

The Warning Passages in Hebrews

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



I remember a particular scary incident that occurred in my own life one day when I was handing out Gospel tracts. I walked around the backside of a trailer when suddenly a German Shepherd dog lunged toward me. The man called the dog off and he stopped right in front of my stomach. I could feel the breath coming out of his nostrils! Apparently, the German Shepherd did not like the Gospel or preachers! Needless to say this incident was a scary event in my life. I'm sure many of us could give stories about how we were frightened by something that occurred in our lives.

There are those who suggest that the warning passages in the epistle of Hebrews (chapters 2, 6, 10) were given to frighten God's people and keep them under the fear of God's reprisal and judgment. However, the epistle to the Hebrews was not written to frighten God's people but to encourage them. We are commanded to "exhort (encourage) one another daily" (Heb. 3:13). We are not called upon to frighten one another about the possibility of being condemned to hell if we don't measure up to God's commands or standards. This epistle reminds us that we are to have "strong consolation" in Jesus Christ (Heb. 6:18).

In this study, I would like to give an overview of the warning passages. The warning passages of Hebrews chapters two, six, and ten have been interpreted in various ways. Some suggest they are conveying how a believer who is saved can lose his salvation if he falls into the realm of apostasy. Of course, this view is opposed to the Biblical teaching of eternal security (John 10:28) which is based upon free grace and justification before God (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:24) and the free gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Rev. 22:17). Furthermore, genuinely saved and born-again believers cannot apostatize where they reject Christ, His deity, salvation, and live without any restraints over their lives, existing without any signs of transformed living (1 John 3:8-9; 5:18; Heb. 10:38-39).

Others teach that these passages are addressed to a separate group of professing believers or apostates. It's assumed that the passages are designed to warn these unsaved people about coming judgment since they have fallen short of true saving faith in Jesus Christ (Scofield). Although apostasy is clearly and unmistakably presented in these Bible passages the aim or purpose is not to address apostates directly within the churches but to teach that true and genuine believers cannot apostatize and lose their salvation.

Others suggest that the writer has the A.D. 70 judgment in mind and is warning the apostate Jews about this impending Roman judgment. In other words, if they don't soon change, these Jews will experience the judgment of the Roman soldiers under Titus the Roman general (Matt. 24:1-2). This view is hard to espouse simply because the language of judgment is not painting the picture of a Roman invasion but missing out on salvation (Heb. 2:3 - "so great salvation" ; "believe to the saving of the soul" - 10:39) and experiencing the eternal judgment of God in hell (Heb. 6:2 - "eternal judgment" ; 9:27 - "once to die, but after this the judgment" ; 10:39 - "unto perdition"). This is not a Roman judgment but eternal judgment in hell. Furthermore, Paul would have been more specific in his details about a Roman judgment if he had this invasion in mind.

Since the passages seem to deal with believers, and since it is impossible for true believers to lose their salvation based upon grace (Eph. 2:8-9), other interpreters have tried to squeeze these warning passages into the general teaching about the Christian life and the loss of reward that believers will experience at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) since the texts are addressed to the brethren or God's saints. But this view also seems unlikely since the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place of *condemnation* for our sins but *commendation* (reward). The language of wrath and judgment does not align with the purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

As we once again reflect upon the various views, we can certainly conclude that the first Arminian interpretation is totally out-of-sync with the rest of the Scriptural teaching which gives the promise of eternal life to all true believers (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23) and the permanent justified standing and positional acceptance before God through the merits of Jesus Christ alone

(Rom. 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 7:25). The second interpretation about apostates (professing Christians) seems to force something into these passages that simply is not there. The writer of Hebrews is addressing God's children in these passages (Heb. 2:1,3; 6:1,3; 10:26, 30, 39; 12:28) and throughout the entire epistle (Heb. 3:12; 6:1) - not apostates. To force another group of people (professing Christians or apostates) into the warning contexts seems difficult to do since continual reference is made to believers in these verses. A separate group of professing Christians or apostates does not seem to fit into the framework of these warning passages.

The people addressed in the warning passages are true believers that had believed (Heb. 10:39) and were "once enlightened" (Heb. 6:4). This speaks of the time when they were enlightened to the truth of the Gospel which brought regeneration into their lives. Enlightenment or illumination occurs when a sinner, which has been dominated by sin passes into spiritual light and life (Eph. 1:18; 2 Cor. 4:4). The author later uses the same verbal concept to describe the reader's entrance into the family of God (10:32 - "ye were illuminated"). The readers of the epistle had "tasted of the heavenly gift" (6:4). Hebrews 6:4 clearly suggests that these people had "tasted" or already experienced the true blessing of the gift of salvation and eternal life (1 Pet. 2:3) even as Christ truly tasted or experienced death for every man (Heb. 2:9). To taste something does not mean to merely sample it and not partake of its benefits. It means to actually experience the complete benefits and blessings that it offers.

Also, these saints "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (Heb.6:4) which not only refers to the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts and lives (Heb. 10:29; John 16:8) that led to their salvation but the actual sharing of the indwelling presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Lastly, they also "tasted the good word of God" (Heb. 6:5) which involves experiencing the saving power of the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16) presented in the life-giving Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23, 25). They also tasted or experienced "the powers of the world (age) to come" (Heb. 6:5) which refers to receiving in advance a foretaste of the moral transformation, peace, righteous living, and Christlikeness that comes through the Spirit's working which will be

experienced in the future Millennial Kingdom when Christ returns to earth (Rom. 14:17).

