

**Text:** Hebrews 6:4-9

**Title:** The Impossible Problem of Apostasy

**Date/Location:** January 16, 2011 at FBC

## Introduction

Hebrews 6:4-6 is commonly known as the most difficult passage in the book of Hebrews, if not the entire New Testament. To study it will test our maturity in the Word of God.

### 1. The Main Idea and Difficulties in Understanding This Passage

- A. The main idea in 6:4-6 is this: **Regarding those who have had some kind of connection to Christianity and then fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance because they would be showing contempt for Christ.**
- B. This form of the statement highlights the questions we must answer before we can properly understand the texts.

### 2. Four Primary Ways the Passage Has Been Understood

The various interpretations of the passage can be cataloged according to WHO is addressed, WHAT they do, and the RESULT that happens to them. So:

| OPTION | WHO            | WHAT                  | RESULT               |
|--------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1      | True Believer  | Apostasy              | Loss of salvation    |
| 2      | True Believer  | Apostasy              | Loss of reward       |
| 3      | True Believer  | Hypothetical apostasy | Loss of salvation    |
| 4      | False Believer | Apostasy              | Eternal condemnation |

In short, I take it that the last interpretation is the most accurate, even though it too has some difficulties associated with it. The text describes ones who, as Compton writes, “had been exposed to the gospel, who had made a profession of faith, and who had been associated with the community of believers, but who were not actually saved...these, under pressure of persecution, reject the faith and become hardened by this act of apostasy so that there is no possibility of bringing them again to repentance. There is only the certainty of eternal condemnation and judgment” (DBSJ, Spring 1996, p. 144).

### 3. A Brief Reading of the False Believer Apostasy View

- A. By using the generic third person here instead of the first person “we” of verse 3, the author seems to distance the readers from the warning.
- B. The people described have what seems to be a genuine experience of salvation.
- C. But they also have fallen away. In the context of Hebrews, this is parallel to those who neglect salvation (2:3) or have an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God (3:12) or who miss the rest of God because of unbelief (4:1) or who fall according to the same example of disobedience (4:11).
- D. What and Why is this Impossible Thing?

*Impossible* is used in three other places in Hebrews, all referring to something that cannot possibly happen (6:18, 10:4, 11:6).

- E. The warning here is intended to prevent the fatal result that is mentioned.

#### 4. The Illustration of Blessing and Cursing, 6:7-8

- A. Then 6:7-8 are an illustration of the preceding teaching. The rain is pictured as being provided in a non-discriminate way to the earth. Some of it bears greenery that is useful for the people cultivating it. The earth receives or “shares in” a blessing from God.
- B. On the other hand, if the earth receives rain and some part thereof bears thorns, this means that the earth has, in a sense, mis-used the rain that came upon it to produce something useless. The rain was intended to produce a crop of blessing, but instead, the earth used it to produce something bad.
- C. The parallel and meaning of the illustration is this:
  - 1. The blessings of salvation are available to all just like the rain.
  - 2. Those gifts can produce the fruit of salvation and new life in a person, or they can be rejected.
  - 3. The emphasis is on the fruit produced at the end of the growth cycle, not the early growth that may seem promising.
- D. Based on the illustration, the contrast between blessing and burning does not at all sound like God is responding in two different ways to *believers*.

#### 5. Spiritual Condition of the Readers, 6:9

The author turns his attention back directly to the readers (notice the switch from the generic third person back to the first person).

He concedes that he has been speaking in hard terms.

He also says that he is convinced of better things, that is, things that accompany salvation.

The implication of this is that what he was just writing about was concerned with someone who is not genuinely saved. This helps us interpret 6:4-6. The readers, he believes, are saved. The warning is effective because it shakes even believers out of their lethargy and exhorts them to examine themselves to make sure they are on the right path. The author wishes them to show diligence and not become lazy in their spiritual life.

#### Conclusion: Two Paths

Chapter 6 has presented two paths that we can choose. One is the path of growing maturity where we do not go backwards and have to reinvent the spiritual wheel all the time by going back to basic Christian teaching.

The other path is the one that goes down to apostasy.

The middle ground is not mentioned, but it is not a safe place to be.

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