

⁴For 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 writer is considering Christians

- They have repented

- The danger is that of losing what God wanted to give them

The people mentioned here are certainly Christians. It is sometimes said that these people have not repented or believed. But this is a mistake, because our writer will go on to say that they cannot be 'renewed' to repentance. In other words they have known repentance before! They have repented at least once. Also the writer refers elsewhere (in connection with the same warning) to their first confidence and confidence is his word for faith!

Yet there is the danger that after having experienced so much these people might become rebellious. It had happened not to the readers themselves but to those who had abandoned the fellowship. God gave them many opportunities for recovery, but they refused them all. Finally God took an oath in his anger and so they 'fell by the wayside'. It was not loss of eternal salvation. But they lost a lot! They lost their fellowship with God. They lost their usefulness in God's kingdom. They lost the ministry God wanted them to have. They became spiritually deaf. No one could reach them. They lived in a spiritual wilderness. I have no doubt they got to heaven. They were not un-redeemed, or un-regenerated, or un-justified. They were not disowned as God's children. God is more faithful than that! **They did not lose what God had already given them, but they lost what God wanted to give them.** Don't be like them, says our writer. Don't even get anywhere near to having a rebellious heart. Hold on to your first confidence. It will be richly rewarded.

The Disaster that overtook them

- They fell aside

- They failed to persist in diligent faith

- They did not reject the gospel – they failed to apply it

We have considered the people he has in mind. Next we must consider **the disaster that overtook them** (they 'fell by the wayside'). What is it? We must note it says 'and fell...', not 'if they fall...'. Our writer is considering something that might actually happen (and elsewhere he gives examples of its happening – the wilderness generation, Esau). We must not emphasize the 'if' so as to imply it is **entirely** hypothetical.

The word is *parapipto*. It means 'to fall aside' or to 'fall by the wayside'. It may mean 'to stumble on something', or 'to be mistaken'. In the New Testament it is found only in Hebrews 6:6, where it means 'to fall aside'. Despite most modern translations it is not a strong word. It does not mean 'fall away' from salvation (for which *ek-pipto* might be the word to use). When the noun *paraptoma* (a falling aside) is used in Matthew 6:14–15 and Mark 11:25, the sin referred to is not apostasy. The word does **not** have the idea of totally and finally renouncing one's faith. Rather in Hebrews it means 'fail to persist in diligent faith and so come under the anger of God and experience a falling aside'. It is not dealing with rejection of the gospel so much as failure to **apply** the gospel. This was the danger facing the Hebrew Christians. We must interpret *parapipto* in the light of Hebrews' message generally. Elsewhere in 2:3 he speaks of not 'neglecting salvation' and says that something serious will happen if we do. In 3:6, 14 he speaks of a failure of faith. Closer to Hebrews 6:6 is Hebrews 3:12 where he speaks of turning away from the

1:1

living God by a refusal to persist in faith. In 3:11, God's oath is so serious that an obvious 'fall' must follow such that those believers will not enter rest. Hebrews 4:1 and 4:11 also have the idea of a 'fall'.

Neglect of Salvation

- Those who have eternal redemption 'may [or may not!] receive the promised eternal inheritance

- The characteristics of this 'falling by the wayside

The seriousness of their sin

- Crucifying again the Son of God – causing him extreme pain

- Shame and disgrace

The writer's illustration

- The question is: What kind of heart is found within us?

