

The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

Dealing with Difficult Bible Passages

On the issues of Predestination and seeming contradictory passages in the Bible, let us examine these passages briefly to draw some basic understanding of the meaning of such passages as they apply to the doctrine of Salvation.

From the lessons which we have learned concerning an Augustinian view of the doctrine of Salvation it has become apparent that God is Sovereign in the Salvation of His own elect people and that their Security is assured because of His faithfulness. These benefits of salvation are wholly the work of God. *Election* is unconditional meaning that God does not elect people based on some condition present within them or some kind of foreseen faith, but that election is based solely on the free and sovereign grace of God's own choice, *see lesson pgs 53-68 above*. The *Perseverance of the Saints* is assured because of God's faithfulness to secure to the end the salvation of His elect, *see lesson pgs 77-85 above*.

With this knowledge of the Sovereignty of God in Salvation, let us examine some difficult and even seeming contradictory passages of Scripture.

The Security of the Believer and Hebrews 6:4-6

The issue at hand in this passage is dealing with certain professing believers and their seeming straying from the faith and the elementary teachings of salvation. The writer is concerned with their lack of maturity and is giving reproof (verses 5-11-6:3), and warning concerning the reality of the conversion (verses 6:4-12). This is the context of the passage. The *primary* issue at hand is not specifically the teaching of the security of the believer, but rather admonishments and warnings to persevere and remain steadfast in the faith. Issues of the security of the believer are only implications drawn from this passage, they are *secondary* and not the actual substance or teaching herein.

Hebrews 6:4-6 - 4 For 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, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and 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. NASB

A. For 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, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come – The difficulty in the section is that these terms seem to be describing the true conversion of those here addressed. What makes it difficult is the fact that in the case of these, verse 6 says that if they “*have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.*” Now if the security of the believer is sure, then this passage would surely contradict it, if in fact these were true believers who fall away. In this case there are only two possibilities of interpretation about these professing believers as follows, either;

- They ARE actually *true believers* who fall away from the faith and are lost.
- OR**
- They ARE NOT actually *true believers* and only *mere professors* who never were truly born again by the Spirit of God in the first place.

Here we will address these two possibilities and consider the context of the passage to see which of these two is the obvious implication of this upon the doctrine of the Security of the Believer.

1) It is abundantly clear from the direct context of this passage that these are not actually true believers and that this is manifested in the fact that they “*fall away*.” This is clear from verse 9 of the passage which says,

Hebrews 6:9 - 9 **But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation,** though we are speaking in this way. NASB

Here the writer obviously draws a *contrast* with the word “*but*,” and makes it evident that this *contrast* is between two kinds of people, some who are truly born again (these are described as the ones who have “*things that accompany salvation*”), and mere professors who are NOT truly born again (these are described as the ones who “*fall away*”). It is according to reason that true believers don’t fall away but instead they “believe” and are saved, that is what makes them a true believer. This is plain.

2) It is abundantly clear from the context of the book of Hebrews that there are certain *professors* who are being *warned* in different sections to persevere in the faith so that they will not come under the judgment of God but will in fact persevere and be saved. This is clear from passages such as;

Hebrews 2:1-3 - 2:1 For this reason **we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.** 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?** After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, NASB

Hebrews 10:26-30 - 26 For **if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.** 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How 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? NASB

Hebrews 10:39 - 39 But we are **not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.** NASB

Hebrews 12:15-17 - 15 **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;** that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he **was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.** NASB

This passage in Hebrews 6:4-6 is another in this list of warning passages to these mere professors.

3) It is abundantly clear from the context of the whole Bible that the Salvation of the Believer is SECURE, and this is sufficient evidence alone to speak to us about the meaning of this passage. It cannot mean that true believers “*fall away*” for that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture in many other places, *see lesson pgs 77-85 above*.

B. The terms used to describe them are not actually terms describing the reality of their new birth and subsequent true conversion, but rather *terms used to describe the state and reality of experiences they have had in relation to their being practicing members together within the life of the true Church*. The experiences of living within the life of the true Church are testimonies to the veracity and power of the Gospel and this is what is meant by the terms described in this passage, but do not actually point to the reality of regeneration in the life of a true believer, but do in fact describe the experiences of all people who come into close fellowship within the life of a group of true believers. These terms describe the conviction and power experienced within the fellowship of true believers as one enters into the very communion of God and His saints.

- once been enlightened
- have tasted of the heavenly gift

- made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come

These terms are not used in any other place in the Bible to describe the reality of regeneration. They are employed here to speak about those who seem to make a genuine profession, but in fact prove by their apostasy that they were not truly born again. John MacArthur comments here...

“By far the most serious interpretive challenge is found in 6:4–6. The phrase “once enlightened” is often taken to refer to Christians, and the accompanying warning taken to indicate the danger of losing their salvation if “they fall away” and “crucify again for themselves the Son of God.” But there is no mention of their being saved and they are not described with any terms that apply only to believers (such as holy, born again, righteous, or saints). This problem arises from inaccurately identifying the spiritual condition of the ones being addressed. In this case, they were unbelievers who had been exposed to God’s redemptive truth and perhaps had made a profession of faith, but they had not exercised genuine saving faith. In 10:26, the reference once again is to nominal Christians who apostatize, not to genuine believers who are often incorrectly thought to lose their salvation because of their sins.”

C. 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. - Notice that this verse does NOT say that it is impossible to **be** renewed to repentance but rather it is impossible to renew them to repentance. It is not speaking of the reality of being in a state that has no possibility of being renewed, but rather that no efforts from others will have the effect of renewing to repentance.

1) Once someone has lived within the life of the Church, and experienced the power and conviction of the Kingdom of God first hand, and has all the outward signs of repentance and true conversion, and then “falls away” again into sin and obvious unbelief, there will be **nothing you can say or do to renew them again to repentance** because they have already heard it all and have experienced sufficient evidence of the veracity and power of the Gospel, and yet have rejected the manifold evidences already given.

2) Consider that this cannot be saying that if someone were a true believer, and then “falls away,” that God would not receive them again upon repentance. This would contradict the free offer of the Gospel, and the mercy of God to truly penitent people who desire by repentance to be saved. This would be heresy of the worst sort and would ultimately condemn every true believer to a state of confusion in the process of sanctification. For which of us has not at some point in our Christian life fallen into difficult problems with sin and doubt, even to prolonged times of sinning again and again in the same way, only to have been restored again and again by God’s gracious love and the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. If this were saying we could not be renewed to repentance after falling away, the question would now become, “To what degree must one fall away in order to reach the state of impossibility of renewal to repentance?” This would be a terrible quandary to try to understand at what point then it is hopeless for those who were once God’s children by adoption, that they have reached a point of no return to which they can be restored by the gracious pardon of God. This would be blasphemy against the free mercy of God! **Therefore, this passage cannot be saying that a true believer can fall into this state of being beyond the forgiven love and grace of God.**

3) Consider that a true believer proves their repentance and the reality of regeneration in their life by the **final perseverance**.

Romans 8:30 - 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. NASB

John 10:27-29 - 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.

1 Corinthians 1:7-9 - 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our

Lord Jesus Christ. 9 **God is faithful**, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. NASB

In contrast to this truth, those who “*fall away*” do give evidence by this fact that they were never saved. What happens when they “*fall away*” is they stop believing, they stop trusting in and agreeing with the Gospel. If they do not persevere, they were never saved. If they “*fall away*,” they believe no more, thus they are not a true believer.

1 John 2:19 - 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. NASB

Luke 8:13 - 13 "And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; **they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.** NASB

1 John 3:9 - 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; **and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.** NASB