

# Hebrews 6

## Can One Lose Their Salvation?

### Hebrews 6:4-8

### Bible Commentary

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Let us begin our study of this passage by understanding that the letter to the Hebrews is addressed to Jews who had become professing Christians. As we can see from Hebrews 10:19-39, some of these professing Hebrew believers were not continuing in the faith, but they were leaving the congregations of believers to return to the way of Judaism.

The main purpose of the letter to the Hebrews was to emphasize to everyone in these congregations the preeminence of Christ, and to admonish them that there is no other way to God the Father than through Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews warned that for those who ultimately reject Christ, there is nothing left for them “but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:27). They would not be saved simply because they were descended from Jacob.

Also as we begin our study of Hebrews 6:4-8, let us consider as well that this passage is prefaced by Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3. In these verses, the writer of Hebrews comments on the fact that though the congregation had heard the fundamental truths of the word of God preached, some did not seem to be growing in the faith. And in fact these needed someone to teach them the elementary truths of God’s word all over again (Hebrews 5:12). With this preface in mind, we will now consider Hebrews 6:4-8.

Looking at the first part of this passage, we read:

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, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 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. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

And then immediately following in verses seven and eight, we see reference to “ground” receiving “rain” that often comes upon it. If the ground “brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled” then it receives blessing from God. But if it bears “thorns and thistles”, it is worthless, and in the end it will be burned. In these verses, the author employed a method of communicating his message that was similar to a method that Jesus used at times to communicate His teaching, which was to teach a spiritual principle by means of an analogy or comparison to something in the natural world.

In Hebrews 6:7-8, the “ground” is symbolic of people. The “rain”, which often falls upon the ground, is symbolic of the word of God, the Gospel message which is preached in the hearing of men. The “vegetation” or harvest that is useful to those for whom the ground is farmed is symbolic of the good fruit born by those who hear the word of God and do indeed come to faith in Christ. As a result of their genuine faith, they will indeed bear fruit in their lives, showing that in truth they are Jesus’ disciples (John 15:8).

In contrast to the ground that bears a useful harvest of good fruit, other ground receives the same “rain” of the word of God, but bears only thorns and thistles. This ground is symbolic of those people who hear the same Gospel message, but they do not come to faith in Christ. And therefore they cannot produce a useful and beneficial harvest.

There are three teachings of Jesus that are in complete agreement with the analogy and teaching of Hebrews 6:4-8. The first is the parable of the sower given in Matthew 13:1-23. The second is Jesus’ teaching on false prophets given in Matthew 7:15-23. And the third is Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares recorded in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43. By considering Hebrews 6:4-8 in the light of all three of these passages, we will let “Scripture interpret Scripture”, and in doing so we will gain an understanding of this teaching given to us by the author of Hebrews.

Let us begin by comparing the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 to our passage in Hebrews 6. In this parable, the “seed” sown by the farmer is symbolic of the word of God. The seed falls upon different types of “ground” or “soil”, and again, just as in Hebrews 6:7-8, the soil symbolizes men, who receive the word of God in their hearing. Jesus taught that the only place where the seed of the word of God will bear a useful harvest is where it falls upon “good soil”. The good soil symbolizes God’s elect, who hear the word of God, understand it, and do indeed come to faith in Christ. Only those who come to faith will be able to bear a useful harvest of good fruit (Matthew 13:23).

Secondly, let us compare Jesus teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7 to our passage in Hebrews 6. In His teaching here, Jesus warned us to watch out for false prophets who come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, or claiming to be Christians, but in reality they are not. He symbolized these individuals as bad trees, which *cannot produce good fruit* (Matthew 7:18b). And He said that these “bad trees” will be cut down and thrown onto the fire (Matthew 7:19; compare with Hebrews 6:8.). By contrast, Jesus symbolized those whose faith is genuine as “good trees”,

which produce good fruit and cannot produce bad fruit (Matthew 7:18a; compare with Hebrews 6:7).

And thirdly, let us compare Jesus' teaching in the parable of the wheat and the tares, which is given to us in Matthew 13, to our passage in Hebrews 6. In this parable Jesus spoke of tares or weeds, which bear no good fruit, being mixed in among the wheat, which does indeed bear a useful harvest of good fruit. The tares, which are often hard to distinguish from the wheat, symbolize the unregenerate among true believers, and they bear no good fruit. In contrast to the tares, the wheat symbolizes genuine believers, and these do indeed bear good fruit, bearing a harvest "useful to those for whom it is tilled", as the writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 6:7).