In addition, these recipients of the epistle also “received the knowledge of the truth” (Heb. 10:26) and were positionally sanctified through the death of Christ (Heb. 10:10, 29). These descriptions of the Hebrew believers in the warning passages would lead us to believe that they were not professing believers. Rather, they were true believers who were being encouraged to not revert or return to Judaism and mask their Christianity with Judaism for fear of persecution. Encouragement to not do this is specifically presented in the faith chapter (Heb. 10:32-34; 11-12:15). The author does not want them to “slip” (Heb. 2:1) or drift away from the truth about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s death and be found “departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12) by not fully grasping and embracing what God has said about Jesus Christ and His finished work upon the cross.

The Greek word *aphistemi* (to take a stand away from) which is here translated as “departing” speaks of apostasy but here it does not relate to total abandonment of Christ and Christological truth but an inward movement away from God and truth by the “brethren” (brothers – Heb. 3:12). There is an apostasy and “deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12) which can occur among God’s people, but this falls short of total abandonment of doctrinal truth and teaching about Christ. However, there is a doctrinal apostasy which is characteristic of the unsaved who reject the person and work of Christ and repudiate Jesus Christ as God and the only way of salvation (2 Peter 2:1-3).

The author’s application of his text is to his Christian readership. Neither here nor anywhere else in his letter did the writer suggest that his audience might contain people who were not real Christians. Instead, they were regarded as “brethren” as stated in 3:12 or as “holy brethren” (Heb. 3:1) who share in the heavenly calling but at the same time were in danger of moving away from the sufficiency of Christ and this was causing them to doubt their security in Christ.

These Scriptural conclusions would lead us to believe that the warning passages are not talking about another group of people who were mere

professors of Christianity that apostatized and fell short of salvation. The effort to see these people as mere professors of salvation in contrast to true converts seems to be forced exegesis. To identify them as a separate group of professing believers or apostates does not do justice to how these people are addressed in the epistle. They are addressed as true Christians.

The first-personal pronouns are used and this makes it very clear that these people are actually Christians being addressed (“we” – 2:1, 3; 3:14, 19; 4:3; 10:26, 30, 39; 12:28; and “us” in 4:1,2,11; 6:1, 3; 10:26, 30, 39; 12:28). This personal reference to believers seems to be consistent throughout the epistle with personal pronouns directed to a believing group: “if we neglect” (2:3), “if they shall fall away” (6:6), “if we sin willfully” (10:26), “if we turn away from him” (12:25). So, we must always be true to the text and grammar when interpreting the Scripture.

Charlie Bing sums it up well:

“Any attempt to apply these descriptions to unbelievers forces the text at the expense of good exegesis and the plain sense of the language.”

As previously mentioned, many teach that the people who are addressed in the warning passages of Hebrews

Apostasy & Apostates

are unbelievers who have been brought to the threshold of salvation but never have crossed over the finish line and been saved. Instead of believing they apostatize in total unbelief and repudiate Christ and His claims. But the Scriptural descriptions of the readers suggest otherwise. They were true believers who had experienced regeneration. At the same time, to conclude that the warning passages have no reference to apostasy and to those who are unsaved is also a very difficult conclusion to arrive at when one honestly reads the language of judgment being presented in these passages. We discover from Scripture that apostates are assigned to judgment and have no opportunity to be saved (2 Pet. 2:1-4; Jude 4). So apostasy and apostates who reject the Biblical and historic claims of Christ do somehow enter into the understanding of these passages.

hypothetically

There seems to be another view (a mediating view) that brings believers, apostasy, and the judgment of unbelievers together under the same umbrella without teaching that believers can lose their salvation or that there is a separate group of professing believers in view instead of genuine Christians. This view holds that the writer was presenting a hypothetical situation that could never occur. The situation is like this. If a believer could apostatize and lose his salvation (which he cannot), then there would be no hope of salvation since the first death of Jesus failed to save them and since there cannot be a second death of Jesus upon the cross to resave them (Heb. 10:10-14, 17, 26 7:27). This illustration serves as a way to drive these Hebrew believers to greater faith in the only sacrifice that can save them – Jesus Christ.

Donald Grey Barnhouse used to say:

“The Book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to tell them to stop being Hebrews.”

I know there is a difference of opinion regarding these warning passages even among conservative and theologically expositors who consistently and correctly reject any notion of a person losing his salvation. In my humble opinion, the warning passages serve to produce assurance of salvation – not lack of assurance. The idea of a Christian apostatizing, losing his salvation, and not being able to get it back serves as an illustration (based upon an impossible scenario) to prove that the one-time sacrifice of Christ, the finished and final sacrifice of Christ on the cross, is enough to save a person forever and why no Christian must worry about losing his salvation. Instead, the writer reminds them that they can possess the “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22) and the “full assurance of hope” (Heb. 6:11). If we believe this, that Christ’s work is finished, then we will never doubt our salvation.

The “warning arguments” are not designed to produce DOUBT but ASSURANCE concerning our salvation. This seems to be the easiest way to understand these passages. If a Christian could apostatize (but he cannot –

an impossibility), and if a Christian could lose his salvation (but he cannot – an impossibility) he could never get it back. This is because Christ would have to be re-sacrificed again (but this could never happen – an impossibility). So, if a person could lose his salvation and seek to restore it again, their expression of repentance and faith would be erroneous and invalidated (“it is impossible... to renew them again unto repentance”) because Christ cannot be re-sacrificed and re-resurrected from the dead since “he ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). Praise God for this! So, why not just go on (Heb. 6:1) and enjoy your salvation!

