

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON THIRTY-SEVEN)**

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN **(PART TEN)**

In our previous two Lessons, we have looked at passages of Scripture which, on the surface, seem to contradict the doctrine of the security of the Christian's position in Christ. We have seen that these seeming contradictions may be adequately resolved when we consider them in the light of their proper contexts.

One of the passages we examined was **Hebrews 6:4-6**, which we explored in the context of the "warning" passages contained in the epistle to the **Hebrews**. In this Lesson, we will scrutinize this particular passage in greater detail, in light of the fact that it is arguably the one that poses the most problems for persons who embrace the doctrine of the Christian's position in Christ. Certainly, those persons who believe that it is possible for a real Christian to so sin and backslide as to fall from grace and be lost eternally, have appealed to this passage, more than any other for proof of their theory.

HEBREWS 6:4-6

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

In studying the epistle to the **Hebrews**, it is critically important that we recognize that the theme of the epistle is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Unless we keep this in mind constantly as we read the epistle, we will go astray. The writer is not contrasting two different stages of Christianity, a childish stage and a mature stage. Rather, he is exalting the substance over the shadow; he is elevating reality over type; he is magnifying Christ over the Law; he is extolling the New Covenant over the Old Covenant.

The writer is of the opinion that the Hebrews had not yet clearly grasped the fact that Judaism was but a temporary system. Its ordinances and ceremonies merely foreshadowed Him who was to come, who would make a complete atonement for the sins of His people. Now that He had come and finished His work, the types and shadows had served their purpose, and had been replaced by Christ, the Substance.

There is no doubt that **Hebrews 6:4-6** is one of the most solemn passages, not only in this particular epistle but in the entire New Testament. It speaks of persons who had been highly privileged, who subsequently had brought shame and reproach on the cause of Christ; and who were in such a hopeless condition that it was *"impossible.... to renew them again unto repentance."*

The primary area of difficulty connected with this passage is to make sure of the class of persons who are referred to. Is the writer, here, describing saved or unsaved persons? The next thing is to ascertain what is meant by the phrase, *"If they shall fall away."* It is our opinion that the *"falling away"* which the writer speaks of here means a deliberate, complete and final rejection of Jesus Christ which is a sin for which there is no forgiveness. The writer's contention that it would be *"impossible"* for persons in such a condition to be renewed again to repentance, clearly indicates that their state is one that is beyond hope of recovery.

Dr. Aaron Adolph Saphir was a Hungarian Jew who converted to Christianity and became a Jewish Presbyterian missionary. Regarding the context of the passage we are examining, Dr. Saphir made the following observations: *“The exhortation must be viewed in connection with the special circumstances of the Hebrews. After the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, the gospel had been preached unto the Jews by the apostles, and the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit had been manifested among them. The Hebrews had accepted the gospel of the once crucified and now glorified Redeemer, who sent down from heaven the Spirit, a sign of His exaltation, and a pledge of the future inheritance. Having thus entered into the sphere of New Covenant manifestation, any one who willfully abandoned it could only relapse into that phase of Judaism which crucified the Lord Jesus. There was no other alternative for them, but either to go on to the full knowledge of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, and to the believer’s acceptance and worship through the Mediator in the sanctuary above, or fall back into the attitude, not of the godly Israelites before Pentecost, such as John the Baptist and those who waited for the promised redemption, nor even into the condition of those for whom the Savior prayed, ‘for they know not what they do;’ but into a state of willful conscious enmity against Christ, and the sin of rejecting Him, and putting Him to an open shame.”*

In order to return to Judaism, the Hebrews would have to reject Jesus Christ, who had left their house “desolate” according to **Matthew 23:38**. This would be a clear indicator that they had fallen from grace, and placed themselves under the curse of the Law, including that aspect of the curse which had brought the guilt of the blood of Jesus on their nation.

In considering the persons spoken of, it is important to note that the writer does not say, “those of us who were once enlightened,” nor even “you who were once enlightened.” Instead, he says *“those who were once enlightened.”* In sharp contrast, he writes in verse 9: *“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.”* It is apparent that the writer is addressing two separate groups.

The group that he refers to as “those” was a group who had enjoyed great privileges. These are outlined in verses 4 and 5. They were *“those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.”*

Firstly, the writer says they had been “enlightened.” These Hebrews had experienced the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy as recorded in **Matthew 4:16**: *“The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”* Unlike the Gentiles, whom Jesus Christ largely refrained from visiting while He was on the earth, the Jews who heard Him and among whom He ministered, were wonderfully blessed.

