

THE PERPLEXING PROBLEM OF HEBREWS SIX

by

John E. Ward

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Author: John E. Ward
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Advisers: John A. Sproule and John C. Whitcomb

Hebrews six has been a hotly debated passage between Arminians and Calvinists and has been a battleground for argumentation and controversy throughout Church history. It is imperative, therefore, that one understand what is involved in this passage and its underlying message. Consequently, in chapter one, 1) the Need for the Study, 2) the Purpose of the Study, and 3) the Method of the Study have been presented with underlying presuppositions that must be considered if this passage is to be properly interpreted by the exegete.

After this, the various interpretations, both ancient and modern, are entertained in an effort to ascertain the correct meaning of Hebrews six. The major modern interpretations suggested are: 1) Saved persons who are in a backslidden condition, 2) Saved persons who subsequently lose their salvation, 3) A hypothetical case which in actuality cannot possibly happen, 4) A sin which is impossible to commit today, and 5) Professed believers who are in reality apostates. The "apostate" interpretation is the one that is strongly endorsed by the writer of this thesis. Both theology (chapter three) and grammar (chapter four) argue in favor of this interpretation.

In chapter three, the crucial doctrines of apostasy, eternal security, and the perseverance of the saints are both defined and biblically defended. One must understand these doctrines if he desires to correctly decipher the meaning of Hebrews six. The apostate view is consistent with all three doctrines.

Moreover, in chapter four the grammar overwhelmingly favors the apostate view. Consideration of the structure of the passage and the context, both immediate and ultimate, are carefully evaluated.

Finally, biblical illustrations of apostates are given that help shed light on this difficult passage of Scripture. Suffice it to say that Hebrews 6:4-6 refers to apostates who professed but never possessed "the faith."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

The epistle to the Hebrews has staggered and bewildered the minds of thousands as they have read and contemplated the pages of this grand epistle. This letter has been the battleground for argumentation and controversy throughout Church history. The writer describes this brief epistle as a "word of exhortation" (13:22). In fact, of all the epistles in the New Testament, none is given more to exhortation and admonition than the epistle to the Hebrews. "Half or more of the letter is devoted to exhortation (of 303 verses, 160 are hortatory), and the writer implies in his conclusion that 'the word of exhortation' has been the burden of his letter and his principle purpose in writing."¹ It is therefore imperative that one understand the nature of these exhortations and admonitions as they are set forth in this epistle.

Couched within this epistle are five warning passages (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:8; 10:26-31; 12:15-29). These warnings have caused considerable confusion throughout the centuries. The writer of the epistle is exhorting

¹Robert Shank, Life in the Son (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1960), p. 226.

and admonishing these Hebrew Christians not to return to the shadows and types taught in the Old Testament Scriptures but to remain steadfast in their faith in the reality, namely, Jesus Christ. "To turn aside from Him who has come directly from heaven to utter God's final word to man, must a fortiori bring with it greater condemnation."¹ These Hebrew Christians who are being addressed are wavering in their faith (10:23,32f) and are tempted to return to their former Jewish religion. The author no doubt believes that the majority of his readers are genuine Christians. However,

Even though he writes to professed Christians, he is wise enough not to take for granted that all profession is genuine. Not all the seed sown by the sower reached the full cycle of maturation, not even some that showed a bit of initial activity (Matt 13:18-23). Thus, warnings to examine ourselves are always in order.²

Consequently, "nowhere in the New Testament more than here do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality."³ The Church of Jesus Christ needs desperately to wake up to the realities that are articulated and expounded in this epistle. These warning passages are real and the reader must be cognizant of them. The poet was right when he wrote,

¹R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel in the Epistle to the Hebrews (London: The Tyndale Press, 1950), p. 64.

²Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 47-48.

³F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 59.

There is a time, we know not when,
 A point we know not where,
 That marks the destiny of men
 For glory or despair.
 There is a line, by us unseen,
 That crosses every path;
 The hidden boundary between
 God's patience and His wrath.¹

Furthermore, "the deeper our impression is of the danger that existed, the clearer will be our insight into the truth that the only source of health and strength to the Church is the knowledge of Christ Jesus."² Therefore, the need for such a study is obvious in light of the apostle Paul's commandment, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5).

Purpose of the Study

The thesis of this paper will be to demonstrate that Hebrews 6:4-8 is not written to "backsliding" believers, but rather to apostates, who fall away to perdition (10:39). The author of Hebrews is cognizant of the fact that the majority of his readers are genuine Christians although there may be a minority among them that can be characterized by the five warning passages. This minority of Jews is a "people who see clearly where the truth lies, and perhaps for a period conform to it, but then, for one reason or another,

¹Shank, Life in the Son, pp. 311-12.

²Andrew Murray, The Holiest of All (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1896), p. 25.

renounce it."¹ Consequently, "they are persons who have enjoyed great privileges, and made considerable attainments in religion; and they are persons who, notwithstanding this, have apostatized--'fallen away.'"² This warning has been both inordinately minimized and overly exaggerated. It is the hope and purpose of this writer to correctly interpret this passage, not only in light of its immediate context, but also in light of the entire canon of Holy Scripture. Scroggie appropriately writes, "The two solemn passages, chapters 6:4-6; and 10:26-31, must surely be understood to refer, not to what these Hebrews were actually doing, but to what they were in danger of doing. The passages are not without difficulties."³ Suffice it to say, that godly saints down through the ages have differed in their particular interpretations and explanations of this crucial warning passage in the epistle to the Hebrews. It will be the attempt of this writer to offer a plausible solution to this difficult portion of Scripture. Though all the questions surrounding this issue cannot be answered, it is the intent of this writer to shed some light on this crucial subject.

¹ Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 119.

² John Brown, Hebrews (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1862), p. 284.

³ W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p. 275.

Method of Study

The writer will attempt to unlock the meaning of Hebrews 6:4-8 by (1) An Historical Study, (2) A Theological Study, and (3) A Grammatical Study. These studies will be amplified by biblical illustrations to demonstrate the character of those described by Hebrews 6.

First, in the historical section, the writer will demonstrate how the early church misinterpreted and misused Hebrews 6. This will be followed by a discussion of the various modern interpretations that are suggested in an attempt to explain Hebrews 6.

Second, in the theological section, the doctrines which are vitally important and must be dealt with are apostasy, eternal security, and perseverance. These doctrines must be properly understood if one is to correctly interpret Hebrews 6.

Third, in the grammatical section, the structure of the passage will be thoroughly analyzed. Also, the immediate context of the passage, as well as the ultimate context of the book will be considered.

Finally, the paper will conclude with various illustrations that are designed to support the major thesis which has been proposed. These illustrations are biblical and will help to clarify the doctrine that is taught and emphasized in Hebrews 6.

Presuppositions

Certain presuppositions are given that will provide the backbone of this thesis. These are:

- 1) An apostate is an unbeliever who has never been "born again." He is an "enlightened" soul, yet unregenerate. He is a mere professor rather than a possessor of the genuine faith.
- 2) It is impossible for a believer to apostatize from the faith. Only an unbeliever can actually "fall away" from God.
- 3) Continuance in the faith is a mark of genuine faith (the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints).
- 4) A genuine believer is eternally secure in Christ and can never ultimately fall away (popularly known as "Once saved, Always saved").
- 5) The addressees of the letter were Jewish Christians who were steeped in Judaism.¹ Thus, the language of the epistle (Hebrews 6 especially) must be interpreted from the vantage point of Judaism rather than Christianity.
- 6) All five warning passages should be consistently explained by the interpreter. If chapter 10:26-31 refers to unbelievers, then chapter 6:4-6 does also. In other words, one cannot say that 6:4-6 refers to a believer, while on the other hand, one interprets the warning of 12:15f as that of an unbeliever. All five warnings must be consistently interpreted as referring to the same individuals.
- 7) The theology of the epistle to the Hebrews must be in harmony with the totality of Scripture.
- 8) The interpreter must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.
- 9) The terminology of Hebrews 6:4-6 does not argue a priori that these individuals addressed must refer to genuine believers. Grammar, as well as context, are the major determining factors. Furthermore,

¹The precise location of these Hebrew readers has been a debated question. The locations suggested have ranged all the way from Judaea to Spain in the West. For a good discussion see F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, pp. 31f.

it will be demonstrated that this terminology can and is used with reference to unbelievers. What is striking to the exegete of this passage is not the terms that are used but the absence of certain terms with reference to these specific individuals.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL SECTION

In this chapter, both the ancient and modern interpretations will be addressed. Ancient interpretations discovered in church history, as well as many of the modern explanations, are insufficient in deciphering the correct meaning of Hebrews 6:1-8. John Owen was right when he wrote,

That this passage in our apostle's discourse hath been looked upon as accompanied with great difficulties is known to all; and many have the differences been about its interpretation. For both doctrinally and practically, sundry have here stumbled and miscarried.¹

Modern interpretations range from the hypothetical view to the apostate view. There has been much debate over the identity of the addressees in these serious warning passages. The terminology that is used (6:4-8) has led many commentators to believe that the writer of the epistle must have had genuine believers in mind. Others have argued that this passage demonstrates conclusively that a genuine believer can and does "fall away" from God resulting in the loss of salvation. This chapter is designed to examine the various interpretations that have been suggested in an attempt to discover the true meaning of Hebrews six. The

¹ John Owen, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol. V (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 68.

ancient interpretations will be discussed first followed by an examination of the various modern interpretations.

Ancient Interpretations

There were several groups in the early church who misinterpreted and misapplied the teaching of Hebrews six. One such group was the Montanists. They were also known as the Phrygians and Cataphrygians. They were known as the Phrygians because historically Montanus appeared in that region around 150 A.D.¹

The movement, which came to be known as Montanism, was extremely charismatic in nature. Montanus believed that he was the Paraclete's mouthpiece and thus had the special gift of prophecy (Montanus had two women join him, Prisca and Maximilla, who shared in the prophetic announcements). Cairns writes, ". . . Montanus contended that inspiration was immediate and continuous and that he was the paraclete or advocate through whom the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church as He, the Spirit, had spoken through Paul and the other apostles."² Montanus developed an elaborate eschatological system and prophesied of the imminent return of the Lord. This led Montanus and his followers to adhere to a strict legalistic asceticism. Latourette comments,

¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, vol. I (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1953), pp. 129f.

²Earle E. Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 110.

"Since the return of Christ and the last judgment were regarded as being so imminent, believers were urged to be strict in their living. Celibacy was encouraged, fasting was enjoined, and martyrdom was held in high honor."¹ Thus, a strict moral discipline was required.

