveness and cleansing. I know that there is the so-called “unforgiveable sin” referenced in Mark and a similar Matthew passage. Here it is ...

Mark 3:28-29 *[Jesus:] Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin.*

There are two credible explanations as to what this “unforgivable sin” is, and both are true. One: the only sin that cannot be forgiven is a lifetime of rejecting the Holy Spirit’s wooing to come to Jesus as Savior and Lord. If at the end of life, one has not received salvation, that life-long line of rejection will not be forgiven. Two: The context in which Jesus is speaking is regarding Satan and his demons who are unclean spirits who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Jesus says there is no sin by the “sons of men: that cannot be forgiven, and then he speaks of a sin, presumably by the demons that will not be forgiven.

Having examined the obvious, we can determine that our Hebrews 6:4-8 passage in question does NOT speak against eternal security, nor against forgiveness of any sin man might commit.

WHAT THE PASSAGE DOES TEACH

Again – at this point I give my best-informed opinion.

1.IT SPEAKS OF TRUE BELIEVERS

- a. Context points toward this decision, as already stated
- b. A strongly worded 5-fold description points toward this decision
 - (1) those “enlightened” (i.e. given the Light of God to have their eyes opened)
 - (2) those who have “tasted of the Heavenly Gift” which is eternal life
 - (3) those who are “partakers of the Holy Spirit”
 - (4) those who “have tasted the good Word of God”
 - (5) those who have tasted “the powers of the age to come” – a transformed life

There are those who point to Biblical examples such as Judas, saying that he “tasted” and was a “partaker” without being saved in attempts to say that this passage shows how close one can be to be a Christian and not truly be saved. Though it is true that there are many “tares” or false Christians among the “wheat” of the Christian community, I still believe that the wording of this passage is too strongly describing a believer to be discounted, plus the context argues for it referring to a true believer.

2.IT SPEAKS OF A HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION

- a. The New American Standard Bible and some other translations begin the passage with “as in the case of ...” which has the author stating a case that might well be hypothetical
- b. Then in 6:9 he writes “But beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you” again leading me to think that he has stated a case that is not actual or even realistic
- c. One of the great theologian and preachers, Charles Spurgeon, has strongly made his case for this being a hypothetical passage – so at least, I am in good company!

For that matter, one of my favorite contemporary pastor/authors, Warren Wiersbe, also comes to a similar conclusion

By “hypothetical” I mean a scenario of Christians that is not possible – “impossible”

3.IT SPEAKS OF WHAT IS IMPOSSIBLE

- a. It is impossible for a true believer to lose his salvation
- b. It is therefore impossible to renew a former Christian to repentance
- c. It is Impossible for anyone to come back to repentance “as if nothing happened” (wording from the Message)
- d. It is impossible to have Jesus crucified and die a second time, which would be necessary for a former believer (if possible) to be re-saved
- e. All this impossible because it would bring open shame to Jesus

4.IT SPEAKS TO THE DANGER OF “FALLING AWAY” AND BEING “BURNED”

- a. The Greek word for “apostasy” (“apostasia”) is not used, but “parapipto” is used, which means “to fall by the wayside” or in our vernacular “slip up” (which we all do)
- b. This was written in a time of severe persecution when falling away from the faith was “sin #1” because it brought Jesus and His church to shame. The warning is that we believers don’t want to be guilty of this by “falling away.”
- c. The illustration given in 6:7-8 reiterates my assessment:
 - (1) v. 7 describes a beautiful field of prosperous vegetation that drinks in the rain that falls on it. This is like the true believer who has been enlightened and tasted of God’s goodness and has brought forth fruit pleasing to God
 - (2) v. 8 describes the unlikely case of this field, by neglect and misuse, which now yields thorns and thistles, like the believer who falls by the wayside. The result: the field, or testimony is ruined and burned. Note that the field is “close to being cursed” but not cursed – just like the prodigal believer.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude my comments with an exhortation, based on this passage. I certainly don’t want this message to be just a dissertation on what I believe the passage says and doesn’t say. So, I want us to focus, as we come to a close, on what our Lord God is saying to you and to me.

1. God want me to revel in the glories of His salvation

- a. Given the precious light of the Spirit to see those things spiritual
- b. Tasting of the joy of the very eternal life of God, begun here and now
- c. Having the Holy Spirit live within to inform and guide us in godliness
- d. Tasting of the riches of God’s Word of truth, taught by the indwelling Spirit

- e. Tasting of the powers of the age to come in experiencing our own miraculous transformation and then hearing of the similar experience of other believers

2. God wants me to be secure in my salvation

Remember that the author's focus is to spur us on to spiritual maturity, teaching that we will indeed persevere in our faith, by God's perseverance in us. He certainly does not want us to think that we can lose our salvation through any falling away.

3. God wants to warn me about the danger of falling away while urging me to maturity

If the goal is maturity and growing deeper in our faith, then the danger is not only

- a. DRIFTING (2:1) or
- b. DOUBTING (3:12) or being
- c. DULL OF HEARING (5:11) but in
- d. DENYING the power of Jesus' death to cover any sin and transform any wrong behavior.

We are to remember that any sin not only breaks the law of God, but breaks the heart of God. And any denial or ignoring of the power of the cross brings shame to Jesus.

How dare we break God's heart or bring open shame to our Lord Jesus. This is the warning that the author gives to us in this passage, spurring us rather on to maturity in our faith.

Let us finish with hearing the text from Hebrews that immediately follows what we have been studying today. This challenge to believers is as true and as encouraging to us as it was 2,000 years ago. This is God's heart for you, so listen and be challenged.

Hebrews 6:9-12 *But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*