

MOVING TOWARD MATURITY

It Is Impossible!

TEXT: Heb.6:4-8

INTRODUCTION: Today in our study of Hebrews we come to one of its most difficult passages, and one of its most abused. I am asked more questions about this passage by students in senior high school and college than almost any other because these verses are the favorite proof text of those who do not believe the Biblical doctrine of the eternal security of the believer.

Today's sermon is not an "easy listening" sermon. It was not easy in preparation either. And while I have labored to remove as much technicality as possible and still teach you what this Scripture means, I could not remove it all. Calculus cannot be fully extracted from mathematics, and grammar cannot be dismissed if one is to master Literature.

So I ask you this morning that as I have studied hard to bring this message to you, and I will endeavor to labor intently to deliver it in such a way as to aid your understanding, I implore you to sit up and listen intently. Activate your mind and think carefully. Most of all, alert your spirit to be sensitive as the Holy Spirit, our mutual teacher, who reveals all truth, does His work in the both of us. With that attitude and preparation, let us read this challenging but rewarding text;

Hebrews 6:4-8 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 briers, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.

I have given the message the title taken directly from the text: It is impossible! As we examine the passage, you will see why.

I. **WHAT THIS PASSAGE DOES NOT SAY.**

A. **It does not say that born again believers can fall away from their salvation.**

- 1. The subject of the passage is born again believers.** The rebuke of the six preceding verses makes no sense if the author is not talking to saved people.

- a. Lost people cannot grow spiritually to where they are able to be teachers and grow to spiritual maturity.
 - b. The descriptions of 6:4-5 only fit people who have come to faith in Christ. 6:4-5 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,
 - 1) enlightened
 - 2) tasted the heavenly gift
 - 3) partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - 4) tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come
 - c. He is definitely talking to born again, saved individuals.
2. The word translated “fall away” does not mean to “abandon the faith.”
- a. It means to fall into sin or to commit sin.
 - b. The same root word is used in Mt. 6:14 and is translated “trespasses.”

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
 - c. The same word is also translated offenses, sins, faults.

The born again believers he is describing are not those who have abandoned the faith or who have renounced Christ. They are believers who have fallen into sin as has every believer at one time or another.

B. He is not addressing the issue of salvation but repentance.

“For it is impossible ... to renew them again to repentance...” 4:4,6 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, 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.

- 1. Repentance is not the same thing as salvation.
- 2. Repentance is necessary for salvation, but is not identical to it.
- 3. The Scripture teaches us to repent of our sins before we are saved.

Mk. 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."
- 4. The Scripture also teaches us to repent of sins committed after we are saved. Rev. 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.

C. If this passage said that saved people could lose their salvation, it would contradict the promises of Jesus.

1. Jn. 10:28-29 ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.
2. Romans 8:35, 38-39 ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
3. Philippians 1:6 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;
4. Heb. 13:5b "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

D. If this passage said that saved people could lose their salvation, it would also say that they could never be saved again!

II. WHAT THIS PASSAGE DOES SAY.

Let me give you what it says in a couple of sentences, and then we will break it down in parts and talk about it.

When a born again person falls into sin, it is impossible for them to renew their repentance while they are still practicing the sin. Be warned that unrepented sin may bring a severe chastening from the Lord.

A. When a born again person falls into sin, ...

1. This is who is being addressed.
2. These are believers who have fallen back into sin to the extent that they are regressing to spiritual infancy and are going to have to virtually start over in the spiritual growth.

B. It is impossible for them to renew their repentance ...

1. Here is what is impossible.
2. While it does not refer to salvation, it is important.
3. **It says that it is impossible for Christians who have fallen into sin to come back to genuine repentance.**
4. What? You mean that a born again Christian who sins cannot come to genuine repentance?

5. Well, under a certain condition, that is exactly what it means. **There is a certain condition under which a saved person cannot repent; it is impossible.**

6. **What is that condition?**

C. While they are still practicing the sin.

“...since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God...” Heb. 6:6b

1. Pardon the technicality, but, **The single Greek word translated “since they crucify” is a present participle, accusative, masculine, plural**, which means that the most precise, literal translation of the Greek is (and I have carefully checked this in some of the best of the Greek language reference books) **“while crucifying again for themselves the Son of God ...”**
2. **It means that it is impossible for a person to be genuinely repentant about lying and deceiving if he is still lying and deceiving, even if the subject matter and occasion of the deceit has changed.**
3. It is impossible to be truly repentant of stealing from Peter if you continue to steal from Paul.