Now why would the writer of Hebrews try to summon these believers on to greater faith and assurance in the finished work of Jesus Christ? It’s because they lacked the assurance of their salvation. There seems to be much internal evidence in the epistle that would point to the fact that these Hebrew believers did not possess the assurance of their salvation and needed to gain assurance. The writer urges them to possess assurance (Heb. 6:11 – “full assurance of hope” and Heb. 10:22 - “full assurance of faith”) by inviting them to reflect upon the finished work of Christ on their behalf (Heb. 1:3; 10:10-14). He also urges them to not cast away their confidence in the Lord and His saving provision upon the cross (Heb. 10:35) and keep their confession or belief system in Jesus Christ and His saving work to the end of their lives (Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23).

There are also words of encouragement reminding them to enter into salvation’s rest which is the peace of knowing that a believer is saved forever through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:7-4:11). In addition, they needed to be taught the “the first principles” (Heb. 6:1) or elementary teachings about the death of Jesus Christ, grace, and their eternal salvation (Heb. 5:12; 7:25). This is because they were still worried about losing their salvation. They are urged to go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1) by embracing the cross of Jesus in its full redemptive light and saving splendor.

A visitor said to a wounded soldier who lay dying in the hospital, "What church are you of?" "Of the Church of Christ," was the immediate reply. "I mean, what persuasion are you of?" "Persuasion?" said the dying man, as he looked heavenward, beaming with love to the Saviour, "I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor

things present nor things to come ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38).

Because of the above observations, I have concluded that these warning passages in Hebrews chapters two, six, and ten are presenting a hypothetical situation that *cannot* occur – a believer apostatizing and losing his salvation. The writer's purpose is not to teach that a believer can lose his salvation through apostasy but to present a hypothetical situation in order to teach that Christ's death saves a believer forever.

The Hebrews were thinking of Christ's sacrifice in the same light as the repeated Mosaic sacrifices. However, Christ's sacrifice was not like this. This is why the writer says Christ was sacrificed "once" (Heb. 9:28; 10:10) and His sacrifice and blessings were "better" (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16). To get the Hebrew Christians to rest in the sufficiency of the one-time sacrifice of Christ and stop doubting their salvation (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:10; Rom. 6:10), he sets up a hypothetical situation based upon the repeated sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Here is the hypothetical situation. If a believer could lose his salvation through apostasy (even though he cannot), then there would be no way to get it back again. This is because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ cannot be reoffered upon the cross like the many repeated sacrifices of the previous Old Testament Law Dispensation which were placed upon the altar.



HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING

We might summarize the warning passages in this manner. Hypothetically, if a believer could apostatize and lose his salvation as suggested by the phrases "if we neglect so great salvation" (2:3), "if they shall fall away" (6:6), "if we sin willfully" (10:26), "if we turn away from him" (12:25), then they could never be saved again ("How shall we escape" – Heb. 2:3) for Christ's one-time sacrifice cannot be repeated like the Old Testament sacrifices (there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" – Heb. 10:26) and is sufficient to save us forever (Heb. 7:25).

The conjunction “if” sets up the hypothetical situation and dilemma. Therefore, “if” you could lose your salvation Christ cannot be reoffered again on the cross and a person would be lost forever without ever being able to regain his salvation. But since this cannot happen, why not trust in Christ alone and forever for your salvation and possess “the full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). Why not just believe in the finished work of Christ and be confident in Christ. The hypothetical case is used to teach the assurance of their salvation.

The writer assures the saints that this apostasy and loss of salvation cannot happen. He reassures them they could never be apostates who will face future perdition or judgment.

Hebrews 10:39

“But we are not of them who draw back (*the apostates who are unsaved*) unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (*genuine Christians who have embraced Christ as Savior*).

God’s people would continue to persevere in their faith and not turn back and forever forsake the death of the Lord Jesus on their behalf. A true Christian will never apostatize to where he rejects Christ’s Virgin Birth, deity, death, and resurrection. He will not abandon and repudiate Christ. He will continue to manifest *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ and also *fruit* for the Lord. This simply means that those who are God’s children will persevere in their belief or faith in Christ and continue to manifest this genuine faith through transformation of living. A faith in Christ is a persevering faith that does not reject Christ and Christianity (James 2:14-26).

Hebrews 3:6

“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

Hebrews 3:14

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”

The writer is confident that God's people would not forsake the doctrine and teaching about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit of God working on the inside of them would not allow them to depart from the soteriological (salvation) fundamentals and Christological foundations of the Christian faith. The above verses are speaking about doctrinal commitment to truth. These believers would give evidence that they are in the household of God (Church) if they continue to embrace or hold fast their "confidence" (Heb. 3:14) in Christ as the only way of salvation and access into the Father's presence. This confidence speaks of their original faith that they placed in Christ for salvation.

These believers would also give evidence that they are in the household of God (Church) if they continually are "rejoicing" in the "hope" (Heb. 3:6). What hope? It's the hope they have of a completed salvation through Jesus Christ. It's the hope and assurance that the death of Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for their sins completely and has satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God for their sins. It's also the hope of the consummation of their salvation which will be experienced when they enter Heaven. These saints will continue to rejoice as they find rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and they will possess this hope "firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6) of their lives. In other words, this hope would remain within their hearts. It's a hope that would not be lost.

These Hebrew believers would not totally abandon Jesus and go back to Judaism forever. They would not be able to put Jesus behind them. They would not leave Him and forget about what He had really done for them in saving their souls and paying the redemptive price for their sins. A real believer is by definition one who is believing! Actually, the original faith or confidence that these believers placed in Christ alone for salvation would not be abandoned. They would not give up the doctrinal ship and sail away from the port of Christianity in flat out denial that Jesus is their Savior.

