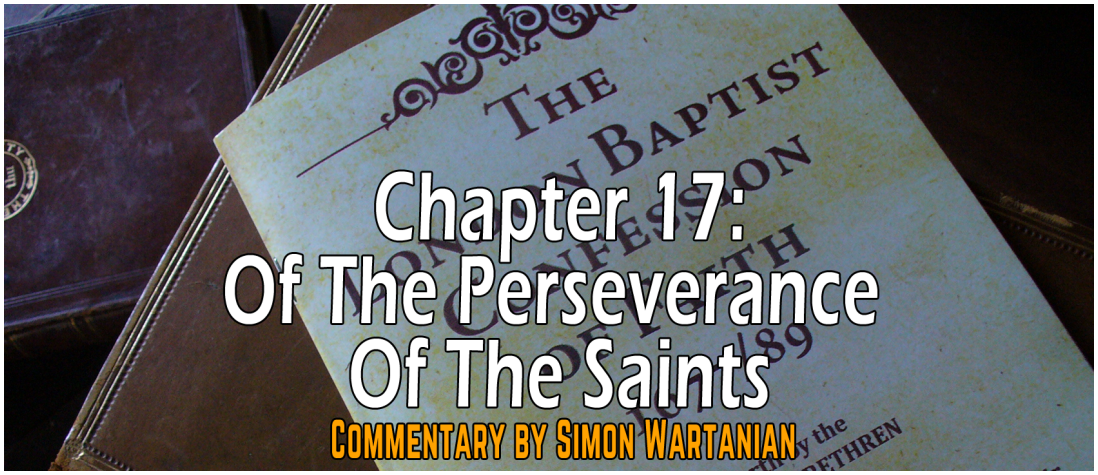
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 17: Of The Perseverance of the Saints - Commentary

Published: Thursday 5th of March 2015 19:18 by Simon Wartanian
URL:
https://www.thecalvinist.net/post/1689-Baptist-Confession-Chapter-17:-Of-The-Perseverance-Of-The-Saints-Commentary



Chapter 17: Of The Perseverance of the Saints

What do we mean by the Perseverance of the Saints? Does it matter what we do? Are we to be passive and do nothing? What passages support the doctrine of Perseverance? What about passages that speak of falling away and Hebrews 6?

Wayne Grudem defines the perseverance of the saints in this way:

> The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.[1]

In this chapter, I want to mainly do two things: first, argue for the *P* in the *TULIP*, the Perseverance of the Saints; and second, examine some passages which are often brought up against the doctrine.

---

§1 Can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace

1. Those whom **God hath accepted in the beloved,** effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and **given the precious faith of his elect** unto, **can neither totally nor finally fall** from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence **he still begets and nourisheth in them faith,** repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; **1** and though **many storms and floods arise** and beat against them, yet they shall **never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon;** notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, **2** yet he is still the same, and **they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation,** where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being **engraven upon the palm of his hands,** and **their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity. 3**
    1. John 10:28-29; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 2:19; 2 Peter 1:5-10; 1 John 2:19[2]

2. Ps. 89:31-32; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Tim. 4:7
3. Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Eph. 1:14; 1 Peter 1:5; Rev. 13:8

Those whom God hath accepted (**chapter 11**), **effectually called** (**chapter 10**), **sanctified by His Spirit** (**chapter 13**) and **given the precious faith of His elect** (**chapter 14**), **can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace** (e.g., John 10:28-29; 1 John 2:19). If we follow what was said in the previous chapters, as this paragraph begins by enlisting these things, we cannot but expect such a declaration. If God is absolutely sovereign over all things (chapters **3** and **5**), even electing, calling, justifying, adopting (**chapter 12**) and sanctifying us, how can it be that God could fail in His purpose and we be lost to eternal perdition? It cannot. The elect will **certainly persevere** in the **state of grace...to the end**. This is the essential difference between true and false faith. True faith perseveres to the end (1 John 2:19). This is because **the gifts and callings of God are without repentance** (Rom. 11:29), in other words, He does not change His mind. Therefore, the elect are safe and He will grant them all these things which are necessary for their final salvation and perseverance.

This does not mean that the journey will be easy. In fact, the Confession speaks of **storms and floods** that **arise and beat** us. Nonetheless, no one and nothing can shake us **off that foundation and rock which by faith** we **are fastened upon**. In these **storms and floods** and by the **temptations of Satan**, **the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured** for us (so also with our assurance, see **chapter 18:4**). This does not mean that God has changed; **he is still the same**. But we are being attacked by the enemy and are fighting or giving into temptation and are in need of restoration. Even in these **storms and floods**, we may **be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation** and the enjoyment of our **purchased possession**. The fact that the elect cannot lose their salvation is further shown from the fact that we are **engraven upon the palm of His hands** (Isa. 49:16) and our **names having been written in the book of life from all eternity** (Rev. 13:8; 20:15). All this is given for the confidence and encouragement of the believers in God's faithfulness, goodness, grace, promise, and power.