I find that shepherding the flock of God is mostly a joy, but there are some sad times that come as part of the job. In years past I had to lead a church to withdraw fellowship from a very active member of the congregation because we discovered that he was perpetually lying and deceiving, he abandoned his wife and children, and he was a sexual predator, and he refused to repent of what he had done and was doing.

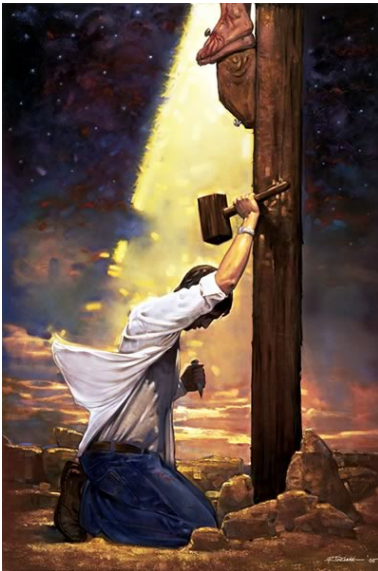
Years later, the man came back to me to request that the church restore him to fellowship. I asked if he had repented, and in tears he told me how sorry he was for his sin. I told him that if he truly repented that nothing would please me more than to be able to say to the church that we should restore him to fellowship. However, before I could recommend that to the church, I would have to know for sure that his life bore the fruits of genuine repentance. So we scheduled a time to talk. As we talked, and I asked him questions about both the past and the present, it became very clear that he was still lying and deceiving. He had done nothing to try to make amends for the harm done to his wife and children. I had no way of knowing whether he was still a predator or not, but I did not need to know. It was clear that he had not genuinely repented of his sin.

4. People have asked me, **“How do I know when I have really repented in the depths of my soul?”** That answer is, **“When you have completely forsaken the sin.”**
5. Many people mistake in themselves and others remorse for repentance.

REMORSE ≠ REPENTANCE

| Remorse | Repentance |
|--|---|
| Remorse weeps and mourns the consequences of sin. | Repentance forsakes the sin, turns from it, and utterly abandons it. |

6. Repentance is often accompanied by remorse, and it is a good combination.
7. But remorse also travels alone, leaving repentance in the dust. Remorse without repentance will fool many a person, but it will not fool God.
8. **The graphic depiction of a believer continuing in sin reveals to us how seriously God views sin in the life of the believer:**



It is described as a personal crucifying again the Son of God. While the sinner cries with his lips, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry," he raises his hands to drive another nail.

It compares our continuation in sin to one who delights in the humiliation brought to the Savior on Calvary.

D. Be warned that unrepented sin may bring a severe chastening from the Lord.

1. **The life of the believer that remains in sin is described as unfruitful, bearing only thorns and briers.**

"but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." Heb. 6:8

2. **Such a life is near to being cursed.**

It is not cursed because it is the life of a believer which due to God's sure promise cannot be cursed, but it is as close as a believer can come.

3. **And the burning that comes in the end is not the fire of eternal judgment but the flames of chastisement, even those chastening flames at the**

Judgment Seat of Christ which consume all the dross to leave the believer saved but only as by fire.

CONCLUSION: What should be the end result of understanding these profound words?

- 1. It should be to treat sin** in the life of any believer, our own or someone else's, **more seriously.**
- 2. We should view sin more as God views it.**
- 3. We should know that the only way to deal with sin is by repentance, not merely remorse** masquerading as repentance.
- 4. We should be clear that genuine repentance always totally forsakes the practice of the sin itself.**
- 5. Unrepented sin in the believer's life will bring the severe chastening of the Lord.**

Believer, is there unforsaken, unabandoned sin in your life? It is impossible for you to be genuinely repentant unless you leave the sin behind and turn from it back to the Savior. This morning, will you forsake it and return to the waiting forgiving arms of your Savior, or will you continue to produce the thorns and briers of an unfruitful spiritual life and await the prospect of the chastisement of God?