These believers could not commit total doctrinal abandonment and apostasy regarding Christ's person and work. However, the infant Hebrew Christians (Heb. 5:11-12) needed to be taught and reminded about the sufficiency of Christ's death on their behalf so they might possess the assurance of their salvation. To do this the writer uses a hypothetical

illustration of a believer apostatizing, losing his salvation, and not being able to get it back. This teaching was designed to bring assurance into their own hearts that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can save them completely and forever (Heb. 10:10). No other Old Testament sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were necessary. The young Hebrew converts needed to be taught the truth about the sufficiency of Christ's work on their behalf. All they needed to do was to trust in the final and finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If they do this, they could stop worrying about losing their salvation.

The hypothetical illustration of a believer losing his salvation is actually turned around and used to promote the assurance of salvation in the hearts of these believers. The illustration goes like this. If they can lose their salvation, then there is no way to get it back through repentance, since the loss of salvation assumes that the work of Christ on the cross was not sufficient to save them in the first place. Furthermore, this would mean Christ must be recrucified again which becomes an absurdity and impossibility (Heb. 10:26).

Hebrews 7:27

"Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did **once**, when he offered up himself."

Hebrews 9:26

"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now **once** in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

Hebrews 9:28

"So Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Hebrews 10:12

"But this man, after he had offered **one** sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."

Hebrews 10:18

"Now where remission of these *is*, *there is* no more offering for sin."

Hebrews 10:26

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.”

In other words, you must embrace Christ’s sacrifice wholeheartedly by faith alone as the only way of eternal salvation. If you don’t then you have no other way to be saved! This leaves the Christian who apostatizes and allegedly loses his salvation in a spiritual dilemma. If Christ cannot be repeatedly reoffered on the cross like the Old Testament sacrifices, then a Christian who has allegedly lost his salvation has no hope of ever being saved again. He will be lost forever! This is because Christ died only once on the cross and if this sacrifice cannot save you, then no sacrifice will save you.

In short, the only way that a believer should possess the fear of eternal judgment is if he could hypothetically lose his salvation. But if this were the case, he could never get it back. This is because Christ cannot die again! This seems to be the meaning and only sensible and fair way to interpret these difficult warning passages.

The old Scottish lady was right. When she was visited by a very young minister who was short on experience, she held fast to her firm assurance of her safety in Christ. "But just suppose that after all God should let you sink into hell?" said the minister. "He would lose more than I would," came the firm answer of this lady. "All I would lose would be my own soul, but He would lose His good name."

Hebrews Chapter 6 Warning Passage

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.”

Again, here is what the writer is teaching. If a person could lose his salvation and seek to restore it again, their expression of repentance and faith would

be erroneous and invalidated (“it is impossible... to renew them again unto repentance”) because Christ cannot be re-sacrificed and re-resurrected from the dead since “he ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). Praise God for this! So, why not just go on (Heb. 6:1) and enjoy your salvation!

Hebrews 6:4-6 is a hypothetical or imaginary situation that could not happen (“For it is impossible”). It is impossible! It could not happen. A true believer could never apostatize and lose his salvation but hypothetically if he could, then he could never be saved again, since Jesus would have to die a second time according to the Jewish way of thinking and the sacrificial system. But this is something that could never occur since there is no more sacrifice for sins which can be reoffered (Heb. 10:26). Therefore, God would judge the person who lost his salvation in the end (Heb. 6:8 – “whose end is to be burned”) and he could never possess any “assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. 6:11).

The unsaved individual who forfeited his salvation would be judged in relation to his *fruitless* living (“thorns and briers” – Heb. 6:8) instead of *fruitful* living (“and bringeth forth herbs” – Heb. 6:7) and would have no chance of being saved again by the death of Jesus Christ. This is because Christ’s death is not repeatable like the Old Testament sacrifices. In other words, He could not be re-offered upon the cross again to save them again for “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26) and “there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18).

In other words, if a Christian could lose his salvation (“If they shall fall away” - hypothetically) it would be impossible for him to repent again and be saved again. In order for someone to be saved again (and again and again!) Christ would have to die again (a second time and many times) “seeing they crucify to themselves the son of God afresh” (literally “recrucify” - Heb. 6:6). This re-crucifying is similar to the repeated animal sacrifices of the Old Testament (Heb. 10:3) which were used to bring ceremonial cleansing and temporary covering (atonement) to the worshipper (Heb. 10:1-2). But any repeated sacrifice of Jesus Christ would cause great shame and reproach to be brought upon His work on the cross (“and put him to an open shame” - Heb. 6:6).

“There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26). Jesus declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Christ’s death is not like the Old Testament sacrifices which needed to be repeated again and again. To say there is another sacrifice becomes mockery of the worst sort. In other words, if a believer could lose his salvation through apostasy, then Jesus would need to be crucified again (“afresh”) so that they can once again be purged from their sins (Heb. 1:3). But this is an impossibility and absurdity. To even think that Jesus could die again brings shame or reproach upon the work of Jesus Christ who “now once in the end of the world appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 10:28).

When you believe that salvation can be lost it brings shame to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:21 – “Christ is dead in vain”). The epistle of Hebrews dogmatically asserts that Christ died only once (Heb. 10:10-14) and takes away all iniquities (Heb. 10:17-18) unlike the repeated animal sacrifices (Heb. 10:1-4). Therefore, to recreate the death of Christ in order to resave people who have fallen away through apostasy is to put Jesus Christ and His work upon the cross to open shame. It’s a mockery and travesty upon the work of Jesus Christ.