The Impossibility Of Final Apostasy For The Elect

The biblical and Reformed doctrine of perseverance is a great mountain, which gives the saints assurance and faith in God's almighty power in overcoming sin in us and completely saving us. The doctrine does not teach, contrary to non-Protestant caricatures, that Christians after being saved can do whatever they want to do and still remain saved. Rather, the doctrine teaches that those who have the Spirit of God indwelling in them will persevere in the faith by the almighty power of God. The Lord will chastise, sanctify and lead them toward a holier life.

That the doctrine is true and biblical may be seen from many ways (**see paragraph 2**), including (1) the decree of election, (2) regeneration, (3) justification and (4) Christ's obedience.

Election: It has pleased God from all eternity to select a particular people in the Lord Jesus Christ whom He will redeem from sin to be with Him forever without any consideration of foreseen faith or works, merely because of His good pleasure. Seeing that their salvation was not dependent upon them, how would their perseverance be (completely) dependent upon them? There is no debate among Calvinists about whether the elect can lose their salvation. Someone who accepts Unconditional Election *must* believe in perseverance. It is logically necessary, for to contend otherwise is to say that God has unconditionally chosen a person to be saved, but has not chosen to preserve that particular person, which is absurd on its face. Therefore, the one who accepts Unconditional Election inevitably must accept the Perseverance of the Saints. For to reject the doctrine is to contend that God fails to save those whom He intends to save. See **chapter 3, paragraph 5** for more on Unconditional Election.

Regeneration: Through regeneration, we have been made new creatures, given a new heart and a new spirit. Plus, the Spirit of the Almighty has come into our hearts (e.g., Ezek. 36:25-27). We've been given a new nature with the Law of the God written upon our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). What happens when (supposedly) a person loses their salvation? Do they become unregenerate? Do they receive their old nature back? Do they become *un*born again? Do you see the difficulty that such an idea of "falling away" brings with it? It is simply impossible that such a thing will happen. And what if the person loses their salvation and then comes to the Lord Jesus again, does God cause him to be born again for a second time? See **chapter 11** for more on regeneration.

Justification: Justification is a legal act of God by which He declares guilty sinners free because of Christ's work. Our sin is put upon Him, and we receive His righteousness (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-31). How does it happen that God's verdict, for a (supposedly) regenerate believer, becomes void after that person falls away (see Rom. 8:1)? Does the person become unjustified? Does he lose his justification? But how can that be if God has already declared them just based on nothing in themselves, but solely by grace through faith *because of* Christ? The idea that justified believers came become *un*justified *un*believers is not found in the New Testament and has great implications on the doctrine of justification by free grace and

through faith alone. Those who believe such things happen practically believe in justification *by works* or perseverance *by works*. See **chapter 11** for more on justification.

Christ's Obedience: The Father has given the Son a charge, namely, to lose none of the elect (e.g., John 6:37-40). How does this fit with the idea that we can become unregenerate and unjustified, or to say it in another way: to be lost? Does the Son of God now fail? But how can God fail in accomplishing all His will (Isa. 46:8-11; Ps. 33:10-11; 115:3; Isa. 14:27; Dan. 4:34-35)? If the Son has received a charge and a command from the Father to lose nothing of what the Father has given Him, will the Son be disobedient to the Father's command? The Son testifies of Himself that He "always do[es] the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29). Will He also lose none of the elect, or will He fail at this point to do that which is pleasing to God the Father? You see, at this point, we are not talking about those who professed to be Christian at one time but now have denied the faith, i.e., apostates. Now we're talking about God. We are talking about God's glory and reputation. Will the Son fail or will He succeed in doing all the Father's will? I believe that the Son will not fail to accomplish all the Father's will for Him, for He is the Son of God! And here I'm not even talking about the fact that the Lord Jesus intercedes for us which guarantees that we will not be lost (e.g., Heb. 7:25).

By just considering these four points, the idea of "falling away" and becoming unregenerate seems unbiblical to me. But that is not the only thing that drives me that way. It is also the clear testimony of Scripture that leads me to believe that indeed: none of the elect can become *un*elect; none of the regenerate can become *un*regenerate; none of the justified can become *un*justified and that the Christ will never fail!

For texts on the Perseverance of the Saints, see **here**. Below I want to take a look at a few passages from the New Testament concerning the fact that God preserves all His elect.

Johannine Corpus

I believe that John is the clearest Gospel on the Doctrines of Grace. All five points are taught in clear form in the Gospel and obviously, that includes the Perseverance of the Saints. Below are some passages from the Johannine writings (mainly the Gospel) in support of this doctrine.

John 6:37-40 – I should lose nothing

> **All that the Father gives me** will come to me, and whoever comes to me **I will never cast out.** 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And **this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing** of all that he has given me, but **raise it up on the last day.** 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6 is a great passage on the doctrine of sovereign unconditional election from the very lips of the Lord Jesus, I have gone through the **passage** in **chapter 3** regarding the subject of **Unconditional Election**. But now we will focus more closely on the fact that the Son of God will lose none of the elect. The idea of the Father giving people to the Son comes frequently in the Gospel of John (John 6:37, 39, 65; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24). Those who are given are obviously the elect to whom the Son of God will give eternal life. This is also the case from John 6 wherein it is clear to see that those who are given are brought safely even to the last day.

