

The Impossibility of Renewing a Fallen Christian

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The text of [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) has been understood by many to demonstrate the possibility of a Christian being lost, and is a significant challenge to those who teach that a Christian cannot be lost. There is also a significant secondary consideration in the view that a Christian can be lost in dealing with the phrase “impossible ... to renew them again”.

Falling From Grace

Was He Really a True Christian?

The evidence is abundant that [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) is describing a Christian who has fallen in such a way as to be eternally lost. It must be recognized that the person under consideration is indeed a true Christian since this one is described as one who:

- Has been “once enlightened, “
- Has “tasted of the heavenly gift,”
- “made partakers of the Holy Ghost,” and
- “have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come”

The Holy Spirit is promised to believers ([Acts 2:38](#)), and this one was beyond a novice believer since he is described as having been “enlightened” and understanding the powers of the world to come. This is similar language that Paul uses in his prayer for the maturity of the Ephesians:

[Eph 1:18](#) (NKJV) “making mention of you in my prayers that ... the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, {19} and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,”

A true Christian who has matured is under consideration, and one who has fallen away in such a way as to “crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” This is not just a person who shows weakness, but one who has now rejected and repudiated Christ so as to be guilty of the same rejection as those who literally crucified Christ. This rejection however is far worse since it is done with full knowledge. Peter testified that those who crucified Christ did it out of “ignorance” ([Acts 3:17](#)) and preached to them to repent, but the one who rejects Christ after having understood exactly what he is rejecting cannot be reached since he has rejected the only power capable of saving him.

Is He Really Lost?

Some argue that although the person has fallen, he is not really lost. Bob Wilkin^[1] argues that “Many interpreters err here because they assume that the author is saying that such a person is eternally condemned. Actually the text doesn't say anything even approaching that.”

Mr. Wilkin argues that in the following verses ([Heb 6:7,8](#)), “The ground represents the

believer. The thorns and thistles represent the worthless and wicked production of his life similar to the wood, hay, and stubble of [1 Cor 3:12-15](#). When the ground is burned, the thorns and thistles are destroyed, not the ground. The ground remains.

In other words, Bob argues that the one who rejects Christ after mature knowledge will face judgment in this life, but will still be eternally secure.

This teaching is in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus himself:

[Matt. 10:33](#) (NKJV) But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Paul, when writing to Titus spoke of those who deny Christ in their lives:

[Titus 1:16](#) (NKJV) They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him

Can a man live his life in such a way as to crucify Christ afresh, and in his works deny Christ and yet be eternally saved? The New Testament scriptures say no!

Paul spoke of the possibility of a Christian being “lost” in other places as well:

[1 Cor 9:27](#) (NKJV) But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

In the context, Paul argues that we “run the race... to get a crown that will last forever.” If therefore, Paul argues that his motivation for disciplining himself is to avoid being disqualified from the crown that will last forever (eternal life), then it is evident that eternal life *can* be lost – even by a mature Christian (e.g. Paul). To argue otherwise is to say that the inspired Apostle Paul was simply wrong, and his motivation was not based in reality.

When writing to the Galatians, Paul strongly opposed those who sought to cling to the Mosaic Law, and argued, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” What does it mean to be “fallen from grace”? It must involve being “estranged” from Christ! Remember that Paul is writing to the “churches of Galatia” -- i.e. Christians. These are Christians who “received the Spirit” ([Gal. 3:2](#)), and among whom God had supplied “the Spirit to you” and worked “miracles among you” ([Gal. 3:5](#)). If these Christians now returned to the Law of Moses and sought to be perfected by it, it would cause them to be estranged from Christ. Can a man be eternally saved and be at the same time “estranged” (alienated, NIV; severed, ASV) from Christ? Paul argued that those who are “without Christ”, and alienated from the promises of God, are without “hope and without God in the world.” ([Eph. 2:12](#)) Can a man be without God and without hope and be eternally saved? Everywhere, the scriptures deny such a thing, and affirms that salvation is *only* in Jesus Christ, and therefore any who are estranged (cut off or severed) from Christ are also cut off from salvation:

[2 Tim. 2:10](#) (NKJV) Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may **obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus** with eternal glory.

Actually, in the context of Hebrews 6, this parable of vv. 6-7 is similar in meaning to the parable of Jesus in Luke 16:

{6} He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. {7} Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ {8} But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. {9} And if it

bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.”

The meaning is simply that just as the fig tree which will not bear fruit will be cut down by the vineyard owner because it does not profit him, so also those who reject God can surely expect judgment. The judgment pictured in Luke is not a temporary thing, but a permanent one. So also, the judgment in [Hebrews 6:6-7](#) cannot be understood as a temporary one since that would be contrary to the plain teachings of the New Testament as has been demonstrated above.