Griffith Thomas concurs with this view when writing in his commentary (page 74) on Hebrews: “The passage is apparently a supposed case to correct their wrong ideas, and the argument seems to be that if it were possible for those who have had the experiences of verses 4-6 to fall away, it would be impossible to renew them unless Christ dies a second time, and thus put Him to an open shame and prove that His work was not of infinite value.”

Homer Kent has a comment on Hebrews chapter six that has some merit. He writes: “The hypothetical case is frequently objected to as not providing any real warning if it could not happen. Yet hypothetical and even impossible cases are not unknown in Scripture. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:12, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (but no one ever did, nor could). James 2:10 states, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law (a hypothetical condition) and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Jesus said in John 9:39, “I am come ... that they which see might be made blind” (there were none who could see, but Jesus

took His hearers at their estimate of themselves, v. 41). The author of Hebrews implies that he is speaking this way in 6:9.”

Elsewhere Kent has stated:

“To object to the value of an argument which ‘cannot happen’ is to misunderstand the difference between God’s perfect knowledge of His program and the means He employs for achieving it ... Hence it is proper to see in warnings such as this one in Hebrews the means whereby God achieves the goal of keeping true believers faithful to the end (3:14).”

The underlying purpose for this passage was not to warn against apostasy but to bring assurance to their hearts, the “full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. 6:11) through placing faith in the finality and completeness of their salvation in Christ’s finished work. The hypothetical situation was given to demonstrate the superiority of Christ’s work over the Old Testament sacrifices and bring the Hebrew believers to the place where they might possess assurance in relationship to their salvation experience. It’s impossible to lose your salvation because once you have lost it you can never get it back. We would all be shipwrecked and awaiting our eternal doom in hell. What a horrible and hopeless prospect this would be for everyone.

Hebrews Chapter 10 Warning Passage

Hebrews 10:26-31

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The warning in Hebrews 10 is similar to the warning in Hebrews 6. It was not a warning against apostasy per se but was used as a hypothetical situation (“if we sin willfully” – Heb. 10:26) of a believer losing his salvation (compare the similar hypothetical statements in Heb. 6:6 - “If they shall fall away” and Heb. 2:3 – “How shall we escape” and Heb. 12:25 - “if we turn away from him”).

Again, we cite Homer Kent who comments on the hypothetical nature of this passage: “A more reasonable explanation would seem to be that the passage warns true believers what the outcome would be if apostasy would occur. The author does not say that it has occurred, and comparison with 6:4-9 provides additional reasons for seeing this as a somewhat hypothetical argument.”

If a Christian could apostatize to this extent, he would lose his salvation (an imaginary scenario) and would be sure to face the fiery judgment of God (“judgment and fiery indignation”- Heb. 10:27 and “how much sorer punishment” – Heb. 10:29). There is no hope of escape. It is impossible to renew the apostate to repentance who has fallen into sin (“For it is impossible” - Heb. 6:4).

The language is obviously designed to denote punishment that is dreadfully severe. However, it’s equally true that if a Christian could lose his salvation this would bring great reproach upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. It would be like stepping or trampling upon the Son of God and concluding that the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed in the New Covenant sacrifice, and which sanctified the believer would have no eternal saving significance (“who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing”).

In other words, the believer who loses his salvation (even though he cannot) would consider the blood of Jesus Christ which ratified the New Covenant as something that was common, unclean, useless, and unholy. It would be like spitting in the face of God and concluding that His Son’s sacrifice was not sufficient to save an individual and was no different than the ceremonial sacrifices which could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). If a

believer could apostatize and lose his salvation, then the Lamb of God (John 1:29) would be no different than the lambs that were offered throughout Jewish history. But the Son of God is personified as the freshly slain Lamb (Heb. 10:20) whose sacrifice continues to provide salvation and acceptance in God's presence (Heb. 10:22).

In Japan there is a crucifix which was used by the government in days of persecution. It was placed on the ground, and everybody had to tread on the face of the Crucified. The non-Christians did not hesitate to tread on His face; the real Christians refused and were killed. The story goes that the face of Jesus was worn down and marred by people trampling on it.

This might be one way to illustrate what is being said in Hebrews 10:29. If a believer could apostatize and lose his salvation he would "trodden under foot the Son of God" and make the blood of Jesus Christ worthless ("hath counted the blood of the covenant ... an unholy thing") and would also bring great insult against the ministry of the Holy Spirit who originally wooed the believer to faith in Christ ("and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace"). This kind of spiritual rebellion clearly calls for a much worse punishment ("how much sorer punishment" - vs. 29) than the capital penalty that was inflicted under the Mosaic setup (Heb. 12:28-29). If a believer could apostatize and be lost, he should possess "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Heb. 10:27) and realize that it is a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31) and be judged for degrading the blood of Jesus Christ and the Spirit's ministry.

Of course, this is all a hypothetical situation that could never happen. Thank God! However, using the illustration of a believer losing his salvation and never being able to be saved again drives home the point of the eternal efficacy of Christ's one sacrifice. In other words, if Jesus as the freshly and final slain Lamb cannot save you, then there is no more sacrifice that can save you ("there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" - Heb. 10:26). Jesus can only be offered on the cross once (Heb. 10:14) unlike the repeated animal sacrifices.

Hebrews 10:18 states: "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." This means that if the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ cannot

save you, then you are on your own! Christ cannot be re-offered on the cross despite what the Roman Catholic Mass teaches. The word Mass actually means a continual sacrifice. The Roman Catholic Mass is a mockery of the death of Jesus Christ. The Savior died only once! He cannot die again and again and again. There remains no more sacrifice for sins!