1. First, we observe the fact that all whom the Father has given to the Son *will* come to the Son. There is nothing "iffy" in the passage. All who are given will definitely come. God does not fail to accomplish His purpose, for it is God actually who draws and grants people to come to the Son (John 6:44, 65). He grants the willingness and desire for a sinner to repent and put their faith in Christ, therefore He will not fail. There is a clear connection in v. 37 between those who are *given* by the Father to the Son and those who *come*. There is only one group, namely, the group that is *given* that will also *come* to the Son.

2. Those who are given by the Father to the Son, will not be rejected by the Son. Sometimes non-Calvinists make a terrible caricature of God's absolute sovereignty saying that some people want to be saved, but they are rejected by God. We as Calvinists abhor such an idea and protest that no one will come to the Son unless drawn by the Father (John 6:44). Therefore, anyone who comes to the Son, comes by the power and drawing of God and consequently will not be cast out. The Son will not reject those whom the Father has given Him and draws to Himself. They will find Him to be a perfect Savior who has atoned for their sins and provides them an unshakable salvation.

3. We see from vv. 38-40 that there is a specific will of the Father concerning those whom He has given to the Son, namely, that they should not be lost. The Son has the duty to protect those whom the Father has given Him. The charge is that He " should lose nothing of all that he has given [Him], but raise it up on the last day." Here we have to ponder if it is possible for the Son to disobey the Father and therefore *sin*. Just thinking of such a thing is close to blasphemy. In John 8:29 the Lord Jesus Himself claims that "I always do the things that are pleasing to him [God the Father]." If the Son is always obedient to the Father, will He fail at this point? Is it possible for the Son to lose those who are entrusted into His care, disobey the

Father and therefore sin? We are talking here of regenerate, justified and in-Christ believers. We are not talking about those who professed to be believers and have rejected that profession. We are talking about those who have been drawn by God to the Son and they were not cast out by the Son. Is it possible for *them* to be lost? I don't believe that is possible at all. The issue for me here is not at all about the supposed **free will** of man or any other thing, the issue is about the glory of God. Will Christ be disobedient to the Father and be unable to fulfill the Father's will contrary to John 8:29? That is the issue! The focus is upon God, not man even in this subject.

4. The Son is not to lose the elect who were given by the Father, but rather He should raise them up. So, not only is the charge given to the Son that He should not lose them. Rather, the charge is given also that He should preserve them unto the last day of resurrection. This portion about perseverance is not spelled out literally in the passage, but could be seen from the fact that we are given assurance that we will not be cast out when we come to the Son, which is the beginning of salvation and the Son is given the charge to raise the elect up on the last day. What about the in-between? It seems clear to me that the Son has also received the charge to preserve them if He has received the charge to raise them up. This expression of raising up is only used in John 6:39, 40, 44, 54 and refers to the resurrection of the believers on the last day (see John 5:29; 11:24).

5. We observe also the fact that in v. 40 a mention is made about the faith of the believer. The Reformed doctrine of Perseverance does not, contrary to false caricatures, teach that the elect can do whatever they want and it doesn't matter since they're elect. Rather, we teach that the elect will persevere through faith as the Scriptures teach. If someone claims to be elect, but has no abiding, everyday faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance toward God, then his claim is simply false, for the fruit of election is faith and repentance. We are not saved by *election*, rather we are saved by *faith* alone in Christ. Election is merely God's choice from all eternity to select out people whom He will in time give that faith which justifies.

6. Lastly, we see that a connection is made between v. 39 and 40 about the ones given and the ones now (present tense) believing. Those who were given by the Father in v. 39 are the ones looking (present tense) to the Son and believing (present tense) in Him. Their being given by the Father ensures that they will have abiding faith through which they will be saved. Furthermore, in v. 40 we see the free offer of the gospel. The gospel is proclaimed to all creation and everyone is called to behold and believe in the Son, knowing also from the Scriptures about the truth of Total Depravity that no one will seek the Son. But we know also that whoever looks upon the Son and believes in Him, will do so as a result of being given by the Father to the Son, and not as a result of human will or effort. Therefore, v. 40 is a call to everyone to look and believe in the Son, and not to say in the state of unbelief, "I don't see evidence of election in me" or "I don't think I'm elect, so it doesn't matter". Rather, the call of v. 40 is to everyone to look upon the Son and believe in Him and in *that way* you will know whether you're elect or not. Those who look and adore the Son prove their election by their faith. Those who reject and spurn the Son until death, prove their reprobation by their rejection.

John 10:27-29 – No one will snatch them

> **My sheep** hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 **I give them eternal life**, and **they will never perish**, and **no one will snatch them** out of my hand. 29 My **Father, who has given them to me**, is greater than all, and **no one is able to snatch them** out of the Father's hand.

