

Hebrews 6:4-6 in context

- Remember Chapters 1-5
- 6:3 – special attention
- Flow of thought
- The oath of God – a major key to understanding
- Not minimise various words and phrases
- Verse 3: 'If – and only if – God permits'

1. There is a possibility of its becoming impossible for us to press on to perfection

2. If such a fall takes place it will be impossible for the writer to help them

We are getting close to Hebrews 6:4–6 – three verses of Scripture that have caused a lot of perplexity in the Christian church. Some guidelines are needed. (i) It is important that we constantly remember what the writer has already said in Hebrews chapters 1 to 5. For Hebrews 6:4–8 repeats and follows up Hebrews 2:1–4 and Hebrews 3:7–4:13. (ii) We must pay special attention to verse 3, before we look at verses 4–6. (iii) We must follow carefully the 'flow of thought', for our writer is logically and carefully working out what he wants to say. (iv) We must keep in mind the teaching about the 'oath' of God, which is certainly a major key to the understanding of Hebrews 6. (v) We must resist the temptation to play down certain words and phrases in the text. 'Impossible' must not be reduced to mean 'very difficult'. 'Tasted' must not be taken to mean 'take a little sip'. The clause 'since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God' must not be stripped of its weight by translating '**while** on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God', as if to say, 'They cannot be rescued from sin while they sin' (a point hardly worth making). And the clauses of 6:4–5 must not be interpreted to refer to people other than Christians. All of these approaches are surely evasive. All attempts to minimize the various phrases of the text must be resisted.

Actually verse 3 is not difficult; it should be carefully followed. The text says: ³*And this is what we shall do if God permits.* The Greek word *eanper* – a word we had in 3:6, 14 – is used here. It is an emphatic marker of condition. I could translate 'if – and only if – God permits'.

1. **There is a possibility of its becoming impossible for us to press on to perfection.** Whatever the details of 6:4–6 might mean it is obvious that it explains verse 3. It is quite clear in verse 3 that there is some kind of failure which makes it impossible for the Christian to make further progress and press on to perfection. 'And this is what we shall do, if God permits'. Verses 4–6 is going to be dealing with this same subject since it begins with the word 'For'. ⁴*For it is impossible to renew again to repentance those who were once-for-ever enlightened, and so have experienced the heavenly gift, who were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and who experienced the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and yet they then fell by the wayside. They are in themselves crucifying again the Son of God and exposing him to public shame.* The main point is made clear by verse 3. There are some people with whom it is impossible to press on to perfection.

2. **If such a fall takes place it will be impossible for the writer to help them.** I shall be able to help you, says the writer. We shall press on to make spiritual progress – but **only** if God is giving us grace. If he decides not to permit this progress I shall not be able to help you in the way that I wish. There will be nothing I can do if God decides to withhold the possibility of your further progress towards 'perfection'.

3. This is why there is need for every Christian to stay soft and tender in hearing God's voice

• God will not permit the hard of heart to progress

• Never begin to become hard of spiritual hearing

• Every Christian needs to stay soft and tender towards God's voice

The gist of the matter

• There is a point of rebellion from which it is impossible to progress to spiritual maturity

3. This is why there is need for every Christian to stay soft and tender in hearing God's voice. 'This is what we shall do, if God permits'. If God gets angry with our hardness of heart, we shall not progress at all and will be left like the Israelites in the wilderness, neither getting un-redeemed and taken back to pre-redemption bondage, nor pressing on to inherit the promises but staying where we are in a wilderness until our life is ended, having forfeited further joys and experiences of the kingdom of God.

It is a frightening thought and yet we must not be terrified more than we need to be. I can say straightaway that anyone who is hearing God's voice has not committed the sin that the author describes. The writer does not in fact think that his readers have 'fallen' in this way. We have not 'fallen' in this way if we hear God's voice and act upon what we hear. The easiest way to prove we are not spiritually deaf is to demonstrate that we have heard God speak to us.

But we do need to know of the danger. How shall we Christians escape God's anger if we neglect such a great salvation? The best way never to become spiritually deaf is never even to begin to become hard of hearing. Physically this is perhaps impossible but spiritually it can be done. 'Watch out, brothers and sisters, lest there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God'¹.

Verses 4 to 6 develop the thought in verse 3. The main point is: **there is need for every Christian to stay soft and tender in hearing God's voice.** The key to Hebrews 6:4-6 is surely to take it in the light of what has already been said in 2:1-3 and 3:7-4:13. The gist of the matter is this:

If a Christian reaches a certain point of rebellion, God may not give him permission to progress to spiritual maturity. God may swear in his wrath that such a Christian – although he remains a child of God – will not reach the goal of the Christian life. Such a Christian cannot be renewed unto repentance. He remains hard of heart. No one can help him. He is saved 'as though through fire'. He will reach heaven but eternally lose reward. The key to not 'falling' in this way is to stay open to God's voice.

¹ 3:12



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