The word “enlightened” is a translation of the Greek word **photizo, fo-tid’-zo**, which means, “to shed rays, i.e. to shine or to brighten.” The writer uses the word here to signify “the giving of light or knowledge by teaching.” These Hebrews had been instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a clear understanding of it. Their enlightenment, however, seems to have been only a natural knowledge of spiritual things, such as may be gained by outward hearing or reading. It fell far short of that spiritual enlightenment which creates transformation.

Secondly, the writer informs us that they had “tasted” of the heavenly gift. To “taste” is to have a personal experience of something, in contrast from merely receiving a report of the thing. Tasting does not necessarily include eating, much less digesting. The word “tasted” is a translation of the Greek word **geuomai, ghyoo’-om-ahee**. Inherent in the idea of this Greek word are two factors. Firstly, the tasting is of a temporary, not a permanent nature. Secondly, a longer lasting experience may or may not follow the tasting.

Matthew 27:34 gives us an illustration of this: *“They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had **tasted** thereof, he would not drink.”* Jesus **“tasted”** the mixture of vinegar and gall, however, He did not **“drink”** it. Of course, there is some kind of experience in every tasting of a thing, but the common factor in all instances of tasting is that the tasting is a temporary experience, not a continuing one and it may or may not result in any permanent experience or permanent change in the person doing the tasting. The author of the epistle clearly does not say that these Hebrews were made alive or transformed by the heavenly gift. If they had been made alive and were transformed then, they would not have fallen away. Again, we refer to **1 John 2:19**: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”*

If, in fact, the author of the epistle desired to emphasize the continuing results of the tasting, he could have done so easily with the use of the perfect participle in the Greek. But instead of doing so, he used the aorist participle, thereby, indicating only that the tasting occurred, without signifying anything about the continuing effects of the tasting. In fact, the author of the epistle uses aorist participles in respect of all the privileges which he mentions in verses **4** and **5**! In other words, the construction in the Greek as it relates to these Hebrews enjoying certain spiritual privileges, would seem to indicate that the author desired to emphasize that their experiencing of these privileges was only temporary in nature.

In **John 6:51**, our Lord said, *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man **eat** of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* The word translated **“eat”** in this passage is not **geuomai** but **phago**, **fag’-o**, which means **“to eat, devour, consume.”** Jesus did not say, **“If a man taste of this bread he shall live for ever.”** He said **if a man eat or devour or consume this bread, he shall live for ever!** Brothers and sisters, if we want to live forever it is not sufficient for us to merely taste Jesus, it is necessary for us to devour Him!

It is, therefore, likely that those who **“tasted of the heavenly gift”** had some experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, most likely in convicting them of sin (**John 16:8**), perhaps in the healing of their bodies or in their being delivered from demon possession (**Mark 1:32-34**). Perhaps some of them had even been used by the Holy Spirit to cast out demons (**Matthew 12:27**). We must remember that it was to a Jewish audience that Jesus had spoken these gravely serious words in **Matthew 7:21-23**: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

Such experiences of the Holy Spirit do not in and of themselves, indicate salvation, for those who are under conviction can resist the Holy Spirit (**Acts 7:51**). In fact, they may resist to the point of blaspheming against the Spirit (**Matthew 12:31**).

Thirdly, the author of the epistle advises us that these Hebrews were **“made partakers of the Holy Ghost.”** The word **“partakers”** is a translation of the Greek word **metochos**, (**met’-okh-os**), which refers to **“a participant, a sharer, an associate.”** This Greek word has a wide range of meaning and may imply very close participation and attachment, or may imply only a loose association with the other person or persons named. The term commonly means someone who shares or participates in something with someone else. The exact nature of the participation and the benefits that result from the association is determined by each circumstance and association.

We must be careful to note that the word **metochos** does not mean “possessors,” in the sense that these Hebrews possessed the Holy Spirit as an indweller who had come to take up His permanent abode in their hearts.

The word **metochos** is used in **Luke 5:7**: “*And they beckoned unto their **partners**, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.*” The word “*partners*” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word **metochos**. Here, it means one who cooperates with another in a common task or undertaking.