1. First of all, we again encounter the idea of the Father giving a specific people to the Son in v. 29 as we did in chapter 6 above. The believers here are designated as the sheep of Jesus the Shepherd. They are His, why? Because the Father has given them to Him. They hear His voice, why? Because He is their Shepherd and they follow no other. They follow Him, why? Because He is their Good Shepherd and the sheep recognize the voice of their Shepherd and they follow Him. The elect are Jesus the Shepherd's possessions and He is the One Who seeks out the sheep when they've gone astray. He has this charge, as we saw from John 6.

2. The sheep are given eternal life by the Son. They are given eternal life in the present time, not after death or after Judgment Day. Eternal life begins on this side of eternity. It is the sheep who are specifically given eternal life, which does not primarily describe the *length*, but rather the *quality* of life. Eternal life is described in terms of knowing and having a relationship with God, and does not merely refer to unending life after the grave, although it does also refer to that, but we also know that the Bible speaks of eternal life as a present possession of believers on this side of eternity (e.g., John 3:16; 5:13). But more on this point below in the next section.

3. The sheep are given eternal life and then another thing follows, namely the fact that they will never perish. The same group is still under discussion. The same sheep who were given by the Father, are given eternal life and we are assured that "they will never perish." The expression οὐ μὴ ἀπόλωνται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (*ou me apolontai eis ton aiona*) may be translated with "shall certainly not perish for ever". The HSCB translates it with "they will never perish — ever!" The idea here is clear that apostasy, or perishing for the sheep is an impossibility. It is not an exaggeration to claim this. It is simply what our Lord says here. We see first that they're given eternal life by the Son, which according to John 3:16 means therefore that they will not perish. But also that they're Christ's sheep who were bought by His blood. He died to save them.

He is the Good Shepherd Who will lead them and be their Guide and the One Whom they will follow because they know Him (John 10:7-9, 14-15).

4. Our Shepherd says that it is not possible for the sheep to be snatched from the Son's hand. They are in His hand, they are under His care and protection. He is the One responsible for them. It is His task to protect and guide the sheep. The Lord Jesus, being the Lord Who is our Shepherd, is faithful to guide His sheep into His ways. Who can stop the Son of God from accomplishing His purpose or who can thwart His purpose? The elect are in the Son's hands and it is impossible for them to be snatched, taken away and seized from His hand. To be snatched from His hand is to perish. The idea is the same, but the Lord Jesus adds this to further strengthen His claim to deity and almighty power to preserve the elect. To suggest that no one can snatch the believers, but they can forfeit their salvation, or go out from His hand is beyond absurd, for when the Lord says "no one", that obviously includes the believer. Furthermore, even if they forfeit their salvation or jump out of His hand, the result is that they perish. But this is exactly what the Lord Christ rejects and claims impossible because of His almighty power.

5. The point is further strengthened and made definite when the Lord claims that not only are they in His hand, but they are also in the hands of God the Father Who has given them to the Son. They are His and they are entrusted to the Son Who never fails to accomplish the Father's will (John 8:29). The Lord Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater. He claims that the Father is "greater than all". This is not a claim that the Son of God is less deity. Rather, in the state of His humanity, the Lord Jesus was in a lower position than the Father. No one is able to seize the sheep and snatch them from the Father's hand. It is simply impossible.

6. Therefore, we observe the last three points being that the sheep (1) will never perish, (2) no one is able to snatch them from the Son's hand, and (3) no one is able to snatch them from the Father's hands. This seems to be a very strong and unshakable doctrine of Perseverance and assurance that none of the sheep, i.e., the elect will be lost, but rather they will persevere in faith.

7. Lastly, we observe the fact that here the Lord Jesus most clearly and definitely speaks of regenerate, justified and Spirit-indwelt believers. He is not speaking of those who merely *profess* the faith, but those who actually *possess* true and lasting God-given faith. He speaks of all believers when he calls us His sheep. This is seen even as He looks forward to the coming of the Gentiles into His fold (John 10:16). Therefore, this passage is a great piece of confidence that Christ is indeed victorious and will lose none of His elect. It is the Godhead here Who will assure the fact that none of the sheep given to the Son will be lost, how can the Blessed Trinity fail? Are we willing to go so far as to say that such a thing is possible? May God forbid the thought!

Eternal Life

John 3:14-16 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may **have eternal life.** 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him **should not perish** but **have eternal life.**

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son **has eternal life**; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life.** He **does not come into judgment**, but has passed from death to life.

John 6:40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should **have eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes **has eternal life.**

John 6:54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood **has eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day.

1 John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer **has eternal life** abiding in him.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you **have eternal life.**

Nowhere do we read in Holy Writ about people losing their "eternal life", not even a hint of such a thing in the "difficult passages." It is John's writings that mention eternal life the most and especially of it being something we possess at the present time. Notice the passages that I have cited above from John's corpus. All of them speak of eternal life and of it being a possession at the present time. First, let us answer the question, "What is eternal life?" We can understand eternal life in two ways. One way is how it is described and the second way is how it is contrasted or what it is not.

1. In John 17:3, we read: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Here we see that eternal life is connected with the saving knowledge of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Eternal

life has to do with the relationship that we have with God through the Lord Jesus. It is the "abundant life" that we have *now* in Christ (John 10:10). In 1 John 1:2, the apostle connects eternal life with the Lord Jesus and calls Him "the eternal life" (see also 1 John 5:20). In 1 John 5:11, John says, "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Therefore, to have eternal life means to have life in God's Son through Whom we can come to God in peace and love.

