

Heb. 6:3-8 The Danger of Apostasy: A Warning for Christians

Let me begin by saying that our passage today is one of the most debated passages in the Bible concerning what we call “eternal security.” In other words, “*Can a saved person be lost?*” Or to put another way, “*Can someone who has been born again through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and then united with Christ fall away?*” There are those who use this passage to say, “*Yes, this is possible.*” I disagree! I do not think this passage teaches that a true Christian can be lost. However, I do believe that the warning passages of Hebrews (like this one) are for Christians. I believe these warnings are God’s means of grace that work in us as we hear the Word and spur us to love and good works as we live in this world as pilgrims on the way to the heaven. I must say that I myself have been moved greatly with fear, and through these warnings, I examine myself. I think of 2 Pet. 1:10 which says: “**Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.**” Or 2 Cor. 13:5: “**Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!**” And, some of you have also approached me with the same thoughts and questions as God is using these words for your sanctification. Therefore, we need these warnings. With this in mind, I have 3 questions to answer: 1) What is apostasy? 2) To whom are these warnings written? 3) How can we apply these warnings?

1. What is the sin of Apostasy. These are very serious words we find in vv. 4-6. In v. 4 he says it is “**impossible**” for those who have been “*enlightened*,” have “*tasted the heavenly gift*,” have “*shared in the Holy Spirit*,” have “*tasted the goodness of the word of God*,” and the “*powers of the age to come*,” and then “**have fallen away**,” to “**restore them again to repentance**.” I believe he is teaching the doctrine of apostasy, to fall away from Christ never to return again. I think this is the clear meaning of the words: *Impossible . . . have fallen away . . . to restore them again to repentance*. Our example from cps. 3-4 is the Hebrew people at the edge of the Land of Canaan, having seen and experienced the great power of God in their lives. And then, many of them rejected the great promise of God, in spite of all He had done. And God says to them, you will not enter the Land. You will not enter my rest. You will perish in the dessert. Only your children (with Joshau and Caleb) will go in. And at that time, the people realized they had sinned and tried to fight against some to the nearby inhabitants. But, God was not with them. It was “**impossible**” after they had “**fallen away**” to “**restore them again to repentance.**”

Personally, I believe in principle, this is the same as what Jesus calls the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ day, the religious leaders saw him heal the sick, cause the lame to walk, open the eyes of the blind. They saw him cast out demons and heard him teach with unmatched authority. And in spite of these things, they still rejected him, and even in their case, attributed his works to Satan (Mark 3:22-30). I think this is certainly what happened with Judas who walked with Jesus for three years, seeing everything He had done and been privy to being a part of the first 12 disciples, and then, in the end, left him for 30 pieces of silver.

I believe the sin of apostasy is a complete falling away, a total abandonment of Christianity. It is a willful turning of the back on God’s revealed truth, a complete repudiation of the Gospel. As 1 Tim. 1:19 says it is to “make a shipwreck of the faith.” A.W. Pink says, “*This terrible sin is not committed by a mere nominal professor, for he has nothing really to fall away from, save an empty name. The class here described are such as had had their minds enlightened, their*

consciences stirred, their affections moved to a considerable degree, and yet who were never brought from death unto life.” And “It is the total renunciation of all the distinguishing truths and principles of Christianity, and this not secretly, but openly, which constitutes apostasy.”

And notice what the author says about what constitutes this great sin in v. 6: **“Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”** This means that those who commit apostasy and turn away from Christ in this way are just like those standing near the cross where Jesus died and shout: “crucify him, crucify him.” In this way they crucify him again and hold him up to contempt. To abandon Christ, who is God’s Son, who is superior to ALL things, is to say that his death was nothing, it didn’t accomplish anything. What a frightening description! I hope NO ONE in this room ever commits apostasy!

2. To whom are these warnings written? I believe these warnings are for Christians. Though there may be various reasons, I will mention two.

First Reason: The multiple warnings in the Book of Hebrews is addressed to new covenant believers. Look over at 2:1. The author writes: **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”** Look over at another warning in 3:12-14: **“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”** Look at 4:1: **“Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”** Also, in 4:11: **“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”** Heb. 10:26: **“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins . . .”** Look back at 5:11: **“About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”** And finally to 6:1: **“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity . . .”** In every case, these warnings are for Christians. It would seem strange if the author singled out the one warning in Heb. 6.

Second Reason: These descriptions in vv. 4-5 seem to be what happens to Christians. Let me say I do believe the author is using OT examples as pictures. They were enlightened, possibly referring to the fire of God leading them in the dessert. They tasted of the manna that fell from heaven. They shared in the Holy Spirit as He worked among them. They certainly tasted of the goodness of God’s Word, and had witnessed great miraculous powers. At the same time, I believe the author is speaking to new covenant Christians who had also experienced the fulfillment of these pictures in Christ. Therefore, to be **“enlightened,”** to **“taste the heavenly gift,”** to **“share in the Holy Spirit,”** to **“taste the goodness of the Word of God,”** who is Christ, and also the **“powers of the age to come,”** is to be a true Christian.