Montanism was absorbed in legalism. "In time of persecutions, it taught, no one should flee Penance should be rigorously imposed on those who sinned, and those who lapsed from the faith would find no forgiveness."² This movement spread rapidly. "It was especially popular in Asia Minor and persisted there and in Carthage into the fifth century. It was found in other sections of the Mediterranean world, including Rome, Gaul, and North Africa."³ Ambrose and Jerome state that the Montanists used Hebrews 6:4-8 to demonstrate that those who lapsed in the time of persecution could not be restored to fellowship.⁴ Thus, due to their fanatical asceticism and church discipline, the Montanists wrongly interpreted and misapplied Hebrews six. Qualben further adds, "They believed that a second repentance was impossible, and therefore the lapsed could

¹Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 129.

²Carl S. Meyer, The Church From Pentecost to the Present (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 31.

³Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 129.

⁴Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 214.

not be restored to fellowship of the church."¹ Therefore, the question arose in the early church "Whether those who relapsed from the gospel renounced forever the hope of salvation, or whether by means of sincere repentance they might once more attain to a state of salvation."² Hebrews 6:4-8 became the center of attraction in this serious controversy.

Tertullian (A.D. 160-220), one of the greatest of the Western Church Fathers, surprisingly enough became a Montanist. There has been a great deal of speculation to determine just what caused Tertullian to join this movement. One writer suggests, "Led on by its moral earnestness, and predisposed against any conformity with the world, Tertullian saw in the new prophecy the divine seal of his endeavors."³ F. F. Bruce believes that it was Montanism's stern puritanism that attracted Tertullian.⁴ Nonetheless, Tertullian did approve of their strict legalistic doctrine and became a Montanist.

¹Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1933), p. 87.

²Gottlieb Lunemann, Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and to the Epistle to the Hebrews (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 536.

³Nathanael Bonwetsch, The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. VII. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 487.

⁴F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame (The Paternoster Press, 1958), p. 220.

This outstanding Church Father "considered it the main duty of the new order of prophecy to restore a severe church discipline."¹ Consequently, he quoted and extensively used Hebrews six to support his strong belief in church discipline. Moffatt adds, "What appeals to Tertullian in πρὸς Ἑβραίους is its uncompromising denial of any second repentance."² Tertullian used Hebrews six "to prove that there can be no pardon or restoration to communion for post-baptismal sin."³ Tertullian listed the "seven deadly sins" as "idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud."⁴ However, concerning Hebrews 6:4-6, he had one particular sin in mind. He writes, "He who learnt this from apostles, and taught it with apostles, never knew of any 'second repentance' promised by apostles to the adulterer and fornicator."⁵ Tertullian criticized the Shepherd of Hermas, which he called the "shepherd of the adulterers," because it conceded that forgiveness might be allowed for one sin committed after baptism. Therefore,

¹Qualben, A History of the Christian Church, p. 87.

²James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Edited by Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), p. xviii.

³Bruce, Hebrews, p. 123.

⁴Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 138.

⁵Tertullian, "On Modesty." In The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 97.

the Montanists denied repentance for those church members who fell into sin.

However, it is obvious that the author of Hebrews had no such sin in mind. Although several of the Church Fathers believed that Hebrews 6:4-6 referred primarily to baptism (John of Damascus, Ambrose), it is apparent from the context that it does not. For example, Ambrose wrote,

So, then, that which he says in this Epistle to the Hebrews, that it is impossible for those who have fallen to be 'renewed unto repentance, crucifying again the Son of God, and putting Him to an open shame,' must be considered as having reference to baptism But Christ was crucified once, and died to sin once, and so there is but one, not several baptisms.¹

Yet the context makes it plain that the passage does not refer to "sin as it manifests itself in the lives of Christians, but to a particular disposition involving a repudiation of grace"²

Consequently, Montanism "was condemned as heretical and its adherents were expelled from the Church and debarred from the communion."³ Furthermore, the Council of Constantinople in 381 declared that the Montanists should be treated as pagans. Two off-shoots of the Montanist movement

¹Ambrose, "Concerning Repentance." In The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 346. See also Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," in Westminster Theological Journal (1972-73):137-55.

²Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 214.

³Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 132.

were the Novatianists of the third century, and the Donatists of the fourth.

The Novatian schism developed out of a controversy concerning the admission of the "lapsed" which fell during the Decian and Valerian persecutions (A.D. 249-250).

Latourette observes,

In the middle of the third century the Decian persecution brought the issue starkly before the Church, for thousands yielded to pressure and compromised their faith. Many of them, terrified or deeply grieved by what they had done, sought readmission to the Church.¹

However, "Novation of Rome would not allow the lapsed to be restored to the communion of the Church, even on proof of penitence."²

It is imperative that one understand the position that the Novatians espoused. They believed that the Church was the body of Christ and must be completely holy. Baptism was the means by which each individual was forgiven whereby he also became a member of Christ's body.

Apostasy is the sin against the Holy Ghost, received by the Christian in baptism and lost by this sin, since there is only one baptism. The Church cannot take back those who have thus sinned against God; logically, it has no power to forgive such a sin.³

Baptism was believed to wash away all sins committed before it was administered. After baptism, the Christian was supposed not to sin, and some sins, if indulged

¹ Ibid., p. 138.

² Qualben, A History of the Christian Church, p. 106.

³ Harnack, The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, p. 201.

in after that rite had been administered, were regarded as unforgiveable.¹

Therefore, similar to the Montanists, the Novatians used Hebrews six in an attempt to support their doctrines. They did not call themselves Novatians but "Puritans" because they insisted that pure communion was of utmost importance "to which Christians who had fallen into grievous sin could not be readmitted."² Calvin wrote, "Both the Montanists of Tertullian's time and the Novatianists later argued from Hebrews 6:4-6 in support of their rigorism in excluding the lapsed from penance."³ He further adds, "This passage has given occasion to many to repudiate this Epistle, especially as the Novatians armed themselves with it to deny pardon to the fallen."⁴ Owen also writes concerning their position, "For they denied all hope of church pardon, or of a return unto ecclesiastical communion, unto them who had fallen into open sin after baptism . . . yes, they seem to have excluded them from all expectation of forgiveness from God himself."⁵

¹ Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 138.

² Bruce, The Spreading Flame, p. 213.

³ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. I. Edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), pp. 616-17.

⁴ John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews. Edited by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 135.

⁵ John Owen, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 69.

On the other hand, Donatism, which developed in North Africa, grew out of the Diocletian persecution (284-305). This group believed that "the traditors, or those who had surrendered copies of Scripture in the recent persecution, had committed a mortal sin."¹ They also held a rigorous stand against those who denied the true faith. The Council at Arles in 314 condemned the Donatist Movement.

Both the Novatians and Donatists came into being as a protest against the lenient treatment of those who "lapsed" during the time of persecution. Both groups used Hebrews six to support their positions. They held strongly to the fact that the "fallen" could not be admitted back into the church.

However, the great majority of the Catholic Church believed that there was no sin beyond forgiveness if it was followed by true repentance.² As a result, Augustine championed the cause against the extreme Donatist position, whereas Cyprian championed the cause against the Novatians. For example, Cyprian wrote concerning the Novatians and Montanists, "I wonder that some are so obstinate as to think that repentance is not to be granted to the lapsed or to suppose that pardon is to be denied to the penitent"³ Thus, one can readily see how these early groups

¹Qualben, A History of the Christian Church, p. 123.

²Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 139.

³Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 215.

(Montanists, Novatians, Donatists) misinterpreted and misapplied Hebrews six.

There were several groups, in contrast to the majority in the Catholic Church, who did not properly interpret Hebrews six. This passage is not concerned with post-baptismal sins nor with those who "lapsed" during the Decian or Diocletian persecutions. It has far greater consequences than these, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

Modern Interpretations

There are at least five interpretations which are given by commentators in an attempt to explain Hebrews 6:1-8. These interpretations are: (1) Saved persons who are in a backslidden condition (C. C. Ryrie, Hendrickson, DeHaan, J. B. Rowell, W. Barclay, Herman A. Hoyt); (2) Saved persons who subsequently lose their salvation (R. W. Dale, Lenski, Shank); (3) A hypothetical case which in actuality cannot possibly happen (B. F. Westcott, G. Thomas, Homer Kent, A. Barnes, Donald Guthrie, Thomas Hewitt); (4) A sin which is impossible to commit today (K. S. Wuest); (5) Professed believers who are in actuality apostates (J. Brown, Newell, Calvin, Talbot, Tasker, A. B. Bruce, F. F. Bruce, S. L. Johnson, Delitzsch, Hughes, Owen, Nicole, Ironside, M. Lloyd-Jones, Pink, A. B. Davidson, Marcus Dods, Neil Lightfoot).

Roger Nicole properly writes concerning the various interpretations of this passage, "The passage that occupies us is one that has captivated the attention of Christians

probably ever since it was written."¹ However, it is imperative for the reader to properly understand the views that have been presented. Therefore, it will be the purpose of this writer to briefly explain the views that have been offered, followed by an attempt to reveal the weaknesses that are inherent within each one.

The "saved-backslidden" position is endorsed by such men as Charles C. Ryrie and J. B. Rowell. Ryrie writes, "These are Christians the writer addresses, and because they have embraced Christianity it is impossible to go back."² Rowell further adds, "That the question is not one of salvation, but of rewards, relating, as the context shows, to 'the better things which accompany' or are connected with salvation"³ Based upon the terminology and the character of the addressees, these writers believe that one must interpret this section as referring to that of genuine believers. Otherwise, one will approach this passage with a certain theological bias.

The men who espouse this view argue strongly from the immediate context. They demonstrate that 5:11-6:3 must refer to back-slidden believers. Consequently, 6:4-8 must

¹Roger Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints." In Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 355.

²Charles C. Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 257.

³J. B. Rowell, "An Age-Long Battleground," in Bibliotheca Sacra (1937):323.

also refer to the same group. For example, Rowell argues from the exhortation in 6:1, "Surely such an exhortation would have been out of place were it not that these, to whom the Apostle was writing, were born-again ones and not mere professors."¹ However, he fails to recognize that Hebrews 6:4-6 describes a certain type of person, not necessarily the Hebrew Christians being addressed. Rowell interprets this passage totally in the sense of service and rewards rather than salvation. Thus, these writers argue that Hebrews 6 refers to believers not only on the basis of the immediate context, but also from the fact that the writer undoubtedly believes that his readership were genuine Hebrew Christians.