2. What does it mean to have eternal life? It means *not* perishing (John 3:16). It means not having the wrath of God abiding on us (John 3:36). To have eternal life means that we do not come into God's judgment, but rather we pass from (spiritual) death into life in Christ (John 5:24). To have eternal life means not to perish and not to be snatched from the hand of God (John 10:28-29). To summarize, having eternal life means not perishing, not having the wrath of God upon us, not coming into judgment and not being snatched from God's hand. Moreover, eternal life is mostly connected with the present time, rather than what we would usually assume, with the future as the citations above show. Eternal life begins on this side of eternity, and not only after death or after the last day. The believers at the present time possess eternal life. Eternal life is given to people through faith (e.g., John 3:16; 6:47). We do not earn it by our works, rather it is a gift of grace as faith is. It is important to note that we have done nothing to earn eternal life, therefore how would the maintaining that eternal life that we have received be dependent on our own efforts? If we've done nothing to earn it, how will its maintenance be dependent upon our efforts? How will this not turn salvation into works-based, rather than *Sola Gratia.*

Please do not overlook point two above and what having eternal life means. It is not possible for us to perish when we have eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28). It is God Who has given us the free gift of eternal life in His Son (Rom. 6:23), how and on what basis will God revoke His gift? We're not even talking about the Arminian idea that people have the ability and choice to either accept or reject the gift of God, but we are talking here about those who have (supposedly) already received the gift and have fallen away from the faith. According to this idea, which maintains that eternal life is a gift from God, but could be lost or forfeited, then we would say that it is given by grace but maintained by obedience. But how is this not a works-based damnable gospel which the Scriptures (e.g., Galatians) warn against? Having eternal life means not entering into God's judgment and coming under His condemnation, but rather going from spiritual death to life eternal with God in the present and also in the future (John 5:24). How does this fit with the idea of people losing their salvation? Do they after losing their salvation go from life back into spiritual death? Do they now enter into the judgment of God? Do you see what impossible ideas this doctrine of losing one's salvation leads to?

Therefore, consistent with the two other passages from John we maintain that eternal life presupposes the fact that those who possess it are unable to lose it.

Pauline Corpus

After considering the apostle John and particularly the Lord Jesus's words in the Gospel, we will move beyond the *direct* words of Jesus into the writings of the disciples beginning with Paul. Paul has 13 Epistles attributed to his name. He is the one who has some warning passages, passages about "falling away", but he is also the one who often speaks of assurance of salvation and perseverance. Here, I want to look at a few passages from which we see that Paul taught the doctrine of Perseverance.

Romans 8:28-39 – Nothing can separate us

> And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified **he also glorified.** 31 What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 **Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?** It is God who justifies. 34 **Who is to condemn?** Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is **interceding for us.** 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors through him who loved us**. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Golden Chain of Redemption is a great passage on the assurance of salvation from the beginning until the end and the victory of God's unconquerable love. Few observations on this passage are in order.

1. First of all, let us notice and take hold of the promise in v. 28. Everything that happens to us is decreed by an all-wise and all-good God for the benefit of His children (e.g., Eph. 1:11; Heb. 1:3; Isa. 46:8-11). Everything must work for the good. But the good of whom? Everything must work for the good of a specific people, namely, "those who are called according to his

purpose." Not everyone has this promise, but only the elect have the promise that everything that comes at them will eventually work *together* for good. Not that only good things will come to us. But rather, whatever comes to pass, we can declare that God will work all things together for our good and His glory. Does this also include temptations, trials, and struggles through which we doubt God's goodness and power and run into unbelief? I believe that it certainly does. But somehow God will work it *together* for good. Nothing, whatever it may be, will be able to separate the elect from God and will render God powerless to work all things for their good. This "good" is first of all defined by being conformed to Christ's image in v. 29. It is God's will that Christians be like *Christ.* This is what the Lord will work on. This is His main purpose for us: to make us more like Christ with each day passing by.

2. We must notice the inseparable connection between the five items in vv. 29-30. We have dealt with **this passage** in chapter 3 on Unconditional Election, therefore, for more on this passage take a look at that link. But for our present purpose, we repeat that those who were foreknown are the same group who were predestined, called, justified and glorified. Paul is discussing a single group throughout Romans 8:28ff, i.e., the elect. He traces them from eternity past to eternity future. From the Father's everlasting love for His own from before the foundation of the world, until their glorification on the last day (Rom. 8:18-23). There is an inseparable line connecting those foreknown (in eternity past) to those who will be glorified (in eternity future). The tenses of the passage are past to stress the fact that it is a sure fact that these things will happen. It is so certain that it could be talked about in the past tense. All who were predestined were also called through the gospel and justified. They receive the righteousness of Christ and persevere unto the end–their glorification.