This hypothetical illustration of a believer losing his salvation would then illustrate the importance of the believer clinging to the only sacrifice that can save him for time and eternity. If the Hebrew Christian would place faith alone in Christ's sacrifice alone, he could stop worrying about losing his salvation.

Dr. Myron Houghton, corresponding with me in an email, concurs with this: "If true believers COULD lose their salvation [but they can't], they wouldn't be able to get it back again, so stop worrying about it [as in 5:12] and 'go on' [as in 6:1]."

The Hebrew Christians obviously lacked the assurance of their salvation and needed to gain assurance by understanding and accepting the truth that Jesus was the fulfillment of the typical sacrifices to which they pointed (9:13-15; 10:1) and became the final sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 10:12, 14) that would be offered up to God and save them forever (Heb. 7:25). We must conclude once again that the hypothetical situation was given to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's work over the Old Testament sacrifices and bring the Hebrew believers to the place where they might possess assurance through faith in the finished work of Christ. It was used to build up their confidence in the Lord's saving grace.

Hebrews 6:1 seems to be a key verse when it states: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God."

In this context "perfection" or spiritual maturity involves receiving and responding appropriately to revealed truth (5:14), possessing a zeal for the realization of their hope in Christ (vs. 11), and continuing to manifest an unwavering faith and steadfast endurance in Christ (vs. 12). These believers

are invited to go on to spiritual maturity (reach the goal of maturity) by accepting the truth about Christ's finished and final sacrifice on the cross and stop worrying about losing their salvation. A mature believer will know that any legalistic conformity to the Law has no saving merit before God. So why go back to it?

They were instructed to leave the Mosaic Law behind and go on to maturity by accepting the finished work of Jesus Christ as the only sacrifice that could save them completely and forever since He is the actual fulfillment of the Law. Therefore, according to Hebrews 6:1-2, the saints were to leave behind the former and basic or elementary teachings about Christ found in Judaism which were hidden in the types and shadows of the sacrificial system ("the principles of the doctrine of Christ"). They were to leave behind their confidence in the dead works of ritualistic Judaism ("repentance from dead works" as in Heb. 9:14), ceremonial washings of cleansing ("doctrine of baptisms"), and the "laying on of hands" which was part of the sacrificial ritual under the Old Covenant (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21). They were also to advance in their understanding of the concept of future, bodily, resurrection and the judgment of unbelievers ("and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment") which became a much clearer revelation in the New Testament teachings and the Gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

The writer seems to be saying that they needed to abandon the elementary or preparatory teachings of Judaism and to press on to maturity in Christianity. In other words, the Hebrew Christians were to grow up in New Covenant teaching instead of going back to the Mosaic Law and Old Covenant. In doing so, they would come to realize that Christ was the fulfillment and final sacrifice of which all the Mosaic sacrifices pointed to (Heb. 9:1-14; Gal. 3:19) and the only sacrifice that could save them completely and forever.

I heard the late George Gardiner give a story of his childhood. One of the cats of his household died. The boys buried Charlie the cat outside but left his tail stick out of the ground so that they could pass by Charlie and still touch his tail. Every day he would pass by Charlie's grave and pull on the tail to make sure Charlie was still there. But one day George reached down to

pull on Charlie's tail and you know what happened? He pulled his old tail right out of the ground and was holding it in his hand! The boys had repeatedly gone back time and time again to touch the dead cat's tail. But there was no need to do so. Why? It's because the cat was dead and gone.

The same was true about the Mosaic system of repeated animal sacrifices. It too was dead and gone. There was no need to go back to this dead system. Jesus Christ had come and died upon the cross and fulfilled the typology of the old system and His sacrifice is non-repeatable. Therefore, the Hebrew believers did not need to go back to the old system and yank on its tail. In doing so they were saying that the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross was not sufficient to save them and another sacrifice was needed. But this is an impossibility since Christ can only die once and His sacrifice can never be repeated. Therefore, to think that you can lose your salvation through the finished work of Christ and then get it back is impossible. This is because Christ's sacrifice cannot be repeated. The end result is that you would be lost forever and have no escape from coming judgment.

Hebrews Chapter 2 Warning Passage

Hebrews 2:2-3

"For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."

I have saved this earlier warning passage for last since less information and details are given about the theoretical illustration of a believer apostatizing and losing his salvation. We can gain a better understanding of Hebrews 2 after studying the other warning passages where more information is gathered and understood concerning this unique hypothetically illustration.

If the angels were involved in the giving of the Mosaic Law and lawbreakers received temporal judgment for breaking the law, then those who refuse the eternal "so great" salvation that Christ spoke about during His earthly ministry (John 3:16-18, 36; 5:24; 6:47), and which was confirmed by the apostolic witness and miracles (Matt. 16:20; 2 Cor. 12:12), will surely face

future spiritual judgment and retribution for their neglect of this “so great salvation.”

When putting all the warning passages together the sense of Hebrews chapter 2 seems to be this. If a believer could lose his salvation, he would never have a chance to get it back since Christ cannot repeat His sacrifice as the epistle speaks about time and time again. There would be no “escape” (Heb. 2:3) for this person from God’s future judgment. It would leave the believer who has apostatized with the gloomy prospect of condemnation since he has neglected the only way of salvation through the finished work of Jesus Christ. In other words, if a believer could commit total apostasy by neglecting the “so great salvation” which Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry and lose his salvation, then he would never again have any chance or opportunity to get it back. This means there would be no escape from judgment. How can there be escape when a person rejects the only way of salvation?

