

“For ever and ever” Hebrews 6:4-8

The woman’s voice sounded frantic. Pastor Joel, I was just reading my Bible and I came to the passage in Hebrews that says it is possible to lose one’s salvation. What about my husband? Ah, there was the real issue. Her husband had made some type of decision early in their marriage 26 years before but had never had any interest in spiritual things and only attended church Christmas Eve, Easter and for weddings and funerals. Well, let’s take a look at the passage that raised the issue for this woman. Hebrews 6:4-8 *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.”*

Several questions come to mind. About whom is the author speaking? Is he speaking figuratively or does he have someone specifically in mind? Can a true believer lose salvation? If he or she can lose their salvation is it possible to regain salvation? Well, these are just a few of the questions this passage raises. I would like to tell you of the various interpretations of the passage and then tell you where I come down on it. Part of the interpretation may depend on whom you believe the passage is speaking about. So let’s pursue that path.

Some say that the passage is **not speaking of a real believer** only one who has gone almost all the way but not crossed over the line. A Scriptural illustration of this would be the story of Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-24. He is said to have believed, to have been baptized, and to have continued with Peter yet after all of this Peter declares, “Your heart is not right before God”. But I do not

believe that this adequately address the terms the author uses. They have been enlightened which refers to the mind change that comes through the blind eye opening of the Holy Spirit. They have tasted the heavenly gift, that gift is always speaking of salvation. All of the descriptives that the author uses speak only to one truly converted by God. And anyways how can a non-believer disgrace Jesus and put Him to open shame.

Here is another view. Some say that this passage does refer to a true **Christian who falls into apostasy** and turns his or her back on Christ. This was an issue the church has had to face through out its history. What about those who seemingly turn from Christ to preserve their own lives during persecution? Perhaps they publicly professed submission to the emperor. The initial problem is that the word apostasy is not used. The actual word means to fall along side and has a different image than a positive public expression of rejecting the faith. A related difficulty with this interpretation is that those who take this line of thinking, that one actually loses their salvation also tend to be those who say that it can be regained again. If you take the apostasy line then how do you deal with the “It is impossible to be brought back to repentance?”

A third interpretation is that this **was a case specific text, applicable** only to an issue in the lives of these Hebrews Christians. Those who take this track would point out that the previous paragraph relates to habits that were part and parcel of Jewish faith practices and that the fear was Christians who had lost all faith vibrancy and had fallen back into the rituals of Judaism as the basis for their confidence in eternity. But if that is the case then we would probably have to throw out all of this letter as being only applicable to that time in history and this is a conclusion that I can not personally accept because I believe that not only the writing but the determination of what would be in the Bible was directed by the Holy Spirit and therefore fits under the words in Timothy that all Scripture is profitable.

Another possibility is that the author is making a point about **sin in the life of a true believer**. If a person is caught up in habitual sin or a life style of rebellion to God's desires, as long as their heart is closed to God then they cannot be brought to repentance. If and when their hearts are softened by the Holy Spirit then they can be brought back into fellowship. That seems so obvious to make this meaning likely.

I believe that the author is addressing a problem that the **church has always struggled** with. Now, there is an important principle of Scriptural interpretation that goes like this, you always interpret the **obscure by the obvious** and I believe that Scripture clearly teaches the perseverance of the saints. Notice I did not say eternal security. Let me define the differences in meaning.

Eternal Security or once saved always-saved means that no matter what I do I cannot lose my salvation. If I raised my hand 70 years ago at a Billy Graham crusade I am in. There needs to be no further evidence of salvation in my life. Salvation is only a decision that is made at sometime. I reject that on the overwhelmingly testimony of Scripture.

Perseverance of the saints means that salvation begins and ends with God. The faith to receive the gift of salvation is given to us by God and those that He has saved he will also keep that they will persevere in their faith until they go to be with God or Christ comes again. Let me illustrate with some of the most obvious passages of Scripture.

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 10:25-29 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

Romans 8:28-39 which reminds us that no power can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1: 4-6 *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

So then, how do we take this verse remembering again that Scripture is to encourage not terrorize. I believe that he was probably describing a hypothetical case to prove the point that a believer cannot lose his salvation. A point clearly made in verses 13-20 of this same chapter. His words in verse 9 seem to support this. ***“Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case.”*** His argument would run something like this. Picking up on the theme of maturity the authors says, “Let’s suppose that you do not go onto maturity. Does this mean that you will go back to condemnation, that you will lose your salvation? Impossible! If you could lose your salvation, it would be impossible to get it back again; and this would disgrace Jesus Christ saying that his once for all death on the cross couldn’t change you and set you on a life long process of being conformed to the image of Jesus. Rather Jesus would then need to be crucified again for you, and this could never happen.

Now, let's keep reading. In the next verses he uses the illustration from farming. God's work in the field of our lives provided good fruit in the past and will continue to provide good fruit in the future as we respond to Christ's invitation to become more like Him. And then the author finishes this chapter with a strong declaration of the security of our salvation because of what God has done and what He has promised.