3. After an overwhelming display of God's amazing sovereign grace the only conclusion possible is that since God is on our side, it does not matter what enemies do to us. Ultimately, no one will be able to stand against us, since it is God Who is on our side. God demonstrated His great love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He gave us His Beloved Son, how will He not give us all that is necessary for us?

4. God has already declared His verdict. The verdict is "not guilty!" for all who are in Jesus. They are justified, cleansed from their sins and given the righteousness of Christ the Spotless Savior (2 Cor. 5:21), by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). They have not earned, but it has pleased God to show His kindness to those who do not deserve it and those whom He has chosen from all eternity without any regard to anything in them. The verdict of God is irreversible. It is impossible to revoke by man and neither will God go back on His word.

5. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). It is not possible for those who are in Christ, to be condemned. It is impossible for the elect to be condemned because of four reasons, (i) Christ's death, (ii) Christ's resurrection, (iii) Christ's exaltation and (iv) Christ's intercession.

(i) Through Christ's death, the debt of our sin was paid and we have been set free from the judgment of God. His death provided a perfection propitiation–satisfaction for our sins and appeasement to the wrath of God (e.g., Rom. 3:25-26). The debt that stood against us, all our sins were put on Christ and He bore the punishment in our place (1 Pet. 2:24). Furthermore, the debt was canceled on the cross:

> Col. 2:13-14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by **canceling the record of debt** that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(ii) Not only Christ's death, but Christ's resurrection assures that believers will also share in a resurrection like His (Rom. 6:5; Phil. 3:21). But not only that, Paul claims in Romans 4:25 that the Lord was "raised for our justification" (**see here** on the meaning of this passage).

(iii) He is seated at the right hand of Power, signifying that He has all power and authority and is able to conquer all His and our foes. How much more our unbelief? It is He Who has power and authority, therefore, we should not fear, and be assured that all things work together for good, indeed. He is seated at the right hand of God. His work is finished. In the meantime, all His enemies are becoming a footstool for Him (Ps. 110:1-2).

(iv) Lastly, the fact that Christ is seated at the right hand of God to intercede for us assures that we will not be condemned. The Lord Jesus appeals before God on our behalf. Hebrews 7:25 teaches us that through His intercession the Lord Jesus is able to save completely everyone who draws close to God through Him. By His intercession, the Lord Jesus prays for us that our faith may not fail as He did for Peter whose faith did not *completely* fail (Luke 22:32). Christ is said to be our Advocate before the Father whenever we sin, knowing that a propitiation was provided for our sins in Christ (1 John 2:1-2).

6. Whatever may come, we are victorious in Christ. Let the whole world be against the elect of God. It does not matter. God is with us and we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. Not because we fight, but because we are loved by Him Who possesses all power and authority. Whatever this world has to bring, let it bring, it will not be able to separate the elect from God. Paul is sure that nothing is able to separate us and he names all kinds of things. Whatever it may be, Paul is

certain based on God's love and sovereignty that it will not succeed in separating the elect from God's love, which is in Jesus Christ.

7. To conclude, the passage as a whole provides an unshakable foundation for assurance concerning the perseverance of God's elect. From eternity past to eternity future, it is God Who brings the elect to faith, it is God Who preserves them and it is God Who will finally glorify them.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 – Sustain you to the end, guiltless

> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the **grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus**, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will **sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord** Jesus Christ. 9 **God is faithful**, by whom you were **called into the fellowship of his Son**, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. Paul starts his letter as he often does with thanksgiving to God for the work done in the believers he's writing to. He gives thanks because grace was given to the believers and the believers are growing in the knowledge of God. They are maturing and becoming more like Christ everyday. Grace–the unmerited favor of God, was given to the believers in Christ that they escape from the punishment of their sins, yet not only in that way, but grace also to be enriched in Christ.

2. The believers are supplied with the *charismata* of the Spirit as they await the blessed hope (Titus 2:13). It is God's grace which gives them the gifts of the Spirit and thereby sustains them to the end.

3. It is the Lord Jesus, say vv. 7b-8, Who will sustain the believers guiltless. First, let us start with what that does not mean. It obviously does not mean that we will never sin, for if we claim that we deny the truth (1 John 1:8). But rather it means that we will be found guiltless before God, because the penalty of our sin was paid for. We have, through justification by faith, received the perfect righteousness of Christ, so when God looks upon us, He does not see our sin, but Christ's perfect and sinless righteousness. The word sustain in the Greek is βεβαιόω *(bebaioo,* G950) which means "to make firm, establish, confirm, make sure" [3] and "to confirm, establish; to render constant and unwavering, 1 Cor. 1:8; to strengthen or establish by arguments or proofs, ratify, Mk. 16:20; to verify, as promises, Rom. 15:8"[4]. It is the Lord Jesus Who will indeed render us constant and unwavering in our faith and righteousness by faith. The Lord Jesus is able to sustain us to the end in the condition which we are now in, namely, in faith and grace, having the gifts of the Spirit and waiting for the blessed hope.