Now, as you think about the sin of apostasy being addressed to Christians, you probably have lots of questions. You may think *“if the warning of apostasy is given to Christians, then they must be able to fall away.”* Or maybe you think, *“this warning is given to a mixed group of professing Christians, where the elect continue in the faith, but the non-elect fall away.”* For the most part this is the Presbyterian view which sees the new covenant as having both Christians

and non-Christians. Now, I may be wrong, but I see this passage as directed at believers, who in the end do not commit this sin, which brings us to our last question.

3. How do we apply these warnings? I have some comments and specific applications.

Comment: There will always be a mixed audience for those who hear and respond to the preached word. Think about the parable of the soils. Remember that 3 of the 4 examples responded positively to the gospel, but only 1 remained, the other 2 fell away. There are those of us here who are not Christians. But, they really have nothing to fall away from. And though some may respond to the general preaching of the Word and even consider such a warning, these warnings (as I've shown) are for Christians.

Comment: The sin of apostasy is a real warning with a real danger, as are all the warnings in Hebrews. As we've seen, they are warned against "*drifting away*" (2:1), "*neglecting their salvation*" (2:3), "*hardening their hearts*" (2:7-8, 15), "*falling away from the living God*" (3:12), etc. These warnings are for Christians. These warnings aren't "looking back" upon those who have fallen away. They are not retrospective, but prospective. They are exhortations describing a real danger. And, this warning isn't just hypothetical. Examples: Think of Road signs. "*Danger ahead.*" "*Curvy road.*" "*Ice on bridge.*" If you do not heed them, what will happen? I think of Parents warning their kids of running into the street or looking both ways. Why? If they disobey, they may be struck by a car and killed. Poisonous labels warn us of what will happen if we ingest them. If we are playing near a cliff, what is the best way to keep anyone from getting too close? Warn them.

Comment: These warnings are means God uses for our sanctification. Let me give an example from Scripture. Acts 27. Paul, along with prisoners being transported to Rome, are on a ship. And there came a fierce storm. And all of them were full of fear as they knew they would probably die. But Paul stood before them and said, "**Take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, "Do not be afraid . . . God has granted you ALL those who sail with you"** (vv. 21-24). And then some days later as the storm continued, the sailors tried to escape and get into lifeboats. And Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "**Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.**" Then the soldiers cut away the ropes." (vv. 27-32). Here, Paul had been promised that none would die. But, he warns them with real danger.

Application: There is a tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. An end assured by God does not negate the divinely appointed means to that end. In other words just because God has decreed something to happen, doesn't mean we can neglect our responsibility to use God's appointed means. Think again of sovereignty and salvation and the call of the gospel. Though God elects before the foundation of the world and predestines Christians to adoption through Christ (Rom. 9:11-18; Eph. 1:5), the elect cannot call on and believe in him unless the good news of the gospel is preached to them (Rom. 9:14). Paul (Jesus, others) still calls on sinners to repent and believe the gospel! God's electing purposes from before creation do not invalidate the requirement that sinners must have faith in Jesus to be saved. Belief is a condition to be saved, but God through his grace has promised to fulfill that condition. Phil. 1:6:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Look over at Heb. 6:9: **“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.”** (See Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 8:28-30; etc.)

Another example is the suffering and temptations of Jesus. Heb. 5:8 says: **“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”** As we’ve seen in Hebrews, he was “without sin.” So, does his moral perfections make his temptations and testings void? In other words, if Jesus suffered and was genuinely tempted to disobey God, does this not necessarily imply that it was possible for him to disobey God? Apparently not according to Hebrews. It was impossible for Jesus to sin. Yet his temptations were real and purposeful that he might be made a merciful and faithful high priest to make propitiation for the people (2:17).

The warning texts in Hebrews are similar. We are presented with a real danger. And we respond positively. As a child listens to his/her parents about the danger of not getting the road, so we believe God with healthy fear as we examine our own lives. This means by way of application that we cannot take the continual and immutable nature of God’s grace for granted or to respond to it with passivity. If we stop praying what will happen. If we stop reading our Bibles what will happen? If we stop sharing the gospel what will happen? What happens if we turn away from Christ? Etc. These are real dangers and we must heed them!

Application: I do not believe this text teaches that one can lose salvation. I don’t need to recall all the verses and all the passages that teach God will keep his children to the end. They are numerous. You might say, *“What about Judas?”* The apostle John says this about him. **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”** (1 John 2:19).

Application: You are not in danger of committing the sin of apostasy if you look unto Christ with a repentant heart. If you are in Christ, you are secure. Have you ever fallen into sin and looked at this passage (and others) and thought, *“That’s me. I’ve committed this sin.”* And then you fall into great despair as you think you may have “fallen away” and now it’s too late for you . . . But, are you still looking unto Christ with a repentant heart? Remember, Christ will not completely break a broken blade of grass, nor will he allow the fire to go out of the smoldering ember. The key is repentance and faith. Brothers and sisters, if this warning appeals to your mind and your heart and you see the danger, and when you hear these words and when you leave this morning, you are drawn closer to Christ, then this warning is God’s means to your sanctification. Praise God for such a warning!

Application. In the end, Christians bear fruit. Look at vv. 7-8. (Read) What does this mean? It means obedience to God as we trust the promise of God found in the Gospel of Christ.