Either useful – producing fruit or useless – producing thorns

Hebrews 6:6 refers to a **neglect** of salvation^{□1}, a refusal to hear God^{□2} that is so ingrained and long-lasting that God finally swears in his wrath and the Christian 'falls' into a state of being beyond restoration and progress to maturity. Verses 4–6 explain verse 3! These verses are not referring to loss of initial-salvation. It is loss of inheritance, loss of reward. It is not lost sonship, or lost new birth, or lost justification. Every Christian is sanctified for ever by the blood of Christ. He has not long-lasting redemption but eternal redemption. But those who have **eternal** redemption 'may [or may not!] receive the promised eternal inheritance'. 'Hold on to your faith', says our writer. 'It will be richly rewarded.' It is reward that is gained by persistent faith. It is reward and current usefulness to God that might be lost for ever by persistent spiritual deafness. The easiest way to understand all of this is to consider the biblical examples and parallels (Esau, the Israelites in the wilderness, Saul, Judah in its last days before the Babylonian exile). What are the characteristics of this 'falling by the wayside'? (i) It is a 'fall' from which they never recover in this life, (ii) it is becoming spiritually deaf, unable to hear God's voice, (iii) it is not wanting to repent and not being able to get back to where you were before, (iv) it is being beyond the help of any Christian friend. No one can renew such a person to repentance.

Next in Hebrews 6:6 we have **some phrases that speak of how serious was the sin they committed**. *They are in themselves crucifying again¹ the Son of God and exposing him to public shame*. The Greek word (*heautois*) for 'in themselves' is often taken to mean 'to their own disadvantage', but more likely it means 'in themselves' and makes the point that the rebellious Christian is doing in his own experience what the enemies of Jesus did when they crucified him. They are subjecting the Lord Jesus Christ to extreme pain. It 'crucifies' him when we rebel against him.

The Christian's lapse into unbelief also is like the crucifixion in that it is 'exposing him to public shame'. Just as the cross brought shame and disgrace upon Jesus, so does the unbelief and lifestyle of the rebellious Christian.

Next we have in Hebrews 6:6–7 **the writer's illustration of what he has said**. ⁷*For land that has drunk in the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.* ⁸*But land that brings forth thorns and thistles, is worthless and near to being cursed. Its end is to be burned.* These words are a small parable. The land represents the heart of the Christian. The often-falling rain represents the Word of God and the many times God has spoken to us. The question is: what sort of land is the rain falling upon and what fruit will it produce? What kind of heart is found within us? There are two possibilities. The land upon which the rain falls (the heart to which the Word of God comes) is either useful or useless. It either produces fruit or it produces the thorns and thistles of disobedience and rebellion. Inevitably a decision will be made about the land sooner or later. That is to say, an oath is to be taken about its usefulness or uselessness. Receiving the blessing of God is God's oath of mercy (about which we shall read shortly in 6:12–20). Being 'near' to a curse is God's oath of anger in which he swears that we shall never enter his rest during this life, that

□1 see 2:3
□2 see ch. 3

• *God's oath of mercy (blessing)*

• *Or God's oath of anger (near to being cursed)*

• *The fire of God's judgment that burns up the useless behaviour of the rebellious Christian*

progress to maturity will never be possible. It is notable that our writer does not say 'receives the blessing of God...receives the curse of God'. He says it is '**near** to being cursed'. Why is there this slight restraint in what is said? It is surely because the Christian can never be totally and eternally cursed. Our writer is referring only to this life and whether in this life our destiny is reached. The 'land flowing with milk and honey' for the Christian is a matter of receiving God's oath of blessing in this life. The Christian who gets rebellious is like land '**near** to being cursed' but he can never be absolutely and eternally under God's curse. He has been given eternal redemption. He is sanctified for ever by the blood of Christ. But the 'land' of his heart can be shown to be useless. What is produced – the thorns and thistles of rebellion – will be burned up. Nothing done in rebellion will have any everlasting significance. Our passage is parallel at this point to John 15:6, 1 Corinthians 3:15 and Hebrews 10:27. None of them refer to everlasting punishment. Each of them refers to the fire of God's judgement in which God angrily burns up the useless behaviour of the rebellious Christian who failed to apply his faith to the calling of God upon his life.

Note ¹ The Greek word here may mean either 'crucify' or 'crucify again' but since any crucifixion of Jesus must now be some kind of crucifying again this is the more likely translation.

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