However, there are serious problems with this interpretation. These writers do not properly explain what the author means by the use of the participle "falling away" (6:6). Ryrie emphatically states that this passage is not a hypothetical case but "a severe warning concerning a very real danger."² Yet, he interprets the passage as though it were hypothetical. He writes, "The participle, 'falling away,' is unqualified in verse 6, but it is undoubtedly conditional (as Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:25)."³ Yet, he offers no proof to substantiate this conclusion. It will be

¹ Ibid., 327.

² Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament, p. 256.

³ Ibid., p. 257.

demonstrated in this thesis that this participle cannot be translated as a conditional participle. Furthermore, he weakens the seriousness of this passage. He explains the participle "falling away" to mean that a Christian cannot start over again in his Christian life. In other words, a Christian cannot be saved a second time. Ryrie argues,

There is no second cross or second cross experience, for that would mean that Christ would be recrucified, which is impossible. There is no such thing as being saved a second time . . . therefore, you cannot retreat but must progress.¹

This interpretation falls woefully short in demonstrating the seriousness of this passage. Is the writer of the epistle simply warning his readers that it is impossible to start over again in the Christian life? Kent recognizes the problem with this interpretation, "The interpreter must decide, however, whether the severity of the warning here is properly served if all that is meant is that you can't as Christians make a fresh start . . . so you must keep moving forward from where you are."² This writer will attempt to prove that in light of the meaning of the terms, the structure of the passage, and the character of the addressees (10:26-31; 12:14f), this interpretation must be rejected.

The "saved-lost" interpretation is supported by R. C. H. Lenski. He writes, "Those once converted may fall so that it becomes 'impossible to renew them to repentance' Both those who were never converted and those who

¹ Ibid.

² Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, pp. 112-113.

have been converted may fall into a state in which they make repentance impossible."¹ The Arminians in general interpret Hebrews 6 as referring to believers who eventually lose their salvation on the basis of apostasy. However, this position is in direct conflict with much of Scripture. This position is exegetically, logically and theologically impossible. There are too many inherent problems within this interpretation.

This interpretation cannot be exegetically substantiated. The terms that are used (6:4-6) do not prove that the people who are addressed in this section are truly regenerate. Furthermore, it fails to properly interpret the participle "falling away" as it relates to the phrase "to renew to repentance is impossible." It fails to consider the other four warning passages (10:26f) which help to further explain these crucial verses.

This interpretation cannot be logically substantiated. Logically, if this passage teaches that a genuine believer can be lost, then it must be interpreted "once lost, always lost." For the passage reads, "To renew unto repentance is impossible." Nicole correctly observes,

Hebrews 6 and 10 both assert that people who commit this sin are beyond recovery. But these interpreters-- in virtue of what we might call a happy inconsistency--

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 180.

are not willing to treat people who are deemed to have lost their salvation as beyond the pale of redeeming grace.¹

If these verses teach anything about loss of salvation, they teach too much. Robert Shank insists that restoration is not impossible for apostates including those mentioned in Hebrews six.² Yet, Shank apparently ignores the exegetical considerations that are evident in Hebrews 6.

This interpretation cannot be theologically substantiated. Not only does this interpretation repudiate the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints but it also "fails to deal adequately with the Biblical teaching of election and security."³ Furthermore, Hebrews 6:9-20 presents irrefutable proof that a believer is eternally secure in Christ Jesus. Therefore, this interpretation must also be rejected.

The "hypothetical" interpretation is one that is recommended by many good men. For example, William Manson writes, "If as Christians they fall away from it, what then? . . . It would appear, then, that the catastrophe predicted in the last section was hypothetical rather than real."⁴ However, this interpretation is theologically, grammatically, and logically incorrect.

¹Nicole, Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation, p. 357.

²Shank, Life in the Son, p. 319.

³Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 111.

⁴William Manson, The Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 64.

Logically, why would the author of Hebrews warn his readers of something that is impossible to happen? Nicole observes,

If in fact the sin contemplated in Hebrews 6 simply cannot be committed, it would seem absurd for the author to dwell on it precisely at the time when he avows that he will 'press on' This type of interpretation shows a wholesome regard for the strength of the Scriptural doctrine of perseverance, but it tends to artificiality.¹

Furthermore, the grammar forbids the hypothetical interpretation. Robert Shank rightly states,

Despite the unfortunate renderings of the Authorized Version and certain contemporary translators, no conditional particle is present in the Greek text. The writer simply says τοὺς . . . παραπεσόντας. There is nothing in either the language or context to indicate that the instances of apostasy cited in Hebrews 6:4-6 are only hypothetical.²

Theologically, the doctrine of apostasy is taught and supported throughout Scripture. Furthermore, nowhere in the Bible is it taught that a true believer is ever refused "repentance" when he comes to God with a penitent heart and confession of sin.

John Sproule gives seven excellent arguments against this specific interpretation. These are: (1) This interpretation denies consistency to the author of Hebrews who explicitly uses Esau (12:15f) as an illustration of those described in 6:4-6; (2) This interpretation does not recognize the relationship of the participle παραπεσόντας

¹Nicole, Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation, p. 356.

²Shank, Life in the Son, pp. 176-77.

to the passage as a whole; (3) This interpretation fails to recognize that παραπεσόντας is an adjectival rather than an adverbial participle; (4) This interpretation fails to consider the entire epistle (10:39; 12:15f); (5) The writer of this epistle would not include five serious warning passages in his epistle if they were only hypothetical; (6) This interpretation cannot argue a priori that these people described are truly regenerate; (7) This interpretation is theologically suspect. A genuine believer can always come back to the Father in genuine repentance and go on.¹ Therefore, this interpretation is proven insufficient in light of theology, grammar and logic.

Kenneth Wuest proposes a unique interpretation for Hebrews six. He writes, "Of course, it should be plain that this sin cannot be committed today. There is no temple in Jerusalem, there are no sacrifices to leave and to return to"² This interpretation fails to take into consideration the seriousness of these warnings and the doctrines of apostasy, perseverance, etc. Wuest fails to recognize that this passage was a "real warning against a real danger, a danger which is still present so long as an 'evil heart of

¹John Sproule, Unpublished class notes on The Epistle to the Hebrews, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980.

²Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), p. 118.

unbelief' can result in 'falling away' from the living God (3:12)."¹

The "apostate" interpretation is supported by the majority of commentators and theologians and provides the best explanation in light of grammar, theology and logic. This view takes into consideration the context of the book as a whole (2:1-4; 10:26-31,39; 12:15f) and is the only interpretation that does complete justice to the theology of the New Testament. Brown writes,

The persons here referred to are not mere nominal professors . . . neither are they backsliding Christians. They are men who have really had their minds and affections to a very considerable degree exercised about and interested in Christianity.²

They are professors but not possessors. They have been white-washed but not washed white.

Many exegetes conclude automatically that the author of Hebrews must have had genuine believers in mind because of the terminology that he uses in 6:4-6. For example, Nicole states, "The most immediate impulse would be to interpret this cluster of statements as describing regenerate persons, especially since the epistle is addressed to Christians and in chapter 10 the author even uses the pronoun 'we.'"³ However, these terms must be explained in

¹ Bruce, Hebrews, p. 123.

² Brown, Hebrews, p. 290.

³ Nicole, Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation, p. 356.

light of the entire context of the epistle to the Hebrews. This warning must be interpreted in light of the other four warnings in Hebrews, as well as the general warnings that are presented throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Chafer comments, "Doubtless these five things are true of a child of God, but so much more is true than is indicated here that these five things are seen to be wholly inadequate to describe the true child of God."¹ Therefore, in the final analysis, the people who were described in Hebrews 6:4-8 were unbelievers who were never saved. This is the interpretation that is endorsed by this thesis and will be substantiated both theologically and grammatically. Suffice it to say, that the entire epistle should be taken into consideration if one desires to properly decipher the meaning of Hebrews 6:4-8.

¹Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, Vol. III (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), p. 303.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGICAL SECTION

The Doctrine of Apostasy

Terms

The various words referring to apostasy will be examined in this section. These words are: ἀποστασία (two times--Acts 21:21; 2 Thess 2:3)¹; ἀπόστασιον (three times--Matt 5:31; 19:7; Mark 10:4)²; ἀφίστημι (fourteen times--Luke 2:37; 4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts 5:37,38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29; 2 Cor 12:8; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:19; Heb 3:12; and possibly 1 Tim 6:5)³; and παραίπτω (one time--Heb 6:6).⁴ The two crucial terms that must be properly understood are ἀφίστημι and παραίπτω.

The substantive ἀποστασία occurs only twice in the Greek New Testament. The term means "defection, apostasy, revolt."⁵ It was used frequently to convey the idea of both political and religious revolt. This idea is employed particularly in the Septuagint. The term signified the

¹W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, A Concordance to the Greek Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 99.

²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 134.

⁴Ibid., p. 760.

⁵G. Abbott Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977), p. 54.

concept of being in a "state of apostasy."¹ Ryrie comments, "It is important to note that all lexicographers give the primary meaning as apostasy or rebellion and the secondary meaning as departure"² Therefore, the noun denotes rebellion, abandonment, revolt both in a religious and political sense.

The substantive ἀποστάσιον occurs only three times in the New Testament and all three occurrences are found in the Gospel accounts. All three references refer to the bill or certificate of divorce which finds its background in the Septuagint (βιβλίον ἀποστασίου). The subsequent meaning denotes abandonment or separation.

The verb for apostasy that is normally used in the New Testament is ἀφίστημι. Transitivity, the verb means "to put away," "to move to revolt," "to mislead." Intransitively, the verb means "to stand off, depart from, withdraw from, to fall away, to apostatize."³ Ryrie concludes that ἀφίστημι in the New Testament reveals two basic meanings. These meanings are: (1) "A personal (or in most cases physical) departure (2) Apostasy or departure

¹Heinrich Schlier, "ἀποστασία," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 1:513.

²Charles C. Ryrie, "Apostasy in the Church," Bibliotheca Sacra (January-March, 1964):44.

³See G. Abbott Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 71; William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 127. Also Heinrich Schlier, "ἀφίστημι," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:512-13.

from the faith."¹ This second meaning occurs only three times in the New Testament (Luke 8:13; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12) and in each case the verb denotes departure from "the faith." Gundry agrees with this evaluation. He writes, "of the fifteen occurrences of ἀφίστημι in the New Testament, only three refer to a religious departure."² Thus, the term means "to depart from, to fall away, to apostatize." This "departure" will be further amplified in the next section.