The word **metochos** is used in **Hebrews 1:9**: “*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy **fellows**.*” Here, the word is translated “*fellows*.” And is a reference to the angels. The angels are described as “*fellows*” of our Lord, meaning that they are associated with Him in the work of salvation.

The word **metochos** signifies one who participates with another in a common activity. This is how the word is used in **Hebrews 6:4**. These Hebrews became participators in the Holy Spirit in so far as an unsaved person can do so, namely, in the sense of them cooperating with Him in His ministry of revealing to them the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant over the Law and its sacrifices. They were now in danger of turning their backs upon the Spirit and returning to the sacrifices.

There was nothing permanent of itself in this work, for the work was only a means to an end. As we noted earlier, this is shown by the author’s use of the aorist participle, referring to the mere fact, not speaking of a finished act having present results. The fact that the writer did not use the perfect tense here, which is a specialized tense, but rather the aorist, points to the incompleteness of the work of the Spirit in the case of these Hebrews. So far as the work had been done, it was perfect, but it would not be complete until the Hebrews accepted the proffered faith from the Spirit. The incompleteness of the work would be due, therefore, not to the Spirit, but to their unwillingness to go on as a partner or cooperator with the Spirit.

This word in its context does not at all imply that these Hebrews had been born of the Spirit, sealed with the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, or anointed with the Spirit.

Fourthly, the author of the epistle states that these Hebrews had “*tasted the good Word of God.*” Much, if not all, of what we said concerning the matter of the Hebrews having “*tasted of the heavenly gift,*” is applicable here. The same Greek word **geuomai**, (**ghyoo’-om-ahee**), is used. Brothers and sisters, any Word that God has spoken is a good gift to human beings. The group of persons that the author of the epistle has in mind had come to hear something of God’s word to men and what they had heard had affected them. To taste the goodness of God’s Word is to come to know and acknowledge something of its truthfulness and power. This is not the same, however, as believing it for eternal life.

Let us, in this context, consider the parable of the sower in **Matthew 13**. In verse **5** we read, “*Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth.*”

In verses **20** and **21**, our Lord explained the meaning of this aspect of the parable to His disciples: “*But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*”

They had received the word with joy initially. They had *“tasted the good word of the Lord,”* but the Word was not able to produce any permanent results because it was merely tasted and not eaten. They could not say with Jeremiah, *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart”* (**Jeremiah 15:16**). A solemn example of one who merely *“tasted”* the good Word of God is found in **Mark 6:20**: *“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.”*

Fifthly, the author of the epistle tells us that these Hebrews had tasted *“the powers of the world to come.”*

The reference here may be to the new dispensation which was to be ushered in by Israel’s Messiah according to Old Testament prophecies. It may correspond with the *“last days”* of **Hebrews 1:1-2**: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath **in these last days** spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”* *“These last days”* would be in contrast from *“in time past.”* Their Messiah was none other than the *“mighty God”* of **Isaiah 9:6**, and His miracles were wonderful, amazing and unique. The *“powers of the world to come”* would be those mentioned in **Hebrews 2:4**.

Some Bible scholars are of the opinion that the *“powers of the world to come”* refer to the Millennial Age and to the change that will be brought about when Jesus Christ reigns personally on the earth. The signs and miracles that He had wrought were a foretaste of the Millennial Age.

Whatever the words refer to, these Hebrews had witnessed the wonderful miracles which He had performed which proved to them that the New Testament was from God. Although the evidence was so convincing, there was not an overwhelming answer of faith in their hearts. What a sad commentary we read in **John 12:37**: *“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.”*

The group of persons described in **Hebrews 6:4-6** 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. Nor is it backsliding Christians who are in view. It is the total renunciation of all the distinguishing truths and principles of Christianity, and this not secretly, but openly, which constitutes apostasy. By the words *“fall away,”* we are clearly to understand what is commonly called apostasy. This does not consist in an occasional falling into actual sin, however gross and aggravated; nor in the renunciation of some of the principles of Christianity, even though those should be of considerable importance; but in an open, total, determined renunciation of all the constituent principles of Christianity, and a return to a false religion.

As we noted in **Lesson 36**, this passage is not speaking of a child of God who falls away. This is obvious for it is manifestly clear to all who have even a passing interest in Christianity, that genuine Christians have backslidden and have, afterward, been led to repentance and restoration by the grace of God. These passages are speaking of someone who may claim to be a believer, but truly is not. Anyone who apostatizes is proving he or she never had genuine faith to begin with.