4. The end is defined to be "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the last day, the day of judgment when God will judge the world in righteousness and manifest who is guilty and who is guiltless. The Lord Jesus is, therefore, able not only to sustain us to the end, but to sustain is blameless and without guilt before the Father. He has the ability and willingness for all who are His. We do not have to fear that day because we will be found blameless, and we know from other Scriptures that our righteousness was not originated with us, but was actually *given* to us by grace through faith. The word ἀνέγκλητος (*anegkletos,* G410) means "that cannot be called into to account, unreproveable, unaccused, blameless"[3] and denotes the fact that God will not be able to find a cause of damnation in us, because of Christ's perfect work. This is the condition that God is able to keep the believer in. How does this fit with "falling away" and actually not being sustained to the end blameless?

5. In this passage, we hear John 6:39-40. The same concept of the Son being responsible to keep the elect is present here. He is given the responsibility to raise them up in John 6, but here it is expressed in being kept guiltless until the day of resurrection. Therefore, to claim that some of those who were given to Christ will *not* be kept blameless until the day of Jesus Christ, is to claim that the Son fails in His work, which should not even be thought of!

6. This passage is in many ways parallel to 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, the same ideas are present there as are here. What here is *explicitly* missing, though not *implicitly* is the idea of sanctification. Obviously, to be guiltless on the day of the Lord, would have to be because of abiding faith in Jesus Christ and growing in Him, which is the essence of sanctification (see **chapter 13** for more). It is God Who is responsible in 1 Thessalonians 5 to sanctify completely the believers. In 1 Corinthians, it is the Lord Jesus and in 1 Thessalonians it is God the Father. Both the Father and the Son are in the work of keeping the believers blameless, how can anyone dare to say that those who truly know the Son and the Father, may, in fact, fall away? Do the Father and Son fail in their purpose because of man's almighty will?!

7. In both passages, believers are given hope and encouraged based on God's faithfulness. It is God Who will sanctify them and keep them blameless. This does not mean that there is no responsibility for them to seek after the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), but it puts things into perspective. God's work is primary. We endure and preserve, *because* it is He Who preserves us and causes us to endure and transforms us into the likeness of Christ our Lord (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). Therefore, truly, all is of pure grace and we have to pray to God to sanctify us daily and change our desires to conform to His own.

8. The believers are called into the fellowship of God. 1 Corinthians 1 lays a strong stress on the effectual calling of God. In v. 2, we read that the believers were “called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours”. All believers are called by God to be *holy ones*, set apart for His purpose. They did nothing to earn it, but were simply the objects of the Father’s loving grace. Can God now reverse His judgment that the believers are indeed saints and holy ones in His sight, set apart for His use? If we were called into God’s fellowship without any regard to our works and faithfulness, but based on *God’s* faithfulness, how can we through our works lose this blessed fellowship bestowed upon us by grace? Are we really saying that to enter the fellowship is by grace alone, but to remain in the fellowship is by *our* faithfulness? Those who truly know God and not merely profess to know Him, cannot be separated from His blessed fellowship.

9. Lastly, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 stresses the fact that it depends ultimately on God to preserves us. It is God Who will keep us blameless because God cannot fail nor goes back on His word. He has called us into His fellowship, and He will never cast us out, but rather He will work on us to make us more holy and more like Christ. We are given assurance that God will indeed sanctify us and keep us without blame.

Philippians 1:6 – Will bring it to completion

> And I am sure of this, that **he who began a good work in you** will **bring it to completion at the day of Jesus** Christ.

1. We notice first of all the connection between the previous two passages discussed from Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and the present passage concerning the day of Jesus Christ. This is an important day and it is a day when final verdicts will be heard before all men and about all men. Therefore, it is understandable for Paul, when speaking about the security of the believer in the hands of God, to assure us that we will be safe and blameless on the Day of the Lord, for that is a day of rejoicing for the believer and a day of doom for the unbeliever (e.g., 2 Thess. 1:5-12).

2. Paul is persuaded, sure, confident and convinced of one thing, namely, if God begins a work, He will surely complete it and not leave it undone. He does not think that God will do it. No, He is sure. If God has begun a work in the life of the believer, He also will bring it to fruition and completion in the end. This work in the least is the work of God in the believer to bring them to faith (John 6:29). It is He Who has caused us to be born again (1 Pet. 1:3) and it is He also Who will sustain us to the end in the same condition of regeneration. Even though our working out of salvation, it is actually God Who works in us to do His pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). The “fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:11) comes actually by the working of God. It is God’s work in us to produce fruit pleasing to Him.

3. Furthermore, Paul expands later on what it means for this “good work” to be brought to completion, namely, to “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). Their further sanctification and the prayer for their sanctification describes what it means for this work to be brought to completion. He prays knowing that all who will have this “good work” being completed or brought to perfection in them, are, in fact, “all partakers with me of grace.” He is not speaking about a mixed, audience, rather he is addressing those who, in fact, are partakers of grace. All who are partakers of grace now, which is a work began by God, will, in fact, have that work brought to completion on the last day and be found blameless before God.

4. This work being brought to completion means being perfected and found pure and blameless. God accomplishing all that He intends to do with us. God will surely fulfill all His purpose concerning His elect to bring them to faith, preserve them in faith and judge them guiltless on the day of Jesus Christ. Those who know that God is at work in them to do His pleasure may share in this confidence of Paul that God will not leave them or leave His work half done, rather He will perfect it. They will not be abandoned by Him, neither will He let them go out of His hand.

