

Hebrews 6:1-12 • Pressing Ahead or Falling Back

Introduction

Can a Christian lose his or her salvation? More specifically, does Hebrews 6:1-12 teach this? Remember that Hebrews is written at a time of greater and greater persecution of the church, and many were resorting to their old Jewish habits and religion. This is really the “Parable of the Sower” in action, the real-life application of what kind of ground (or life) the seed of the Gospel fell on, and to what degree of success it is having. Read Hebrews 6:1-12 before beginning the study.

¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God

[Read v.1]

Q: What is the writer referring to in stating, “...leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ...”?

A: From time to time we need to be reminded that Hebrews was a letter with no chapter or verse markings. Whenever we words such as “therefore”, “but”, et al, a conclusion is about to be presented based on the **preceding** remarks. Therefore, let's read 5:12-14 to see what the writer is referring to:

¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Q: What is the writer referring to in v.1?

A: The reference is to the statement in v.12, “...the elementary principles of the oracles of God...” and the fact that their spiritual immaturity is preventing them from growing into the deeper “word of righteousness” mentioned in v.13. They are being challenged that their spiritual difficulties lie in having an infant-like or immature walk which, according to v.14, produces erratic results due to their inability to discern between good and evil in order to go to a deeper level.

Q: Describe the overall situation. What is the writer trying to identify in the lives of these Believers?

A: They are stuck at the beginning of the Gospel, the justification of past sin through the work of the cross; they are failing to take the next steps of sanctification, the working out in our lives the Gospel which separates us from the world, devoted in every way to Christ, growing into His calling.

¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What are the six basic teachings (“elementary principles” or “elementary teaching”) found in v.1 and 2, and what is their meaning?

1. **“...repentance from dead works...”** This refers to the old way of following only the OT Law. This was the message of John the Baptist, to repent of going through the motions of being religious and to become truly changed from the heart, to repent in order to accept the “live” works, so to speak, to come through the Messiah.
2. **“...faith toward God...”** This is the distinction of having a relationship with God based not on keeping the OT Law but upon a faithful relationship with Him through Christ. [Note: Remember “faith” and “faithfulness” are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew.]
3. **“...instruction about washings...”** Although some translations use “baptism”, “washings” is a better translation as this term in the Greek is never used of baptism. The plural form of the word is also inconsistent with the concept of singular baptism, as we are baptized but once. Therefore, “instructions about washings” probably refers to the act of regeneration which is performed by the Holy Spirit when one receives

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Christ and stands in contrast to the OT's myriad cleansing requirements and rituals which were a shadow teaching of the work of the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5, *"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,"*

4. **"...laying on of hands..."** Most likely this refers to the laying on of hands to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, probably an "elementary" teaching following the point of salvation as evidenced in the early church (e.g., Acts 8:17-18; 9:17). The gift provided generally identifies a calling to perform greater works/deeds on behalf of the Kingdom of God.
5. **"...the resurrection of the dead..."** Another teaching that would logically follow closely to the early stages of a Believer's salvation experience referring to the hope of the resurrection of Believers as a result of Christ's resurrection.
6. **"...eternal judgment..."** That Jesus will return to judge the nations and all unrighteousness.

Q: Can you summarize these basic doctrines of Christianity?

1. Repentance of sin/the old life.
2. Walking in faith/faithfulness towards God.
3. Walking according to the Spirit.
4. Receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
5. The hope (future fact) of our resurrection in Christ.
6. Final judgment.

¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God

[Read v.1 again]

Q: What does the writer say in regard to how these Christians are to consider these basic Christian teachings?

A: "...leaving..."

Q: Is "leaving" the same as "forgetting"? What is the point here?

A: It means moving on beyond them toward maturity, to continue as Paul states in Colossians 1:9, *"filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"*

Application: Do people who have received Christ fail to grow spiritually, and perhaps have even forgotten the basic understanding of what it means to be a Christian? If so, what do they tend to believe instead? (They tend to go back to the way they believed before.) Have we ever done this? Do we know of anyone who has?

³And this we will do, if God permits.

[Read v.3]

Q: What is the writer referring to when stating "...this we will do..."?

A: It's a reference to verse 1, *"...press on toward maturity..."* That is, the writer won't have to begin a square one with them again.

Q: What will be the result of a failure on their part to "press on"?

A: There are two possible consequences: Living a life of gross spiritual immaturity or lapsing back into a state in which even the *"elementary principles"* are not going to have an impact.

⁴For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

[Read v.4-6]

Q: To whom is the writer referring: Christians, non-Christians, or those who appear to be Christians but aren't really born again?

A: The writer is specifically referring to Christians. There can be no other good explanation based on the phrase, "...and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit." These are born-again Believers.

Q: Is the writer discussing the salvation of these Believers, or something else?

A: There are no grounds for interpreting that salvation is the issue, nor that their "falling away" is the equivalent to a loss of salvation. The issue is apostasy; that is, Christians who are true Christians but fall away from the faith.

"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." – Matthew 24:24

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction," – 2 Thessalonians 2:3

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons," – 1 Timothy 4:1

"Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." – Hebrews 3:12

Q: How does the phrase "...it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.." fit into this teaching?

A: This is the explanation of "fallen away" in v.6. If one falls away from Christ, where else will he or she go to find the repentance from sin, guilt and/or shame? If one leaves Christ, repentance from some other source is impossible. These are true Christians who are no longer walking with Christ. A peak at next week's reading explains their situation:

²⁶For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." – Hebrews 10:26-31

⁹But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. ¹⁰For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

[Read v.9-12]

Q: What are some things Christians can do to (1) keep from falling away, and (2) keep each other from falling away?

A: The beginning of the answer in v.1-8 is to press on to maturity, that is to aspire to a deeper knowledge and implementation of God's Word in our life in order to discern the choices that lead to a faithful walk. An encouragement in v.9-12 is to be "...imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"; that is, to follow the example of mature Believers.

Application: *What is this teaching speaking to us personally in terms of our own walk and spiritual maturity? Are we still at the beginning? Are we sliding back towards the influences of the old life? What will we do to press onward?*