*The one consistent theme in each of these three teachings of Jesus, and also in this passage of Hebrews 6:4-8, is that professing believers will demonstrate or give evidence that their faith is genuine by the fact they do indeed bear good fruit. Only genuine believers are able to bear good fruit; the unregenerate are not able to do so.*

The individuals in Hebrews 6:4-8 who receive the "rain" of the word of God, but they bear no useful harvest of good fruit, are the same individuals that we see in the parable of the sower who receive the "seed" of the word of God, but they never come to faith in Christ, and therefore they bear no good fruit. They are also the false prophets whom Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7. Their profession of faith is false. Though they may claim to be Christians, and they may claim to have repented, they are not true believers, and Jesus characterized them as bad trees which can produce only bad fruit. And again these individuals in Hebrews 6 are the same individuals that Jesus spoke of in His parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares symbolize the unregenerate who are mixed in among genuine believers. Unlike genuine believers who are symbolized as wheat, which does produce a useful harvest of good fruit, the tares cannot bear good fruit.

When we compare the teaching in Hebrews 6:4-8 with Jesus' teaching in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7, and His teaching in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13, we find that *in all four of these passages the individuals who bear no good fruit are those who receive the word of God in their hearing, but they never come to faith in Christ as God's elect do. As a result, they can bear no good fruit.* The individuals referred to in Hebrews 6:4-8 are individuals who will be present in most every congregation of professing Christians, who are in fact unregenerate. *They will claim to have repented, and they will claim to be believers,* when in fact they have never come to faith in the first place.

When the writer of Hebrews said that they "have once been enlightened", "have tasted the heavenly gift", "have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit", and "have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come", he was saying that these unregenerate individuals, who claimed to be believers but were not, were present in the congregation and *shared in the hearing of the preaching and teaching of the word of God* with others who were in fact true believers. These unregenerate individuals are symbolized as ground that "drinks the rain which often falls on it" (Hebrews 6:7), and again this rain is symbolic of the word of God, but

they produce only “thorns and thistles” (Hebrews 6:8), or bad fruit as Jesus taught in Matthew 7:15-23.

In John 6 we see that Jesus spoke to a crowd saying: “...*the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*. But there are some of you who do not believe.” ... “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (John 6:63-65, emphasis added). *For any man to read or to hear the word of God is for him to partake in spirit and life, but not all of those who partake in God’s word believe*. Many hear the word of God, but it has not been granted to them by the Father to believe in Christ, or to come to Him, even though they hear the spoken Gospel message.

*To hear the word of God preached* is to be “enlightened” (Hebrews 6:4) as to God’s only plan of salvation for man. It is also to “have tasted the heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4), and to “have been made partakers in the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 6:4), because once again, Jesus said that *His words* “are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). It is also to “have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5).

These unregenerate individuals were present in the congregations of professing Jewish believers, and they heard the word of God preached, but as the writer of Hebrews also said, “the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” (Hebrews 4:2). This is to say that the word they heard did not profit them because unlike the true believers in the congregation, they did not possess a genuine faith in Christ. And as we have seen from the Scriptures before, a genuine faith in Christ is itself the gift of God, and a gift that He does not give to everyone, but only to those whom He has chosen to show mercy in calling them to faith in His Son (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:15-18, I Thessalonians 1:4-5).

The individuals to whom the writer of Hebrews referred in this passage of Hebrews 6:4-8 are *not* believers who have lost their salvation, or who are in danger of losing their salvation. Rather, *they are those individuals among professing Christians who have never in fact come to faith in Christ in the first place*. And because they had never come to faith, they were not growing in the faith, but needed someone to teach them the elementary truths of God’s word all over again (Hebrews 5:12).

The individuals spoken of in Hebrews 6:4-8 are not those whom Jesus once knew; rather they are those whom Jesus *never knew* (Matthew 7:23). They are those who heard the word of God, but they never came to faith in Christ because it had not been granted to them by the Father (John 6:65, 8:43, 8:47). *As a result, they did not continue in the faith they claimed to have, but were ultimately numbered among those “who have fallen away”* (Hebrews 6:6. Consider also Matthew 13:20-21 and I John 2:19).

These individuals are not trees that were once “good trees”, but because they produced bad fruit they therefore lost their salvation and then became “bad trees”, because Jesus taught that “A good tree *cannot* produce bad fruit...” (Matthew 7:18, emphasis added). Rather, they were “bad trees” all along, and because of this they produced no good fruit (Compare Matthew 7:16-19 and Hebrews 6:7-8).

When we interpret Hebrews 6:4-8 in the light of the context of Hebrews 5:11-6:8, in the light of the book of Hebrews as a whole, and in the light of other similar teachings in the Bible, we gain an understanding of what the author intended to communicate. However if we were to isolate this passage from the rest of the Scriptures, we might arrive at an altogether different and erroneous understanding.

To interpret this passage as saying that a believer can lose their salvation would be in stark contradiction to numerous passages that we have discussed elsewhere, which state clearly that a believer cannot lose their salvation. According to the word of God, our salvation does not depend upon our own power and ability to obey God, but we are kept safe by His power (I Peter 1:4-5). Our salvation is both initiated and carried through to completion by God Himself (Philippians 1:6).