

Repentance Impossible to Renew Hebrews 6:4-6

As we look at the following passage of Scripture we would be wise to remember that the writer of Hebrews was addressing a group of Jews who had come into the Christian fellowship. Some had fully embraced the teachings of Jesus, while others liked what they heard yet were tempted to return to the religious rituals of Judaism and the Law of the Mosaic Covenant. The writer wrote with deep concern and warning against falling away (rejecting Christ). It was within this setting that these verses were written. See [Hebrews Introduction](#). We too who have come into the Christian fellowship, would be wise to examine our own hearts to see if we are following the true Christ in love and obedience--or are we just religious.

Hebrews 6:4-6

4. It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5. who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6. if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace (NIV, emphasis added).

No Other Sacrifice for Sin

Later in Hebrews 10:26, the author speaks on this subject again and states: “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27. but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28. Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (NIV, emphasis added)

Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6

Porter Barrington (1978) explains that a backslidden Christian is not meant in the verses. He gives the following examples from Scripture: Simon Peter backslid (Matthew 26: 69-75) repented (John 21:3-17), and we see that he was restored to fellowship with the Lord.

King David sinned (2 Samuel 11:1-27), repented (Psalm 51:1-19), and was restored to fellowship with the Lord (2 Samuel 12:13). God did not just wink at David's sin. David was painfully convicted of his sin, turned from his rebellion, and God restored him. Also, before and after he was restored David personally suffered the consequences of his sin as well as witness the consequences his sin had on those around him he loved.

On the other side, Scripture illustrates how Esau sinned against the Lord when he sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:27-34). Later he tried to repent, but found it impossible to do so. The Scripture goes on to say: “He [Esau] was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Hebrews 12:16,17; NKJV, emphasis added).

At the great white throne judgment where only the wicked dead are judged (Revelation 20:11-15) they too, will try to repent but will find it impossible.

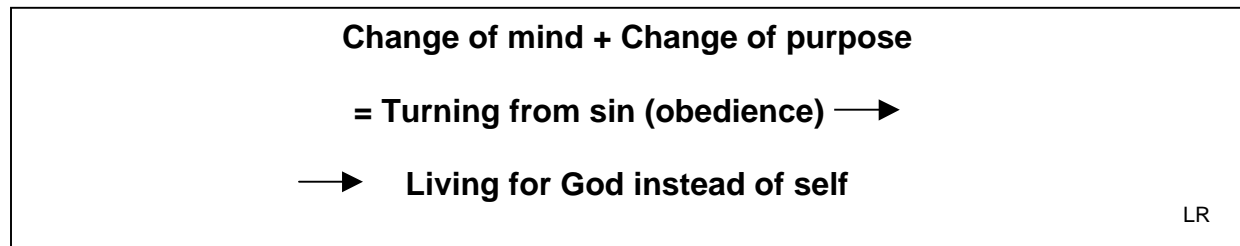
Barrington concludes that the writer of Hebrews is exerting that these verses are proof that being religious is not enough to save you. “They professed, but did not possess eternal life” (Barrington. p. 401). From the outside they had the appearance of being a Christian, but on the inside no regeneration (spiritual rebirth) had taken place.

Jesus said, ““Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does [obeys] the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21 NIV, emphasis and interpretation added).

Repentance

As previously mentioned [link](#), John MacArthur (1988) states, “Repentance as Jesus characterized it...involves recognition of one’s utter sinfulness and a turning from self and sin to God (I Thessalonians 1:9)... It is much more than a mere change of mind—it involves a complete change of heart, attitude, interest, and direction.... True faith is never seen as passive—it is always obedient” (MacArthur, p.32) (c.f. John 3:36; Romans 1:5; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

MacArthur goes on to state, “Repentance is not merely being ashamed or sorry over sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. It is a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead” (MacArthur, p.163)



William Kirwin (1984) exerts the same kind of belief: “Our repentance (a change of mind leading to a change of heart) calls for a change of lifestyle—turning from the world and turning to Christ.... The most significant change is not behavioral so much as attitudinal. It is a matter of heart, not of outward actions. Conversion [a conscious choice to turn to Christ from a life of self-centeredness and sin] is fundamentally a radical reorientation of identity...that is, of who one is. The Christian has a new heart, mind, and status with God” (Kirwin, pp. 194,196).

Apostasy and Perseverance

F.F. Bruce (1964) states regarding this Hebrew text, “Apostasy [Abandonment of one’s faith in Christ] is irremediable [Impossible to remedy, correct, or repair]” (Bruce, p.118, emphasis added). He exerts that the author of Hebrews proceeds to emphasize, “Continuance is the test of reality. In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints...rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints” (Bruce, p.118).

Bruce observed that people may become “immunized against Christianity by being inoculated with something which, for the time being, looks like the real thing that it is generally mistaken for it.” There may have been a formal attachment without an inner reality or transformation. These verses suggest that a person may see the truth and perhaps for a time conform to it, but for one reason or another--renounce it (Bruce, pp.118-119).

(For more on this comparative study, see [Jesus’ Parable of the Soils](#) (Luke 8: 4-15).

Perseverance to the End

“Let us not become weary in doing good [obedience to God], for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians: 6:9, NIV, interpretation added).

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV, emphasis added).

“Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position” (2 Peter 3:7, NIV, emphasis added).

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23, NIV, emphasis added).

“Let us hold fast to our confession that Jesus is the Christ” (Hebrews 4:14, NIV, emphasis added).

“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to [remain steadfast to, obey] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know [understand] the truth [reality of God], and the truth will set you free” [to live with/for God], (John 8:31-32, NIV, emphasis and interpretation added). Knowing the truth and receiving freedom is conditional on holding to (obeying/acting on) the teaching (commands and promises) of Jesus.

“Men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22, NIV, emphasis added).

Conclusion:

Although these verses were written with the Hebrews in mind, it is prudent that we also pay sober attention to these words. They call for us to examine our lives to see if we are truly following the commands of God, or are we just walking in religion and empty rituals. I hope you can say along with many others and me on the path of righteousness, that you could never imagine turning away from the Lord who has called you into his marvelous light. You have heard his call, responded in faith and repentance, and daily see his revelation all around you. May you keep your eyes on the prize (Jesus), holding fast and trusting him to see you through to the day of his return.

What's Your Next Step?



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To continue this study see: [Hebrews 6:7-12](#)

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