Finally, the last verb to be considered that is crucial to this study is παραίπτω which occurs only once in the entire New Testament (Heb 6:6). The verb means "to fall beside, go astray, miss, fall away, commit apostasy."³ In the New Testament the verb denotes one who falls away from the true faith. The verb corresponds to ἀφίστημι (Heb 3:12) and both verbs are used to translate נָפַח in the Septuagint (Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27).⁴

The verb occurs nowhere else outside of Hebrews 6:6, although the noun παράπτωμα is quite common. The verb

¹Ryrie, "Apostasy in the Church," pp. 44-45.

²Robert Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 116.

³William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 626.

⁴See Wilhelm Michaelis, "παίπτω," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), VI:161-73, for a good discussion.

παράπτω is used to translate three Hebrew verbs (נָשָׁח, לָעַז, לָחַז). The most important one as far as Hebrews 6:6 is concerned is לָעַז. לָעַז means "to act unfaithfully, treacherously," and was used in reference to the priests. Concerning the relationship between παράπτω and ἀφίστημι (LXX לָעַז), Lightfoot writes, "The verb παράπτω indicates no more than a falling aside from the path, but the context here and the larger context of the Epistle requires the rendering 'commit apostasy.'"¹ Another author comments, "The falling away means apostasy, the worst kind of παράπτωμα, the complete and willful renunciation of Christianity. Thus it is used by the LXX to represent the Hebrew לָעַז which in 2 Chronicles 29:19 they render by 'apostasy.'"²

Therefore, the two crucial verbs ἀφίστημι and παράπτω are used in the Septuagint to translate the same Hebrew verb לָעַז. παράπτω as used in Hebrews denotes the same meaning as ἀφίστημι as it is explicitly revealed in the Septuagint. Both verbs refer to "apostasy."

Defined

Ryrie writes, "Apostasy is a subject more often discussed than defined these days."³ This is readily seen by a cursory reading of various commentaries and theologies.

¹Neil Lightfoot, Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 125.

²F. W. Farrar, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews (Cambridge: University Press, 1883), p. 83.

³Ryrie, "Apostasy in the Church," p. 44.

Most "apparent" explanations leave the reader confused and bewildered and do not shed further light on the subject.

There are several questions that must be asked and properly answered if one is to understand this biblical concept. For example, what is apostasy? Is the danger of apostasy real? What does an apostate depart from? Can a Christian apostatize from the faith?, etc. These questions will be briefly evaluated and explained in this section.

The term "apostasy" (ἀφίστημι, παραπίπτω) means a "departure" or a "falling away" from something. Ryrie defines apostasy as "a departure from truth previously accepted and it involves the breaking of a professed relationship with God."¹ This is vitally important for one to understand. In other words, an apostate is a professor rather than a possessor. It is always possible for a "professing" believer to renounce that which he professes and oftentimes he does. An apostate is one who knows the truth, experiences its power, conforms to the truth for a while, but then "falls away" from the faith.² F. F. Bruce explains, "It is a question of people who see clearly where the truth lies, and perhaps for a period conform to it, but then for one reason or another, renounce it."³ John Brown adds, "They are persons who have enjoyed great privileges

¹Ibid., p. 46.

²Sproule, Unpublished class notes, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980.

³Bruce, Hebrews, p. 119.

and made considerable attainments in religion; and they are persons who, notwithstanding this, have apostatized--

'fallen away.'"¹ Thus, it is impossible for a Christian to be an apostate. An apostate is not and never has been a "born again" Christian.²

An apostate is one who willfully (Heb 10:26f) removes himself from an objective standard of truth that he completely understands. It involves both his intellect and will.³ Campbell appropriately observes, "Whenever his professed faith is tested, he will either openly renounce it, or continuing his pretext, he will deny its reality by his practical disobedience to the very truth he professes to believe."⁴ Thus, an apostate is one who gives all outward indications of faith in Christ but for some reason subsequently loses all interest and becomes indifferent to

¹Brown, Hebrews, p. 284.

²See A. Glenn Campbell, "The Problem of Apostasy in the Greek New Testament," unpublished dissertation from Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975, for an excellent treatment of apostasy. He demonstrates conclusively that a believer can never apostatize from the faith. On the other hand, Robert Shank writes, "An apostate according to New Testament definition, is one who has severed his union with Christ by withdrawing from an actual saving relationship with Him. Apostasy is impossible for men who have not entered into a saving relationship with God (Life in the Son, p. 158).

³Ryrie, "Apostasy in the Church," p. 46.

⁴A. Glenn Campbell, "The Problem of Apostasy in the Greek New Testament," Unpublished dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957), pp. 49-50.

the Christ that he once professed.¹ In the final analysis, those who do apostatize are in actuality unregenerate men who simply professed but did not possess genuine salvation.

The danger of apostasy is a real peril that the New Testament writers warn against (Luke, Paul, Peter, the writer to the Hebrews, etc.). Evidently it is the danger about which the writer to the epistle to the Hebrews warns his readers. No doubt the author of the epistle believed that the majority of his readers were genuine believers. Yet he revealed apparent doubt concerning a minority (6:4-8). Thus, one must understand the nature and character of an apostate if he desires to properly interpret Hebrews 6. Commenting on Hebrews 10:26-31, Newell observes, "In these verses we have a passage which, like chapter 6:4-8, views apostates from that faith which they once professed. No true exposition can account for either Hebrews 6 or Hebrews 10 on any other ground."²

On the other hand, an apostate must be distinguished from both a New Testament heretic and a carnal Christian. A genuine believer can cause divisions and walk according to his flesh for a time yet he cannot apostatize. A heretic may deviate from some specific doctrine without repudiating Christianity. Furthermore, a "back-slidden believer"

¹John Murray, Redemption, Accomplished, and Applied (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 152.

²William R. Newell, Hebrews Verse by Verse (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947), p. 354.

must be distinguished from an apostate. An apostate is one who deliberately renounces the faith that he formerly professed. Furthermore, he is not a typical unbeliever who has never heard the truth. Thus, Ryrie states, "An apostate, according to the definition, would be different from a carnal Christian in that the latter is 'in Christ' while the apostate is not."¹

Therefore, an apostate is not and never has been a born again Christian. He is one who goes along with truth for a while but then "falls away." His actions are willful and deliberate and he renounces truth which he formerly professed. He is neither a heretic nor a carnal Christian but an unbeliever who enjoyed abundant light. Finally, only an unbeliever can apostatize from "the faith."

Defended

The doctrine of apostasy is clearly taught and defended in light of its usage in Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12. In all three instances it refers to actual departure from the faith (ἀφίστημι). For example, Luke records a departure from the word; Timothy, a departure from Christian doctrine; and the author of Hebrews, a departure from the living God. These passages strongly support the conclusion that profession of the faith is not synonymous with possession. For example, in the parable of

¹Ryrie, "Apostasy in the Church," p. 47. See also A. Glenn Campbell, "The Problems of Apostasy in the Greek New Testament," pp. 50-51; Lewis S. Chafer, Systematic Theology, VII:17f.

the sower (Matt 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), four types of soil are depicted but only one responds genuinely to the Word of God. In the first type, Satan comes and snatches "the word out of their hearts, lest they should be saved." In the second type, the word is received with joy bringing forth apparent fruit but because of lack of depth, falls away. This is an artificial rather than real response indicated by the words "and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of testing fall away" (ἀφίστανται, apostatizes). The third type starts out well but due to "the cares and riches and pleasures of this life" chokes the word and it becomes unfruitful. Thus, only the "good ground" actually hears and accepts and brings forth fruit (Luke 8:15). This is a classic illustration of profession in contrast to possession. Although the first three soils professed acceptance of the word, only the "good ground" in actuality possessed it.

Two other passages, Hebrews 6 and 2 Peter 2, also fit into this category of mere profession in contrast to possession. The term ἀφίστημι is not used in these passages but the same concept is certainly indicated. Furthermore, as it was seen earlier, the term παραπίπτω was used synonymously with ἀφίστημι in the LXX. Therefore, both 2 Peter 2, as well as Hebrews 6, describe individuals who have experienced and enjoyed considerable light, yet "have fallen away." In time of testing, similar to Luke 8:13, they openly renounce or deny the faith they once professed. Tasker writes, "To turn aside from Him, who has come

directly from heaven to utter God's final word to man, must a fortiori bring with it greater condemnation."¹ It will be demonstrated in the grammatical section of this thesis that Hebrews six indeed falls into this category of passages referring to apostasy.

The Doctrine of Eternal Security

Biblical Proof

Hebrews 6:4-6 has been a battleground between Arminians and Calvinists. Both believe they can substantiate their claims by Scripture. The Arminians insist that Hebrews 6 refers to a genuine believer who apostatizes from the faith. The Calvinists, on the other hand, insist that this passage addresses professing believers who were proven to be counterfeit. For example, one Calvinist writes, "These passages do not teach that we can be saved and lost again, but they serve as tests of whether we have ever been saved."² Thus, Kent raises the question,

Are true Christians ever guilty of complete apostasy? The Arminian says yes, and interprets this passage as denoting true believers who lose their salvation. Calvinists, however, recognize that salvation is eternally secure for true believers, and interpret this passage in other ways. Some regard the apostates as mere professors who finally depart.³

¹R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel in the Epistle to the Hebrews (London: The Tyndale Press, 1950), p. 64.

²Willard M. Aldrich, "Perseverance," in Bibliotheca Sacra (1958):18.

³Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 206.

It seems plain to this writer that the Scriptures clearly indicate that a genuine believer ultimately can never "fall away" and be irretrievably lost. Charles Spurgeon was right when he stated, "The believer, like a man on shipboard, may fall again and again on the deck, but he will never fall overboard."¹ This doctrine, viewed from the divine side, is the preservation of the saints. If properly understood, this can be a comforting doctrine, but it must be properly understood rather than abused or misinterpreted. Furthermore, it must be remembered that this doctrine applies only to those who are genuinely saved. Hebrews 6: 4-8 does not teach that a believer can "fall away" and ultimately spend eternity in hell. Then,

How, it is asked, does this passage fit in with eternal security? The answer is easy: If this were an ordinary backslider--we would have here a contradiction of the many other Scriptures that admonish the backslider to return (Jer 3:12,14,22; Hosea 14:4). No, this reference deals with the Jews who had nominally accepted the Christian faith, but were turning back to Judaism.²

However, this doctrine is not the result of speculation but is based upon explicit statements in Scripture. This section will present several passages which explicitly teach the security of the believer. This will not be an exhaustive study, but sufficient to prove the doctrine as it unfolds in the Holy Scriptures. The passages to be examined

¹Augustus H. Strong, Systematic Theology (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), p. 885.

²Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 390.

are: Romans 8:28-29 (the purpose of the Father); John 10:27-30 (the promise of the Son); John 17:11 (the prayer of the Son); John 14:16-17 (the presence of the Holy Spirit); and 1 Peter 1:5 (the power of the Father).¹ These specific passages teach clearly that a genuine believer is eternally secure "in Christ."

Romans 8:28-30 outlines the purpose of God the Father from eternity past until eternity future. The apostle asks the question in 8:31, "Therefore, what shall we say to these things (ταῦτα)? If God for us, who against us? It is clear that the ταῦτα refers back to the five elements in 8:29-30 which comprise one's salvation (foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification). This chain that begins with foreknowledge and ends with glorification (aorist tenses) cannot be disrupted. Chafer correctly observes, "The failure of one soul to be saved and to reach glory whom God has ordained to that end means the disruption of the whole actuality of divine sovereignty. If God could fail in one feature, be it ever so small, He could fail in all."² Thus, God's purpose is based entirely upon His foreknowledge and predestination which is worked out and accomplished by means of "calling," "justification," and "glorification" (also 2 Tim 1:9; John 6:39-40).

¹S. Lewis Johnson, "Once Saved Always Saved" (Taped sermon through Believers Chapel, Dallas).

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Calvinistic Doctrine of Security," in Bibliotheca Sacra (1950):13.

John 10:27-30 sets forth a precious promise from God the Son. The Lord Jesus Christ states, "And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever, and no one (indefinite pronoun) shall pluck them from my hand." The Greek uses the subjunctive of emphatic negation. In other words, the statement is a strong negation against the possibility of a believer ever losing his salvation.¹ He further states, "No one shall pluck (them) out of my father's hand" (10:29). Thus, a believer experiences double protection being in both the Son and the Father's hand. "Eternal life" is never ending life in the knowledge of God (John 17:3).

John 17:11 indicates clearly that a believer is eternally secure because of the prayer of the Son. He prays in 17:15, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest protect them from the evil (one)." John 11:42 declares that the Father always hears the Son's prayers and they are always answered. Toussaint proposes the question, "If the Lord Jesus is praying like that for every believer, what chance does Satan have?"² Other passages that refer to the prayer of the Son are: Romans 8:34; Luke 22:31-34; Hebrews 7:23-25.

¹ See A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 1174f.

² Stanley Toussaint, "Can a Believer Lose His Salvation," in Good News Broadcaster (1979):3.

John 14:16-17 clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit permanently indwells each believer. Furthermore, the apostle Paul writes, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom 8:9). The Holy Spirit permanently regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals each believer and it is impossible for this work to be thwarted. Chafer observes,

Thus the assurance is given that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer and that His presence is abiding. He may be grieved, but He will not be grieved away. He may be quenched--which carries the thought of resisting --but He cannot be extinguished.¹

Finally, the believer is eternally secure because of the infinite power of the Father (1 Pet 1:5). The verb *προσῴρω* is a military term translated "garrisoned." This text states that a believer is being constantly garrisoned (present passive participle) by means of the infinite power of God. The tense indicates that it is an ongoing process, whereas the voice indicates that the subject (believer) is being acted upon by an outside influence, namely, the power of God. Therefore, it is impossible for a genuine believer to "fall away" and eventually spend eternity in hell.

Theological Proof

Eternal security has been debated and discussed throughout the centuries. The Church at Rome rejected the doctrine believing that it was possible for a believer to lose his salvation through mortal sins. For example, the

¹Chafer, "The Calvinistic Doctrine of Security," p. 38.

Council of Trent confirmed "no one can know with the certainty of faith, which excludes the possibility of error, that he continues in the grace of God." And again, "If any man hold trust, confidence, or assurance of pardon to be essential to faith, let him be accursed."¹ The Lutherans also believe that through mortal sins, a believer could lose his salvation.

On the other hand, Wesleyans and most Pentecostal groups do not distinguish between mortal and venial sins. Yet, they too believe that a regenerated man may be lost due to apostasy from Christ.

The Reformed position is that a truly regenerated person will persevere to the end and be saved. For example, John Calvin believed that a man could be assured of his salvation based upon both an objective and subjective work of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the doctrine of assurance should not be confused with the doctrine of eternal security. Chafer writes, "The latter is a fact due to God's faithfulness whether realized by the believer or not, while the former is that which one believes to be true respecting himself at a given time."² John Wesley believed in assurance but rejected the doctrine of eternal security. The doctrine

¹Mark A. Noll, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Assurance," in Bibliotheca Sacra (January-December, 1975): 162.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, Vol. VII (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), p. 21.

of assurance emphasizes the fact that a believer has life in the present (now). Eternal security emphasizes that a believer has life as a permanent possession (forever). The doctrine of assurance is based upon the testimony of God the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16; Heb 10:10,12-15), the Word of God (1 John 5:13), and many personal tests (e.g. 1 John). The doctrine of assurance is of immense practical value for it lends stability to the Christian life. Furthermore, the doctrine promotes joy and happiness for the Christian and establishes a firm foundation for the Christian life.

The doctrine of eternal security is based upon the Word of God and God's preservation. The writer was correct who wrote,

It is well to hold on to God's hand, but it is better to have God's hand hold on to us. The perseverance of the saints, looked at from the divine side, is the preservation of the saints, and the hymn that expresses the Christian's faith is the hymn, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word."¹

The doctrine of eternal security is a necessary inference from such doctrines as: sovereign election, union with Christ, discipline, salvation by grace, and the doctrine of sin. Each of these doctrines will be briefly examined to demonstrate that the doctrine of eternal security is in perfect harmony with the totality of Scripture.

Inherent within the doctrine of sovereign election is security. Election has as its goals salvation and

¹ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 883.

glorification (2 Thess 2:13). These are accomplished by means of "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess 2:13). Chafer adds, "Since sovereign election purposes this and sovereign grace accomplishes it, the Scriptures could not--being infinitely true--do other than to declare the Christian's security without reservation or complication."¹ Buswell agrees, "If God has elected to save a people, and has provided for the certainty of their salvation, it follows that He will infallibly accomplish that salvation."²

The argument from union with Christ also strongly favors this doctrine. Jesus Christ is the federal head who stands for all who are in Him. The believer is united with Him at the moment of faith and that union can never be severed (1 Cor 6:17; 12:27).

The Scriptures make it plain that although a believer is justified, he will still be disciplined under the loving hand of God the Father (Hebrews 12). In fact, if a believer persists in sin, the Scriptures teach that premature death could result (1 Cor 5; 1 John 5; Acts 5).

Furthermore, a believer is saved by God's grace alone. Salvation is not based upon grace and works, but upon the sacrifice of Christ (Rom 3:25). The Lord Jesus

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Eternal Security of the Believer," in Bibliotheca Sacra (1945):261.

² J. Oliver Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 145.

Christ cried, "It stands finished" demonstrating conclusively that the transaction had taken place and the Father was completely satisfied. Salvation is not based upon what Christ accomplished combined with the believer's works, but upon the finished work of Christ. Furthermore, if one believes that he can be saved and then lost, he is on the border of believing that one is saved by works. Logically, salvation would be accomplished by the cross and works.

Catholics and Lutherans distinguish between mortal and venial sins. However, in the New Testament, God never distinguishes between sins. Therefore, classifying sin as mortal and venial, is unscriptural.

In conclusion, both Scripture and theology confirm and promote the doctrine of eternal security (preservation). Therefore, Hebrews 6 must be interpreted in harmony with this doctrine. Hebrews 6:4-8 cannot refer to a genuine believer who "falls away" unto damnation.

The Doctrine of Perseverance

Defined

A proper understanding of this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is imperative if one is to ascertain the meaning of Hebrews six. James Arminius wrote, "I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith and perish: yet I will not conceal, that there are passages of Scripture which seem to

wear this aspect"¹ Furthermore, John Wesley insisted that a truly regenerated person could lose the salvation he once possessed. He writes,

It is a common thing for those who are thus sanctified, to believe they cannot fall. . . . Nevertheless, we have seen some of the strongest of them, after a time, moved from their steadfastness Nay, sometimes they have utterly lost the life of God, and sin hath regained dominion over them.²

Augustine held that it was possible for some to be saved who were not of the elect and that these would ultimately fall away. Therefore, one must understand the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as it is properly defined in Scripture. Furthermore, "correctly understood, this doctrine is a consolation, and from the standpoint of this consolation many passages which are full of both permanency and admonition become understandable."³

Jonathan Edwards insisted that the sure proof of election is that one holds out to the end. Charles Spurgeon declared that it is not so much the perseverance of the saints as it is the perseverance of the Saviour. In other words, because God preserves, true believers will persevere. Berkouwer writes concerning this crucial doctrine

¹James Arminius, The Writings of James Arminius, Vol. II, trans. by James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), pp. 502-03.

²Norman C. Sellers, "Analysis and Evaluation of the Writings of Robert Shank" (Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), pp. 24-25.

³G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 112.

Perseverance is not in addition to preservation but is the nature of this divine preservation Perseverance, then, cannot be thought of as a supplement to preservation but, instead it points to God's preservation.¹

Chafer writes, "This aspect of soteriology, commonly styled by earlier theologians the perseverance of the saints, contends that no individual once the recipient of the saving grace of God will ever fall totally and finally from that estate."² Dabney defines perseverance, "that this perseverance in a state of grace is not innate and necessary, with the new-born nature, but gracious. It does not proceed from anything in the interior state of the regenerate soul, but wholly from God's purpose of mercy towards that soul."³ Strong defines the doctrine as "The Scriptures declare that in virtue of the original purpose and continuous operation of God, all who are united to Christ by faith will infallibly continue in a state of grace and will finally attain to everlasting life."⁴ Berkhof defines the doctrine as "The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein

¹ Ibid., p. 221.

² Chafer, "The Eternal Security of the Believer," 260.

³ Robert Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 688.

⁴ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 881.

to the end and be eternally saved."¹ S. L. Johnson defines this doctrine both negatively and positively. First, negatively, he states, "Perseverance is not the teaching that the believer is saved no matter what his practice is (argument against this would be): new nature (changed life), discipline (God's chastening), doctrine of reward (faithfulness)." On the other hand, positively stated, "God secures in grace the salvation of true believers, keeping them from sinning as a practice and from apostasy."² In other words, God preserves, the believer perseveres. Therefore, it has been rightly said that instead of the perseverance of the saints, "we ought to say the perseverance of the Saviour."³ However, one must keep in mind that a genuine faith will at the same time be a persistent faith.

The epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes strongly the persevering character of true faith (3:6,14; 6:9f; 10:23f) and exhorts believers to faithfulness in light of this crucial doctrine, "but this does not imply that there are genuine believers who will not hold fast. The plain fact is that Hebrews contains a wealth of material oriented toward perseverance."⁴

¹ Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), p. 545.

² Johnson, "Once Saved, Always Saved."

³ J. Oliver Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 145.

⁴ Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints," p. 358.

The warnings and exhortations that are integrated throughout the epistle to the Hebrews are not inconsistent with this crucial doctrine. These warnings promote self-examination and are the means by which God keeps believers in the way of perseverance. "They do not prove that any of those addressed will apostatize, but simply that the use of means is necessary to prevent them from committing this sin."¹ These warnings do not teach that a regenerated person could ultimately fall away. They demonstrate: (1) That only those who are "apparently" saved eventually fall away; (2) That the mere professor and the genuine believer are at times indistinguishable in this life; (3) That the "professing" believer may experience special divine privileges and influences and yet be lost; (4) That the perseverance of the saints might be secured by these very exhortations and warnings.² Strong appropriately concludes, "Warning a traveler to keep a certain path, and by this means keeping him in that path, is no evidence that he will ever fall into a pit by the side of the path simply because he is warned of it."³

Consequently, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is a vital doctrine that must be maintained. In fact, to deny this doctrine will result in making the salvation of man "dependent on the human will rather than

¹Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 548.

²Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 885.

³Ibid.

on the grace of God."¹ The black preacher was right who insisted that perseverance meant, "Take hold"--"Hold on"--"Never let go."² This doctrine must be properly understood if one is to ascertain the correct meaning of Hebrews 6. Stated simply, continuance in the faith is the mark of a genuine faith.

Defended

The doctrine of perseverance will be defended biblically in this section. Passages that will be considered are: 1 John 2:19; John 10:27-30; 2 Peter 2:20f; Jude 21; and the warning passages in general as they are presented in Hebrews.

1 John 2:19 is a text cited by most Reformed theologians to substantiate this doctrine. The apostle John clearly indicates that apostates are those who simply profess "the faith" rather than possess it. In other words, professors will eventually go out (ἐξέλθαι) from the company of believers. This departure, in the final analysis, clearly indicates to all that they were not genuine believers.

Furthermore, the same apostle indicates in John 10:27-30 that the true sheep ("my sheep") not only hear but follow (present tense) their master. This activity is a characteristic of the believer. Bruce writes, "The

¹Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 549.

²Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 882.

practical implication is clear: it is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings final salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if that faith is a genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith."¹ Hodge adds, "The only evidence of election is effectual calling, that is, the production of holiness. And the only evidence of the genuineness of this call and the certainty of our perseverance is a patient continuance in well doing."² Therefore, the apostle John indicates that there is a vital connection between "being" and "abiding." A believer will "abide" with Christ.

The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2:20-22 declares that an apostate is one who has experienced a tremendous amount of light and yet turns away from that light. The context (2:1f) and the logic of the passage demands this interpretation. The statement, "For it were better for them to have never known the way of righteousness" would never be used to describe the condition of a "back-slidden" believer. Therefore this passage refers "to people who have been in close contact with the gospel, who may have taken some significant steps in professing acceptance of it, and who have then renounced their allegiance to it."³ Again, it must be emphasized that continuance in the faith is a mark of genuine faith.

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 73.

²Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 207.

³Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints," p. 360.

The book of Jude stresses the same concept that the apostle Peter stresses in his second epistle. In the opening verse, Jude proclaims that all believers are kept (preserved) in the Lord Jesus Christ (perfect passive participle --τετηρημένοις). However, Jude at the same time, commands his audience to keep themselves in the love of God (vs. 21--aorist active imperative, τηρήσατε). Thus, the believer is one who will persevere in the faith. It must be asserted that "perseverance is not in addition to preservation but is the nature of this divine preservation. Perseverance, then, cannot be thought of as a supplement to preservation but, instead, it points to God's preservation."¹

The warnings in the epistle to the Hebrews are consistent with these passages and also teach the perseverance of the saints. It will be impossible for one to grasp these warnings if he does not understand the doctrine of perseverance. Buswell appropriately writes, "These warnings are a part of the means whereby God preserves the regenerate in the walk of the Christian life."² Consequently, these are warnings addressed to professing Christians. Moreover, a profession of faith certainly does not guarantee eternal life for those who persistently live in sin. Their lifestyle only indicates that their profession was and never has been genuine.

¹G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 221.

²Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, pp. 147-48.

On the other hand, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints "does not contradict nor negate the fact that believers do at times succumb to sin. It is possible for a Christian to occasionally stumble and fall in the Christian life. He may fall in the faith but it is impossible for him to fall out of the faith."¹ Dabney comments concerning this problem, "Nor do we teach that all Christians have equal spiritual vitality at all times; but they may fall into partial errors of doctrine, coldness and sin, which may for a time wholly interrupt their comfort in religion"² Both of these doctrines, perseverance and the fact that believers do sin, are abundantly sustained in the New Testament. Suffice it to say, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is a biblical doctrine that is supported throughout the Scriptures. The doctrine does not depend upon the individual believer but totally upon God's grace.

¹Johnson, "Once Saved Always Saved."

²Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 689.

CHAPTER IV

GRAMMATICAL SECTION

Structure of the Passage

The structure of the passage, primarily Hebrews 6:4-6, will be discussed in this chapter. Melancthon was absolutely correct "in insisting that the Scriptures must be understood grammatically before they can be understood theologically."¹ An understanding of the structure of this passage is crucial if one is to apprehend the meaning of the severe warning that is set forth. Furthermore, Hebrews 6 must be interpreted consistently with the other warning passages contained in this epistle. For example, an interpretation of Hebrews 6 that leaves untouched the difficulty presented in Hebrews 10 is no solution at all.²

The actual warning is presented in Hebrews 6:4-6. A general survey of the structure of the passage will be presented here followed by a more thorough treatment of the major terms later in the thesis.

The ἀδύνατον (Heb 6:4, 18; 10:4; 11:6) in 6:4 is a predicate adjective of an understood verb "to be." The

¹Shank, Life in the Son, p. 56.

²Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints," p. 357.

subject of ἀδύνατον is the infinitive ἀνακαινίζειν found in 6:6. Therefore, the passage should be translated, "To renew . . . is impossible." Any other translation does not fit the grammar of the passage. There are five participles in 6:4-6 (φωτισθέντας, γευσάμενους, γεννηθέντας, γευσάμενους, παραπεσόντας) all in the accusative case which serve as direct objects to the subject infinitive ἀνακαινίζειν. All five participles are connected by copulas and therefore are related to each other grammatically. Therefore, one cannot divorce παραπεσόντας from the previous four participles but must interpret all five participles as a unit. Furthermore, all five participles are in the aorist tense (antecedent) and are all connected with the one article τοὺς in 6:4. Burton notes, "The aorist participle is most frequently used of an action antecedent in time to the action of the principle verb."¹ Concerning antecedent action, Robertson writes, "This is the usual idiom with the circumstantial participle. This is indeed the most common use of the aorist participle."² That all five of these participles are governed by the article τοὺς in 6:4 seems apparent from the context. Thus, all five of these participles (including παραπέσοντας) are adjectival and not adverbial participles. It is incorrect and inconsistent

¹Ernest DeWitt Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 63.

²A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 860.

both logically and grammatically to translate the last participle as conditional. It is true that adverbial participles can be correctly translated as conditional participles (Heb 2:3; 10:26), but adjectival participles cannot. Adverbial participles never take the article, whereas adjectival participles do. For example, Robertson writes, "The articular participle is always attributive or (substantival)."¹ And again, "When the article is used there is no doubt about the participle being attributive."² Smyth adds in reference to the adverbial or circumstantial participle, "The circumstantial participle has no article."³

Therefore, one cannot translate παραπεσόντας as a conditional participle. Failure to denote this grammatical connection (τούς . . . παραπεσόντας) will only lead to confusion and a distortion of the real meaning of the passage. For example, Guthrie evidently ignores or misunderstands this grammatical connection. He writes, "Much debate has surrounded the interpretation of the 'if' clause. That the writer is thinking of a hypothetical case is hardly to be disputed."⁴ Moreover, Wuest comments, "The words 'fall away' are from a participle in the aorist tense . . . the

¹ Ibid., p. 1104.

² Ibid., p. 1105.

³ Herbert Weir Smyth, Greek Grammar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 457. See also, John A. Sproule, "παραπεσόντας in Hebrews 6:6." In Grace Theological Journal (Fall 1981):327-32, for an excellent discussion.

⁴ Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 632.

classification being a conditional participle. . . Paul here presents a hypothetical case, warning these unsaved Hebrews from making such a thing a reality."¹ However, this interpretation must be rejected since the participle is clearly adjectival rather than adverbial.

Furthermore, the two participles in 6:6b (ἀνασταυροῦντος and παραδειγματίζοντας) agree in gender, number and case with the preceding participles in 6:4-6:6a. Grammatically, these participles describe the same people spoken of in 6:4-6, but are not parallel in sense. Two things suggest this difference: (1) the shift from the aorist tense (6:4-6a) to the present tense (6:6b) and (2) there is no connecting copula between 6:6a and 6:6b. These two participles are adverbial (in contrast to those in 6:4-6:6a) and are probably best taken as circumstantial participles expressing cause. In other words, these two causal participles indicate the reason why those described in 6:4-6:6a cannot be renewed unto repentance.

In conclusion, any interpretation which fails to explain the force of the adjectival participles (including παραπεσόντας) must be dismissed as insufficient in its explanation. The context and the grammar of the passage indicate clearly that this is not a mere hypothetical case. This passage teaches explicitly that those described in 6:4-6 do "fall way." Coupled with 10:39 (ἀπώλειαν), it

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), p. 117.

becomes clear that these warning passages are addressed not to genuine believers but to apostates who are mere "professors" of the truth.

Immediate Context

In 5:11-6:3, the author of Hebrews is exhorting these Hebrew Christians to move on to maturity. He believes that the majority of his readers are genuine believers (6:9) but has doubt concerning some. "Hence, our author, in deep concern, urges upon them that they have everything to gain by standing fast, and everything to lose by slipping back."¹ In 6:3 he writes, "And this will we do, if God permit" (third class condition--more probable future). In other words, 6:3 indicates that "there is an apostasy from which all efforts to recover men are vain. This extreme case the apostolic writer now sets before his readers as a salutary warning."² Furthermore, the writer uses the pronoun 'we' in 6:3, whereas, in 6:4f "he at once speaks of 'those' and proceeds to describe apostates."³ Therefore, those described in 6:4-6 are those whom God would not permit to go on, namely apostates. Bruce underscores this fact when he states, "The reason why there is no point in laying the foundation over again is now stated: apostasy is

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 60.

²Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), p. 279.

³William R. Newell, Hebrews Verse by Verse (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947), p. 183.

irremediable. Once more our author emphasizes that continuance is the test of reality."¹

John Brown writes concerning 6:4-6, "There are three topics brought before us for consideration: First, a description of a particular class of persons; second, a statement with regard to them; and third, a reason assigned for that statement."²

Many able commentators argue a priori that the description of 6:4-5 must refer to genuine believers. However, these commentators fail to note the grammatical significance of παραπεσόντας, as well as, the severe warning of the other passages in this epistle (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 10:26-31,39; 12:15f). John Murray observes,

It staggers us to think of the terms of this description as applicable to those who may fall away. They advise us, however, of forces that are operative in the Kingdom of God and of the influence these forces may exert upon those who finally demonstrate that they had not been radically and savingly affected by them.³

However, this interpretation is confirmed by the statement in 6:9 where the author indicates that the preceding statements described not the saved but the unsaved.

The statement given with reference to this group is, "It is impossible . . . to renew unto repentance." Any interpretation that does not adequately explain this phrase

¹ Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 118.

² Brown, Hebrews, p. 284.

³ Murray, Redemption, Accomplished and Applied, p. 153.

must be deemed insufficient. Bruce rightly observes, "For it is possible for people who can be described in the language of verses 4 and 5 to 'fall away' irretrievably."¹

The reason for this statement is found in 6:6b, "because they are crucifying to themselves the son of God and are exposing him to public ignominy." They are forsaking the substance of Christianity (Christ) for the shadows of Judaism. Consequently, it is evident that the people referred to in 6:4-6 are distinguished from those in 5:11-6:3 and 6:9f. The author offers an illustration in 6:7-8 to demonstrate the two types of people addressed, that is, believers and apostates. The major point of the illustration is that the same ground either yields fruit or is burned. It should be noted by the interpreter that it is not the fruit but the ground that is burned. Hughes concludes, "It is apparent, then, that the sin of apostasy is a grim possibility for persons who through identification with the people of God have been brought within the sphere of the divine blessings."²

However, the author of Hebrews reassures his readers in 6:9 by stating, "But beloved (only time ἀγαπητοί is used in the epistle) we are persuaded better things concerning you, and things accompanying salvation though we are thus speaking." He is convinced that the majority of his readers

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 122.

²Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy." In Westminster Theological Journal (1972-83):150.

are genuine believers and are not classified in the category of those in 6:4-6. This warning does not suggest that a genuine believer can lose his salvation, but forms "a part of God's plan to keep us."¹

Meaning of the Terms

The major terms found in Hebrews 6:4-6 will be defined in this section. Suffice it to say that the terms found in 6:1-3 are explained in light of Judaism and not Christianity. Consequently, the writer urges his readers to leave the shadows of Judaism for the reality that is found in Christ. Talbot correctly observes, "Before we read Hebrews 6:1-3, let us bear in mind that the exhortation of these verses was a call to those Hebrew Christians . . . to leave the ceremonies and shadows of Judaism for the 'perfection' which is in Christ Jesus, the Lord."²

The various phrases found in 6:4-6 have caused considerable disagreement among commentators. Each phrase

¹William M. Aldrich, "Safekeeping: What the Bible Teaches about Final Salvation." In Bibliotheca Sacra (1956):260.

²Louis T. Talbot, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Lesson 7 (Sermons from Church of the Open Door, Los Angeles, California), p. 6. Furthermore, one should note that the θεμέλιον is described by three appositional genitives. That these six doctrines refer back to the shadows of Judaism is clear from the statements found in 9:10 ("washings") and 9:14 ("dead works"). Moreover, God would never instruct Christians to leave behind New Testament doctrines (e.g. baptism). For an excellent discussion see Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), Louis T. Talbot, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Sermons from the Church of the Open Door, Los Angeles, CA), S. Lewis Johnson

will be closely examined and explained in this section. The writer will attempt to demonstrate that these phrases do not refer to a believer but to a professed believer, who ultimately falls away.

After exhorting his readers in 6:1-3, the writer describes those who have experienced a great degree of light, and yet due to intensive persecution, have deliberately renounced it. The author begins his discussion in 6:4 with the conjunctive γάρ. This conjunctive can express: (1) a ground or reason; (2) an explanation; (3) a confirmation or assurance.¹ Evidently, the conjunction is explanatory, identifying what the author meant in 6:3.

The ἀδύνατον is a predicate adjective that appears first in the clause. Westcott notes, "The ἀδύνατον at the head of the sentence is singularly impressive."² The subject of ἀδύνατον is the infinitive ἀνακαλινδίζειν found in 6:6. The phrase should be translated "For (explanatory) (it is) impossible . . . to renew unto repentance." Erasmus held that ἀδύνατον should not be translated "impossible" but "difficult." On the other hand, Bengel insisted that what was impossible for man was certainly possible with

"Some Important Mistranslations in Hebrews." In Bibliotheca Sacra (1953), and A. B. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908).

¹H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 242.

²Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (London: MacMillan and Company, 1914), p. 150.

God. However, as A. B. Davidson remarks, "Impossible must not be toned down to 'very difficult' nor must the edge of the expression be turned by suggesting 'impossible for man.'" ¹ Furthermore, the term ἀδύνατον occurs three other times in this epistle (6:18; 10:4; 11:6) and all three clearly mean "impossible." This phrase, "For it is impossible . . . to renew unto repentance" is never described by a believer. A genuine believer is never refused "repentance" when he comes to God with a penitent heart and confession of sin. Therefore, this passage cannot refer to believers but to unbelievers. Bruce writes, "Those who have shared the covenant privileges of the people of God, and then deliberately renounce them, are the most difficult persons of all to reclaim for the faith."²

As it has been noted earlier in this thesis, the article τοὺς in 6:4 includes all the participles (5) down to παραπεσόντας (6:6a) and describes the same people. This article demonstrates conclusively that all five participles are adjectival rather than adverbial. The ἀπαξ seems to be in direct contrast to the πάλιν in 6:6. On the one hand, the ἀπαξ seems to indicate the completeness of the act. Also the term "qualifies not just the first verb but the whole sequence of verbs, showing that it is a unitary experience, a single, decisive event that is spoken

¹ Andrew Bruce Davidson, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), p. 122.

² Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 118.

of here."¹ On the other hand, Moffatt suggests that πάλιν was added for emphasis.²

The infinitive ἀνακαινίζω is a hapax logomenon found only in Hebrews 6:6. It means "to renew" or "to restore." Normally one would think that the infinitive would come immediately after ἀδύνατον but instead it is separated by a series of participles. Moffatt suggests an explanation to this structure, "The passage is charged with an austerity which shows how seriously the writer took life."³ Therefore, any explanation that fails to interpret the ἀδύνατον and its subjunctival phrase "πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν must be deemed insufficient.

As it has been noted, the five participles in 6:4-6a (φωτισθέντας, γευσασμένους, γεννηθέντας, γευσασμένους, παραπεσόντας) grammatically serve as direct objects to the infinitive ἀνακαινίζειν. All five participles (aorist) are in the accusative case and are all grammatically connected (τε . . . και . . . και . . . τε . . . και). The enclitic particle τε indicates that there is a close

¹Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 220.

²James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. In The International Critical Commentary, edited by Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), p. 79. Also James H. Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949) shed interesting light on πάλιν.

³Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 76.

relationship between the participles.¹ These five participles describe those who cannot be "renewed unto repentance."

The participle φωτισθέντας (aorist passive participle) has been variously interpreted. Intransitively, the verb means "to shine"; transitively it means "to illuminate" or "to give light." The early church (Justin Martyr, second century) attempted to explain φωτίζω as a synonym for baptism. In the Septuagint, the verb was used to signify instruction or teaching (Numbers 24:4; Judges 13:8; 2 Kings 12:2). Evidently the verb corresponds with the phrase λαβεῖν . . . ἀληθείας in 10:26. Westcott writes concerning this term, "Inwardly this crisis of illumination was marked by a reception of the knowledge of the truth (10:26); and outwardly by the admission to Christian fellowship."² Newell adds, "To the mind of a Hebrew, it included complete persuasion by the Holy Spirit that Jesus of Nazareth was his Messiah."³ Illumination certainly leads to salvation, but it is not a technical term synonymous with salvation. An enlightened man is simply one who is well informed in contrast to one who is ignorant. It indicates that one has been exposed to the light (John 1:9; 3:19; 2 Cor 4:4).

¹Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 815.

²Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 150.

³Newell, Hebrews Verse by Verse, p. 185.

The participle γευσσάμενους (aorist middle participle) occurs twice in these verses. It takes δωρεᾶς (genitive) as its object in the first occurrence (6:4) and ρῆμα and δυνάμεις (accusatives) as its object in the second occurrence (6:5). The reason why γευσσάμενους takes a genitive and then an accusative has been debated. Westcott sees a significance in the change. He writes,

The use of the genitive . . . here stands in sharp contrast with the use of the accusative in the following clause It is difficult to suppose that this repetition of the verb with a changed construction is without design and force. The difference which is inherent in the two cases ('a part of,' 'something of,' and 'the thing as a simple object') falls perfectly with the scope of the passage.¹

However, on the other hand, F. W. Farrar writes,

The verb "taste," which in the previous verse is constructed with the genitive (as in the classical Greek) is here followed by an accusative, as is more common in Hellenistic Greek. It is difficult to establish any difference in meaning between the constructions²

The phrase "and have tasted of the heavenly gift" is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Therefore, there has been a considerable amount of speculation concerning this phrase. The various options that have been presented are: Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, the Lord's Supper, and the gospel (e.g. the blessings of the Messianic age). This last suggestion seems the best

¹Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 151.

²F. W. Farrar, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews (Cambridge: University Press, 1883), p. 82.

explanation in light of the book as a whole (2:1-4,5; 3:7f; 10:26f).

The verb γεύομαι means "to partake of" or "to enjoy." It occurs also in Hebrews 2:9 in reference to Christ's death. There it explicitly means to participate fully in. Thus, the interpretation of γεύομαι in 6:4-5 should be consistent with its plain meaning in 2:9. Again, it must be stressed that γεύομαι is not synonymous with salvation. John Brown explains, "To 'taste' the Gospel revelation, is to know, not merely from report but from personal experience, what the Gospel is--to understand in some measure its meaning, and in some measure, too, to enjoy those pleasurable sensations of mind which the Gospel, when understood, naturally produces."¹ Furthermore, Hughes emphasizes that this "tasting" is certainly something real and personal.² Subsequently, this term does not prove that those described here are believers.