There is no escape outside of Jesus Christ! Hypothetically, if a believer (“we”) were to willfully or presumptuously neglect the saving offer of Jesus Christ (“if we neglect so great salvation”) by claiming that the death of Jesus Christ is not sufficient to save us forever and forfeit the only way of salvation, then we would have no other opportunity to be saved (“How shall we escape”) since Jesus cannot be reoffered upon the cross. We can’t escape! We would be judged and forever lost in hell.

The other warning passages clearly speak about the judgment that comes when a person refuses to receive the gift of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. The answer to this warning passage is simple. There is no escape from judgment outside of Jesus Christ. You will burn in hell forever as implied and taught by the other warning passages (Heb. 6:8; 10:27-29, 31, 39). Your judgment is sure, and your destiny is sealed if you neglect the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

This same warning seems to be reiterated in Hebrews 12:25: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”

This earlier warning passage in the epistle (Heb. 2:3) is designed to get the believers reflecting upon the importance of the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation and eternal life (Heb. 7:24-25). Hypothetically, according to the Hebrew way of thinking under the Mosaic Law, if a believer could lose his salvation through apostasy, Jesus' present sacrifice would be disqualified to save him. Therefore, Jesus would have to die again. But since this cannot happen (Heb. 10:26) the believer who lost his salvation would never have any chance to get his salvation back. Again, this is because the death of Jesus Christ cannot be repeated. If the death of Jesus is not good enough to save you then nothing will ever be good enough to save you! There would be no escape! How can you escape? There is no escape!

Imagine what it would be like to know that you could never be saved! What would it be like to know that there is no escape from coming judgment? What would it be like to live and know that when you die you would have to face God's righteous wrath and fiery judgment throughout eternity? What would it be like to know that there would be no possibility of escape from God's wrath? Oh friend, if you reject the only sacrifice that can save you, Jesus Christ's death on the cross, there is no escape from God's judgment.

You would have no hope. You might as well engrave these words on your tombstone ahead of time: "Condemned to hell and lost forever." But there is hope! There is salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christ has died to give us what is termed "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3). This means we can rejoice in knowing that we are saved from all future judgment (Rom. 8:1, 33-34) and that Jesus Christ and His finished work will avail for you and me throughout eternity "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25) for everyone who believe on Him.

The warning chapters of Hebrews convey a hypothetical situation of a believer apostatizing and losing his salvation. It is something that could not occur. The illustration is designed to teach the Hebrew believers about the importance of trusting in the saving provision and merits of Christ's finished work. The hypothetical situation of a Christian losing his salvation would prove to the readers that there is no hope outside of the completed sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Theoretically, if a person could lose his salvation, this would mean that the work of Christ on the cross was not sufficient to

save him in the first place, and that “Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). This would also mean that Christ must be re-crucified again in order for another sacrifice to save the individual who has forfeited his salvation. But this conclusion, based upon the thinking of the Mosaic system, becomes an absurdity and impossibility since the Bible teaches the sufficiency of Christ’s one-time sacrificial death to forgive, save, and justify sinners forever (Heb. 10:4, 11-12, 17; 7:27).

This leaves the Hebrew Christian who allegedly could lose his salvation in a spiritual dilemma. If Christ cannot be re-offered on the cross after he loses his salvation, like the Old Testament sacrifices, then there is no hope for him to ever be saved again. Thus, only faith alone in the complete provision of Christ will provide eternal salvation to the believer and bring assurance into his heart.

Hebrews 7:25

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost (*completely and forever*) that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth (*as our High Priest in Heaven*) to make intercession for them” (*pleading the efficacy or value of His sacrifice on the cross*).

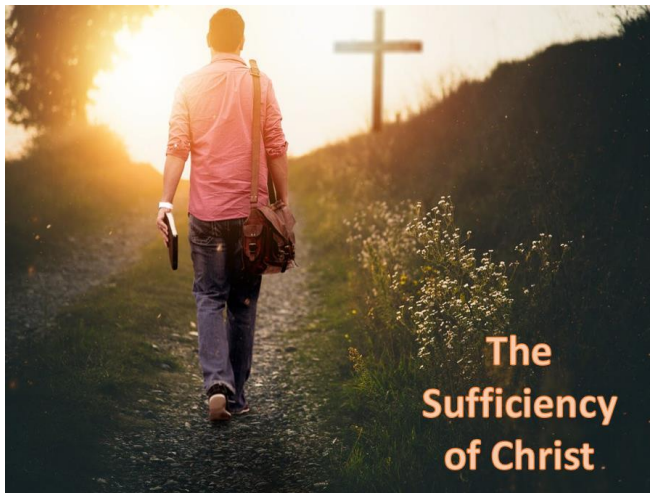
“And now for me He stands,
Before the Father’s throne.

He shows His wounded hands and names me as His own.

For me, He died, For me He lives,
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.”

There are no other possibilities to consider. We are locked into salvation only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This conclusion should provide believers with the “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22) and the “full assurance of hope” (Heb. 6:11) in their hearts knowing that they are saved completely and forever through the final sacrifice of Christ. It should allow believers to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6) and “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:14). It should urge us to “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward” (Heb. 10:35).

The truth about salvation only through Christ should encourage us “to hold fast our profession” (Heb. 4:14) or our confession and belief system that the death of Jesus Christ settles the issue of our salvation and justification before God forever. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised” - Heb. 10:23). Let us go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1) and accept what Jesus Christ has done for us through His death. Christ has provided us with complete salvation from hell and eternal forgiveness in God’s sight for all eternity (Heb. 9:26).



