

Hebrews 6:4-8

These verses do not teach that a Christian can lose his or her salvation. Other portions of Scripture teach emphatically that once a person is saved he is sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13, 14), inherits eternal life and will never perish (Jn 3:16, 10:27-29). That person can never lose his salvation. In short, once saved—saved forever!

Scripture does not contradict itself so there has to be another explanation for these verses in Hebrews 6. And there is. They are a description of a person who has professed, or claimed, to be a Christian at one time and later turns his back deliberately on the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 4 and 5 describe some of the privileges this person has received in identifying himself as a Christian.

He has been “enlightened” (v. 4)—he has understood the way of salvation but has not accepted Christ as his Savior. Judas Iscariot had been enlightened by spending three years with the Lord Jesus but he never truly received the light (Jn 8:12).

He has “tasted the heavenly gift” (v. 4) which is the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is possible to taste something and not to eat it, to reject it after tasting it.

He has “become a partaker of the Holy Spirit” (v. 4). This may sound like the person really is saved but not necessarily so. The Holy Spirit works in a person’s life before he becomes a Christian, and even in people who don’t become Christians (Jn 16:8). He convicts people of sin and leads them to repent and accept the Lord Jesus as Savior. The person being described in this verse has experienced the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in his life, but he has not responded in actual faith to put his trust in the Lord.

He has “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” He is like the rocky soil in the parable of Matthew 13:19-20. When he first hears the Word of God he accepts it gladly but as soon as he has some hard times, he abandons the truth he knows. The powers of the age to come refers to the miracles that will take place in the millennial kingdom when Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years. The miracles performed by Peter and John and others in the early days of the Church (Acts 5:12-16) were a foretaste of the signs and wonders that will characterize the millennial kingdom.

This passage goes on to say that if a person has experienced all of the above privileges, and then “falls away” or turns his back on the Lord Jesus deliberately, it is impossible to renew him to repentance. “To turn from Christ is to reject His claims, make Him an impostor and justify the Jews who crucified Him.” (Landis, p. 64-65). To reject Christ after experiencing these blessings is to insult Him and expose Him to open contempt.

Only a person who has never truly put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior would do such a thing. We call such a person an “apostate.” Apostasy is willfully “abandoning what one believes in”. It is not the same thing as backsliding or falling into sin. Even as Christians we all sin, but that sin is taken care of when we confess it to the Lord (1 Jn 1:9). The sin of apostasy

involves a deliberate decision to turn away from the Lord Jesus Christ and renounce Him and the salvation He offers, after full knowledge of the truth, and enjoying the privileges discussed in verses 4 and 5.

(see following pages)

Hebrews 6:7, 8 give an illustration from nature of a true believer and an apostate. They are each compared to land that receives abundant rainfall and careful cultivation. The one in verse 7 produces useful crops and good fruit and receives the blessing of God. This is a picture of the true believer. All the privileges mentioned in verses 4 and 5 cause him to truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and continue in his walk with the Lord. The other land (verse 8) only produces thorns and thistles and is good for nothing but to be burned. This is a picture of the apostate. Even though he has experienced the privileges described in verses 4 and 5, he has not responded in true repentance and put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(The following paragraphs from MacDonald's commentary on Hebrews "From Ritual to Reality" may be very helpful to a person concerned about whether or not these verses actually apply to himself—whether or not he is an apostate).

"Apostates are people who hear the gospel, who make a profession of being Christians, who become identified with a Christian assembly, and who then abandon their profession of faith, decisively repudiate Christ, desert the Christian fellowship, and take their place with the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Apostasy is a sin which can be committed only by unbelievers, not by those who are deceived but by those who knowingly, willfully, and maliciously turn against the Lord.

"It should not be confused with the sin of the average unbeliever who hears the gospel but does nothing about it. For instance, a man may fail to respond to Christ after repeated invitations from the Holy Spirit. But he is not an apostate. He can still be saved if he will commit himself to the Saviour. Of course, if he dies in unbelief, he is lost forever, but he is not hopeless as long as he is capable of exercising faith in the Lord.

"Apostasy should not be confused with backsliding. A true believer may wander very far away from Christ. Through sin his fellowship with God is shattered. He may even reach the point where he is no longer recognized as a Christian. But he can be restored to full fellowship as soon as he confesses and forsakes his sin (1 John 1:9).

"Apostasy is not the same as the unpardonable sin mentioned in the Gospels. That was the sin of attributing the miracles of the Lord Jesus to the prince of the demons. His miracles were actually performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. To attribute them to the devil was tantamount to blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It implied that the Holy Spirit was the devil. Jesus said that such a sin could never be forgiven, either in that age or in the age to come (Mark 3:22-30). Apostasy is similar to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in that it is an eternal sin, but there the resemblance ends.

“We believe that apostasy is the same as the sin unto death mentioned in 1 John 5:16b (AV). John was writing about people who had professed to be believers and had participated in the activities of local churches. Then they had imbibed the false teaching of the gnostics and had spitefully left the Christian fellowship. Their deliberate departure indicated that they had never been truly born again (1 John 2:19). By openly denying that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22), they had committed the sin unto death, and it was useless to pray for their recovery (1 John 5:16b).

“Oftentimes earnest Christians are troubled when they read Hebrews 6 and similar passages. Satan uses these verses especially to unsettle believers who are having physical, mental, or emotional difficulties. They fear that they have fallen away from Christ and that there is no hope for their restoration. They worry that they have drifted beyond redemption’s point. The fact that they are even concerned about it is conclusive evidence that they are not apostates. An apostate would not have any such fears; he would brazenly repudiate Christ.

“If the sin of apostasy does not apply to believers, to whom then does it apply in our day? It applies, for instance, to a young man who makes a profession of faith in Christ and seems to go on brightly for a while, but then something happens in his life. Perhaps he experiences bitter persecution. Perhaps he falls into gross immorality. Or perhaps he goes off to college and is shaken by the anti-Christian arguments of atheistic teachers. With full knowledge of the truth, he deliberately turns away from it. He completely renounces Christ and viciously tramples on every sacred, fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. The Bible says it is impossible to restore such an one to repentance, and experience corroborates the Bible. We have known many who have apostasized from Christ, but we have never known one who has returned to Him.”

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