The third phrase describing these people is "and have become (aorist passive participle) partakers with the Holy Spirit." The crucial term in this statement is μέτοχος. The term means "to share or participate in." Wuest correctly cautions, "We must be careful to note that the Greek word translated 'partakers' does not mean

¹Brown, Hebrews, p. 285.

²Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 210.

'possessors.'"¹ In other words, to "partake of the Holy Spirit" "is to be a sharer of His gifts or influences."² This phrase does not say that these described are indwelt by the Holy Spirit but they "participate with the Holy Spirit." There is a vast difference. Judas really did cast out demons through his "participation with the Holy Spirit, yet he was lost (Matthew 10; also Simon Magus). Brown concludes, "The persons here described, then, were persons who not only enjoyed what has been termed the common influences of the Holy Spirit, but His miraculous gifts" ³ The term μέτοχος also occurs in Hebrews (1:9; 3:1,14; 12:8).

The fourth phrase indicates that these described "tasted the good word of God." The same comments that were given to γεύομαι earlier apply here also. The key word in this phrase is ῥῆμα. In the Septuagint it was used for a specific promise spoken by God (Joshua 21:45; Zech 1:13). Owen declares that the word ῥῆμα "denotes words spoken and when applied to God, his word as preached and declared."⁴ Thus, the ῥῆμα of God found its fruition, in the Messiah. Consequently, "to taste" this ῥῆμα is to experience fully that God has been faithful to His promises concerning the

¹Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. II, p. 114.

²Brown, Hebrews, p. 286.

³Ibid., p. 287.

⁴John Owen, Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews (London, 1840), p. 218.

coming Messiah. However, again this phrase does not indicate that these addressed are saved.

The fifth phrase describes these as "(having tasted) the powers (miracles) of the coming age." The "coming age" is a description of the Messianic age. These "miracles" (Acts 8:13; Hebrews 2:4; Matthew 7:22) were 'signs' "that the age to come had already broken in upon the present age" ¹ These miracles (Heb 2:4) accompanied the dawn of the Messianic age. Again, this phrase is simply a description of the age of the Messiah to which unbelievers did participate fully in.

The final statement which is linked grammatically with these, states the awful tragedy "and have fallen away" (aorist active participle). This is the only time the verb occurs in the New Testament. It corresponds to the words given in 10:39 "ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν" and to the ἀποστῆναι in 3:12. Delitzsch appropriately writes, "The brief expression παραπεσόντας is to be understood in accordance with 10:26-31, the parallel passage, by which the writer's meaning here is best illustrated, and the missing links of thought supplied."²

The two participles in 6:6b indicate the reason for the "impossibility" affirmed in 6:4-6a. These participles are both present active participles indicating

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 122.

²Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 288.

that they are habitually performing this action. The two major options that have been offered in an attempt to explain these participles are: (1) temporal ("while"); and (2) causal ("because"). The best explanation that does justice to the context is to take both participles as causal.¹ Bruce writes,

To say that they cannot be brought to repentance so long as they persist in their renunciation of Christ would be a truism hardly worth putting into words. The participle 'crucifying' is much more appropriately taken as causal than as temporal in force²

The verb ἀνασταυρόω does not indicate that they crucify Him again but that they lift Him up on the cross. The second verb παραδειγματίζω means "to expose to disgrace." "The two words express the main idea under different aspects. The first . . . marks specially the wrong done to Christ; the second . . . the effect which is produced upon others in deterring them from the faith."³

The seriousness of this action is expressed by making "the Son of God" the object of their attacks. The second verb is a strong expression. It "implies exposing to ignominy or infamy, such as was effected in barbarous times by exposing the quarters of the executed criminal,

¹For an excellent explanation against translating the participles temporally see Roger Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints." In Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 357.

²Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 124.

³Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 153.

or leaving him hanging in chains. Archilochus says Plutarch . . . rendered himself infamous . . . by writing obscene verses."¹ They are reduplicating the action of the Jewish Sanhedrin who crucified Christ because He said that He was the Son of God. These people described are doing it for themselves (ἐαυτοῖς). They are cursing the name of Jesus.

The apostate crucifies Christ on his own account by virtually confirming the judgment of the actual crucifiers, declaring that he too has made trial of Jesus and found Him no true Messiah but a deceiver, and therefore worthy of death.²

Thus, these addressed in 6:4-6 are unbelievers. They are people who have "had their minds enlightened, their consciences stirred, their affections moved to a considerable degree, and yet who were never brought from death into life."³ One cannot argue a priori that these are Christians based on the terms that are used.

This is evident from what is not said. Observe, they were not spoken of as God's elect, as those for whom Christ died, as those who were born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved.⁴

¹Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 4. Edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 299.

²Ibid., p. 298.

³Arthur W. Pink, An Exposition of Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 293.

⁴F. W. Farrar, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, p. 290.

Consequently, those described are apostates who ultimately "fall away" from God.

Ultimate Context

The interpretation of Hebrews six must be viewed in light of the other warning passages in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews is consistent throughout the letter and thus each warning passage refers to the same group of people. The author states in Hebrews 6:4-6 that those described ultimately "fall away." Hebrews 10:26f explains explicitly that these described in Hebrews 6:4-6 "fall away" to ἀπώλειαν (10:39). Westcott notes that this term (only occurrence in Hebrews) is the opposite of σωτηρία.¹ Moffatt comments concerning the warning passage of 10:26f, "In ἐκουσίως . . . ἁμαρτανόντων, ἐκουσίως is put for the sake of emphasis, and ἁμαρτανόντων means the sin of ἀποστῆναι ἀπο Θεου (3:12) or of παραπίπτω (6:6), the present tense implying that such people persist in this attitude."² Consequently, within the letter the author of Hebrews explains what is meant by the term "falling away" in Hebrews 6:6. These are apostates who ultimately spend eternity in hell.

Moreover, the divine illustration that describes this type of person is found in 12:15f. Esau, evidently

¹Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 338.

²Moffatt, Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 149.

an unregenerate man, is likened to this class of people. He is a type of those who cannot be "renewed unto repentance." Therefore, the ultimate context demonstrates conclusively that Hebrews 6:4-6 is not describing believers but unbelievers.

"If" Clauses in Hebrews

Any interpretation which ignores the "if" clauses throughout Hebrews is insufficient in its exposition. These clauses (2:3; 3:6,14; 6:3; 10:26,38) substantiate the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Bruce writes, "The conditional sentences of this epistle are worthy of special attention. Nowhere in the NT more than here do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality."¹ Concerning the "if" clauses Berkouwer writes, "The Epistle to the Hebrews is no less explicit in warning against apostasy as a real threat."² Moreover, one should not be bothered by the use of the pronoun "we." The writer, being a Jew, "employs, as a recognition of Jewish unity, the pronoun 'we.'"³ Consequently, the various "if" clauses must be explained in terms of meaning and contingency as they are integrated throughout this epistle.

¹Bruce, Hebrews, p. 59.

²Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance, p. 86.

³Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Eternal Security of the Believer." In Bibliotheca Sacra (1949):409.

CHAPTER V

ILLUSTRATIONS

There are many illustrations in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that demonstrate the doctrine that is taught in Hebrews 6:4-6. Hughes rightly states, "It is not enough to have the name of the Lord upon one's lips in worship and invocation Even to prophesy and to cast out demons and do many mighty works in the Lord's name does not necessarily guarantee trueness of heart."¹ Biblical illustrations that supplement the teaching of Hebrews 6:4-6 are provided from the lives of Judas Iscariot, Balaam, and Esau. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews sets forth two illustrations that further define and explain Hebrews 6:4-6 (6:7-8; 12:15f).

The author pens solemn words in his illustration of 6:7-8. One cannot interpret this illustration in the sense of believers being judged for sin. It simply does not fit the tenor of Scripture. Furthermore, his statement in 6:9 clearly indicates that the author had unbelievers in mind ("But, beloved, we are convinced better things of you, and things that belong to salvation, though we thus speak").

¹Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," p. 149.

The term εὐλογία occurs only here and in 12:17 in reference to the apostate Esau. The "burning" that is pictured in 6:7-8 is also referred to in 10:26-27 and 12:29. Thus, the author is not thinking of the believer's judgment but of a "final punishment . . . which he associates as usual with fire."¹ Also, the ἐγγύς does not indicate that this curse will not take place but that only it is a matter of time (8:13).

The crucial illustration that sheds light on Hebrews 6:4-6 is the author's own illustration of Esau (12:15f). He writes in Hebrews 6:4-6, "It is impossible . . . to renew unto repentance." Moreover, to amplify this concept, he writes concerning Esau in 12:17, "For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Therefore, it seems clear that if Esau was an unbeliever, then those addressed in 6:4-6 are unbelievers also.

Balaam is a classic example of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the Old Testament. He was a pagan prophet who was illuminated "who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High . . ." (Numbers 24:16). Yet, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Balaam was an unbeliever (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14). He was a man who experienced a great deal of light, who

¹Moffatt, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 82.

knew the knowledge of God, yet turned away from it for his own gain.

One of the most revealing illustrations in the New Testament is that of Judas Iscariot. He was appointed by the Lord Himself (Mark 3:13) to not only preach but also "to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out demons" (Mark 3:15). All indications reveal that Judas actually did cast out demons and perform various miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was a man who walked with the Lord of glory for three years, proclaimed the message of the Kingdom, and yet "fell away." In fact, he was called "the Son of Perdition" (John 17:12). Therefore Judas Iscariot is a prime example of those who experience abundant light, and yet "fall away." Hughes rightly notes, "Many of the same voices that cried 'Hosanna' . . . and hailed Jesus as king on Palm Sunday insistantly demanded his crucifixion on Good Friday."¹ Also, the doctrines taught in 2 Peter 2, 1 John, and Luke 8 are exemplary of the serious warning of Hebrews 6.

¹Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," p. 149.

Inasmuch as there are some sensitive souls who torment themselves with the thought that they have committed this sin, it may be wise to point out that their concern about this indicates that they are not immune to the grace of God nor incapable of repentance.¹

Hughes sums up the whole situation appropriately,

What he has reason to fear is that some among them who have professed Christian faith, enjoyed Christian fellowship, and engaged in Christian witness may prove to be hypocrites and enemies of Christ and, by turning their backs on the light they have known, show that they do not in fact belong to God's people at all.²

¹Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints," p. 364.

²Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," p. 155.

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