

Text: Heb 6.4-6

Today we begin to look at the most difficult passage in Hebrews.

Read Heb 6.4-6

- Many have written page after page of commentary on these three verses.
- Christians have long divided over how to interpret these verses.
- One writer identifies five different interpretational positions on these verses.
- The controversy centers on what a Christian really is, what eternal life really is, and whether anyone can cease being a Christian for any reason.

Consequently, one must approach the text with caution and humility. Which one of us can think that we, alone, after hundreds of years of controversy, have a rock-solid interpretation that settles the matter once and for all?

The starting point for all of us is this proposition: The Bible is the word of God, and every word is true.

- We start here, but we also must be grounded here. Everything we believe about these words must always go back to the Bible as the authority.
- Interpretation is not the authority.
- What the Bible says is the authority.

In other words, I have to be willing to let the Bible shape my interpretation, even if the Bible contradicts something I believe.

We must be willing to argue with ourselves when we come to difficult passages like this.

Today I won't be answering questions about this text specifically. I plan on taking at least two more Sundays on the text, maybe three! We may collapse in exhaustion by the end of the month and be glad for a Christmas break in December.

Today we are going to be in a helicopter, hovering over the content of the passage, keeping it in mind, while we at the same time look all over the Bible to the topic:

The Permanence of Salvation

The reason for this is that this is the question people wrestle with as they try to understand the passage.

The passage could be taken to teach that salvation isn't necessarily permanent, and some *do* take that position.

Consequently, keeping our passage in mind, we will look all around the Scripture to see whether the Bible clearly answers the question one way or another. Is salvation permanent?

Remember, the Bible is our authority, not our opinions or our long-held beliefs.

In this message, I am going to work toward a proposition, not work away from it.

I. Christian unease about salvation

A. The incredible benefits of salvation from sin include

1. Regeneration (being 'born again')
2. Conversion (which includes repentance and faith – the internal heart change in response to the gospel)
3. Justification (God declares sinners righteous based on Christ's work for us)
4. Adoption (God includes sinners in the family of God because they are 'in Christ')
5. Sanctification (the ability to overcome sin through the life of faith, enabled by the Spirit, assisted by the Scriptures and the church, in which the sinner breaks with sin and imitates Jesus Christ)¹

You see by my qualifications of each term that we need more than a list of five words to describe each concept.

B. If, as some think, loss of salvation is possible, that means

1. Regeneration is lost — the sinner is now dead in his sins

¹ This list taken from Wayne Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6.4-6 and Other Warning Passages of Hebrews," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1995) my source is a pdf extract, so pagination not possible.

2. De-conversion occurred — the sinner has lost repentance and faith
3. Justification is lost — the sinner no longer has Christ's righteousness
4. Sanctification is lost — every effort to imitate Christ becomes fruitless²

There are more features of salvation that we could describe, but these serve to illustrate how profound a loss the loss of salvation would be.

C. The doctrine that salvation can be lost produces tremendous spiritual insecurity

1. God becomes a fearful judge instead of a loving Father
2. My continued salvation depends on my work instead of Christ's work
 - a. Can I lose my salvation by *any* slip into sin?
 - b. If I can "get away with" one sin, what if I commit more than one?
 - c. If it is only big sins that cause me to lose my salvation, does that mean I can "get away with" little sins?

One of the charges that are made against the doctrine of perseverance is that then "a Christian can sin all he wants."

I don't think the doctrine that you can lose your salvation escapes the same charge: "as long as I don't 'sin big,' I can sin all I want"

3. In any case, the possibility creates deep spiritual insecurity, with little to no assurance

For assurance, we need Bible assurance, not the opinions of men, no matter how well intentioned.

² This list also derived from Grudem Note: despite using Grudem's lists, I do not agree at all with Grudem's conclusions.

II. Biblical revelation about salvation

“But it must be said that those who take the view that 6:4-6 describes genuine Christians who lost their salvation have an obligation not only to give a reasonable explanation of 6:4–6, but also of those other passages which repeatedly teach that true Christians will certainly persevere (for example, John 6:38–40; 10:27–29; Rom 8:1, 30; Eph 1:13–14; 4:30; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:5; and passages on *eternal* life: John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28; 1 John 5:13).”³

A. The perseverance passages

1. Jesus won't lose anyone (Jn 6.38-40)
2. My sheep will never perish (Jn 10.27-29)
3. No condemnation for them in Christ (Rm 8.1)
4. The called are glorified (Rm 8.30)
5. Believers are sealed in Him (Eph 1.13-14)
6. Do not grieve the HS, sealed till day of redemption (Eph 4.30)
7. He who began the good work will perfect it (Phil 1.6)
8. Protected for a salvation to be revealed a the last time (1 Pt 1.3-5)

There are more passages on these lines

B. The eternal life passages

1. If you believe, you have eternal life (Jn 3.36)
2. If you hear and believe, you have eternal life (Jn 5.24)
3. The one who believes has eternal life (Jn 6.47)
4. I give eternal life to them, they will never perish (Jn 10.37-38)
5. These are written that you may know you have eternal life (1 Jn 5.13)

There are more passages like this also

³ Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6.4-6 and Other Warning Passages of Hebrews,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1995), 180.

III. Understanding Hebrews about salvation

We look again to our passage: given what the Bible says about preservation and eternal life, how must we view the passage?

A. Whatever the passage means, it cannot mean that a genuine believer can lose his salvation

B. Here are the things we must identify:

1. The subject of the sentence “for in the case of those who...”

a. Six characteristics

- 1) Have once been enlightened
- 2) Have tasted of the heavenly gift
- 3) Have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- 4) Have tasted the good word of God
- 5) [Have tasted] the powers of the life to come
- 6) And have fallen away

b. The first five characteristics have to do with a spiritual past

The question is, who is this person? Is he a Christian or not?

c. The last one has to do with a subsequent shift: a key condition we need to identify

2. The one fallen away: what does “fallen away” mean?

3. Also, what is this “repentance” that is impossible?

C. For today, we will say this (Proposition):

Proposition: When God does something, nothing men can do can change it, even if they falter in their faith and fail their Lord.

Conclusion:

Ecc1 3.14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

When someone comes to Christ for salvation, he changes his attitudes, he is converted.

- Repentance of sin and self
- Faith in Christ and God

The moment that soul cries out in faith to God, God does something:

- God regenerates the spirit, giving it eternal life
- God makes a declaration in the court of heaven: justified, on the blood of Christ
- God adopts the repentant soul into the family of God
- The Holy Spirit enters the life, empowering and enabling the first steps (and all the steps) of subsequent sanctification

Do you think you are bigger than God? That you can undo what God did?

There are consequences for falling away, but the witness of the Scriptures teach us that one thing it cannot be is the loss of salvation.