Is a Christian “Once Lost, Always Lost”, or Can A Fallen Christian Repent?

Some argue that these verses ([Hebrews 6:4-6](#)) teach that once a Christian has fallen, then it is impossible for him to repent, and therefore conclude that this must be the same case as one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. For example, Dave Redick argues:

If repentance is an impossibility, then such a person has reached a point where he cannot be forgiven. This is the very same condition as that brought on by blasphemy of the Spirit.^[2]

However, this argument assumes a statement that is not made in the text. The text ([Heb. 6:4-6](#)) does not say that it is impossible for the fallen Christian to repent, but says that it is impossible to renew them. The impossibility is on the part of the one who seeks to restore this one. Even this does not require that it be impossible for such a one to be restored, but only that there is nothing left to entice the sinner to repent (i.e. to renew them). For those who crucified Christ in ignorance, Peter preached to them about the saving grace in Jesus Christ, and for many their hearts were open to understanding and repentance. However, for one who has known the saving grace in Jesus Christ, and has rejected it, what more can we offer to renew such a one? This is similar to one in a boat who has only one means of saving a man in the water, and his offer is rejected – what more then can he do to save this one? A doctor may utilize every means that he has to restore life, and then say that there is nothing more that can be done, and yet sometimes the person still lives. It should be acknowledged that when we have done all that we can do, and are unable to renew a man to repentance, that we are not the final answer. It is God that can save and God works in the hearts of men beyond what we can accomplish.

When Saul was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus told him that the path he had chosen was difficult because he was resisting God (“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”) It is evident from this that God had been working to goad Saul into obedience, and that Saul was resisting.

Even for those who have rejected the way of truth, there is still hope. It is in this hope that we withdraw fellowship from a wayward brother. Paul said concerning the one in Corinth (1 Cor. 5) who was guilty of sexual immorality and was lifted up in pride, to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” To deliver one to Satan is to accept that he has left the kingdom of God, and is therefore subject to the kingdom of Satan. Even in this situation, Paul says that there is hope that the person will yet repent since the goal is that his spirit may be saved after the destruction of the flesh. This destruction of the flesh may be the consequences of ungodly living which may yet touch the heart of an unrepentant person.

What is a willful sin? ([Hebrews 10:26-27](#))

The one who sins willfully after receiving a knowledge of the truth is really in the same

situation as the one spoken of in [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) who “falls away” after having been partakers of the Holy Spirit. Each of these reject the Christ after coming to a knowledge of the truth. There remains in this situation “no more sacrifice for sins.” The sacrifice of Jesus cannot atone for the sins of those who reject Christ, and so there is nothing left for this one. Just as there is nothing else we can offer to renew to repentance the fallen brother who has rejected the only one capable of saving him, so also there remains nothing for the willful sinner, but the expectation of judgment. The significance of this rejection of Christ is emphasized by the writer where he noted that under the Law of Moses, the one who despised Moses’ Law died without mercy, and goes on to question, “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

It is evident from the context that the one who sins willfully is one who:

- fully rejects the way of Christ and his sacrifice for us (v. 26 there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins)
- counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, (v. 29)
- insults the Holy Spirit (v. 29)
- Casts away their confidence in Christ (v. 35) and along with that the expected reward (v. 35)

Is this the same as one who sins due to stubbornness (i.e. they know something is wrong and out of pride and self-will they still transgress)? God did not abandon Israel even though it was stubborn, but sent the prophets to turn their hearts:

[Isaiah 46:12](#) “Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, ...

There is a significant difference between one who is stubborn and one who will not listen. The stubborn one can be reached (God thought so and sent the prophets to reach them), while the one who has willfully rejected God simply will not listen, and therefore nothing is left but the expectation of judgment.

[Jer. 44:5-6](#) But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods. {6} So My fury and My anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.’

While these two situations are not the same (i.e. stubbornness and rejection), it should be noted that stubbornness leads down the path toward rejection. These two conditions are considered together in the following verse:

[1 Sam. 15:23](#) (NKJV For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. ...

If we continue in stubbornness, then we are going down the slippery path that leads to rejection and rebellion.

In the strictest sense, sins are usually committed voluntarily – i.e. without constraint, but the sense of this passage is not to describe one who sins reluctantly, one who gives in to temptation, but who does not desire to cast away his relationship with God. The intent is to describe someone who fully intends to abandon his religion and to “cast away” his confidence, to despise the blood of Jesus Christ and to insult the Spirit of God.

[1] <http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1992/92july3.html>

[2] <http://preacherstudy.com/blasph.html>