The Sufficiency of Christ

Here is a practical note. Those Christians who teach that a person can lose his or her salvation should remind themselves of the final sacrifice of Christ or the “one offering” (Heb. 10:14) that is sufficient to save a sinner forever. Christ’s sacrifice has “perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). We stand complete in Christ –

fully, finally, and forever accepted in God’s presence (Col. 2:10). Grace is enough! Christ’s death is sufficient to save us without the Mosaic Law and rituals.

Those who claim a person can be lost after being saved should also remember the impossibility of being resaved (Heb. 6:4) if one loses his salvation. If Christ’s death is not sufficient to save you the first time, then it won’t be able to save you a second, third, or fourth time! This is because Christ’s one-time sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to save you forever and this is illustrated by the very fact that it cannot be repeated (Heb. 10:26). If you make a mockery out of Christ’s sacrificial blood and death (Heb. 10:29) by claiming it can’t eternally save and secure you, then you have brought great shame upon the death of Jesus Christ. If you will believe in the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ’s death to save you forever, then you will never be faced with damnation (Heb. 10:29) but can know that you have escaped God’s wrath and judgment forever (Heb. 2:3).

“Only trust Him, only trust Him
Only trust Him now.
He will save you, He will save you
He will save you now.”

Summary and Conclusion

Let’s summarize the warning passages one more time so we can be sure to grasp the importance of these unique portions of Scripture. The Hebrew Christians were looking back to the Mosaic sacrifices and the need for repeated forgiveness and atonement under the Old Covenant (Heb. 10:1-4). This led them to doubt the sufficiency of Christ’s one sacrifice for sins (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:10; Rom. 6:10). To get the Hebrew Christians to rest in the sufficiency of the one-time sacrifice of Christ and stop doubting their salvation, he sets up a hypothetical situation based upon the repeated sacrifices of the Old Covenant.



Hypothetically, if a believer could apostatize and lose his salvation as suggested by the phrases “if we neglect so great salvation” (2:3), “if they shall fall away” (6:6), “if we sin willfully” (10:26), “if we turn away from him” (12:25), then they could never be saved again (“How shall we escape” – Heb. 2:3) for Christ’s one-time sacrifice cannot be repeated like the Old Testament sacrifices (there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” – Heb. 10:26) and is sufficient to save us forever (Heb. 7:25). The conjunction “if” sets up the hypothetical situation and dilemma. Therefore, “if” you could lose your salvation Christ cannot be reoffered again on the cross and a person would be lost forever without ever being able to regain his salvation. But since this cannot happen, why not trust in Christ alone and forever for your salvation and possess “the full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). Why not just believe in the finished work of Christ and be confident in Christ. The hypothetical case is used to teach the assurance of their salvation.

The Christian who lost his salvation would never be able to be renewed to repentance (Heb. 6:6) since Jesus Christ could not be recrucified (“afresh” –

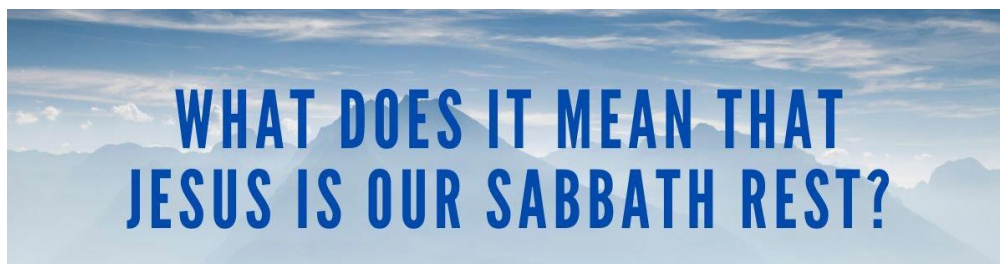
Heb. 6:6) upon the cross or die again like the repeated Old Testament sacrifices. There “remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (10:26) if the one sacrifice of Jesus cannot save us forever. And if this is the case, then there is no hope of ever being saved again, or getting your salvation back, since there can be no reoffering of Christ’s sacrifice. You would be lost forever in “the judgment” that follows death (Heb. 9:27) and your “end would be burned” (Heb. 6:8) in the fiery torment of hades (Luke 16:24) and the eternal Lake of Fire (Mark 9:43; Rev. 20:15). You would “draw back unto perdition” (Heb. 10:39) and the reality of coming judgment would cause you to possess “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” (10:27) and “sorer punishment” (10:29) that would follow you in the afterlife.

Henry Ward Beecher once remarked:

"The thought of future punishment for sinners which the Bible reveals is enough to make an earthquake of terror in every man's soul."

Thank God that our salvation cannot be lost since Christ has forgiven the believer of all his sins according to the New Covenant provision and promise (Heb. 10:17 – “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”) and provides each Gospel believer with full and final acceptance in God’s presence forever (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:2-25).

We must find our Sabbath rest in Jesus Christ!



Hebrews 4:9-10 declares:

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”

There is a rest or peace that comes into our hearts when we trust in the total sufficiency of Christ's death to save us forever. This rest of salvation that comes from only trusting in Christ is our New Testament Sabbath rest. It's a spiritual rest that can be ours when we express faith alone in Christ alone for our eternal salvation. Are you resting in Christ? Do you possess the sweet assurance in your soul that Christ enough to save you today and forever?

“Lord Jesus, Thou has promised rest,
Then give it now to me.
The rest of ceasing from myself
To find my all in Thee.”

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”