Conclusion on Paul

We’ve seen in clear words that Paul believed that the elect will certainly be preserved and not be lost. Therefore, when we come to the difficult passages, we must have this in mind: Paul declares in no unclear terms that those chosen by God will not be lost, nor can they be lost, for God Himself, the Father and the Son, keep them.

Petrine Corpus

1 Peter 1:3-5 – Being guarded through faith

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for **you,** 5 **who by God’s power are being guarded through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1. First, we notice again, as Paul often does, so likewise Peter begins with thanksgiving to God for the believers he’s writing

to. The audience is identified as “Those who are elect exiles” (1 Pet. 1:1). He is writing to suffering believers. They are chosen according to God’s foreknowledge or fore-love as in Romans 8:29, in or through the sanctification of the Spirit and for obedience to Jesus (1 Pet. 1:2). Notice that when Peter will later write about being guarded by God, he is speaking about those who are chosen by God, being and are sanctified by the Spirit and are obeying Jesus. He is not talking about those who merely *profess* the faith, but those who *possess* the truth and abiding faith given by God. This is important to see, as it makes clear the audience that Peter is writing to are believers. There may be unbelievers, obviously, but he is not writing about them, but rather is assuming that all of them are believers.

2. God receives all praise and glory for the great mercy shown to believers, because mercy was given to us by pure grace and not because of anything in us. We did not earn it, therefore God is forever to be given glory for every good thing in us and done to us. His grace was shown in the fact that it was He Who “caused us to be born again”. It is God Who regenerated us, giving us His Spirit and a new nature (e.g., Ezek. 36:25-27) and thereby we have become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who claim that true believers may, in fact, fall from grace, have trouble finding in Scripture any slight reference to those who after being regenerated by God, later become unregenerate. There is not a hint of such a thing that those who are circumcised in their heart by God, later become uncircumcised in their heart. Previously, we were dead in sin, but now we have been made alive by the will and working of God (Jas. 1:18; John 1:12-13).

3. We have been born again to a living hope which includes “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”. This inheritance includes but is not limited to our final salvation when we will be freed from all sin, given our new glorified body and living with God in the New Heaven and New Earth. This inheritance is kept, guarded and attended to carefully by God for a specific people, namely, the plural “you” of the believers who have been caused to be born again. This inheritance is kept in heaven, where God is. It is God Who is keeping it for the believers, therefore He will not fail to give them their inheritance.

4. In v. 5, Peter specifies about whom he is writing when he speaks of the inheritance. He is speaking only of those “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith.” The promise is only to true believers and not to wolves in sheep’s clothing. It is God Who has chosen them, it is God Who has caused them to be born again and it is God Who is keeping their inheritance in heaven above. It is all the work of God, from the beginning to the end, from salvation to reward. God is abundantly to be thanked and glorified. It is God’s power. God in all His all-might has set Himself to be for the believers and Who guards them. The word for *guard* in the Greek is φρουρέω (*phroureo*, G5432) and it is used here in the present tense (φρουρουμένους, *phrourounenous*) denoting the fact that the believers at this moment are being kept by God’s almighty power. But what does the word *guard* mean? Thayer’s Greek Definitions defines φρουρέω as “to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight”[3]. It is certainly interesting that this word with such a meaning would be used by Peter who wants to assure the believers that they’re safe within God’s will (1 Pet. 3:17; 4:19) against their persecutors, but this further shows that they’re even safe from remaining unbelief within their hearts. God is guarding us, keeping our enemies from destroying our faith and even keeping us from straying into unrepentant unbelief.

5. Notice that this guarding and preservation of God does not simply happen without any regard to the believer, for there is a specific means which Peter mentions through which the believers are guarded, namely–faith. God uses the means of abiding faith to preserve the believers. He does not randomly preserve people, but only those with faith toward Him and the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the means of preservation. Therefore, if anyone claims that he is elect and therefore, it doesn’t matter what he does he will be saved, that person is deceiving themselves. For Peter first of all says that the elect will, in fact, obey God, that is the purpose (not cause) of God’s election (1 Pet. 1:2). And furthermore, they will also be sanctified by the Spirit. But more importantly, those who are guarded are the same group who have abiding faith. They are being guarded through their **faith which is given by God**. Their faith did not originate with them, but rather came with regeneration, which according to v. 3 was the work of God Who caused us to be born again (see **Regeneration Precedes Faith**).

6. Therefore, we see in 1 Peter a strong foundation for the belief that all God’s elect will receive the imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance, their complete salvation–body and spirit, which is kept for them and none will be lost, for they are being guarded by God and God in His power. Peter further on encourages them that even their trials have been for their benefit because through their trials it has been shown that their faith is, in fact, genuine and will result “in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

Hebrews

It is true that the book of Hebrews contains some warning passages, but I want to contend that it is likewise true that the book of Hebrews does, in fact, include passages about our assurance of salvation. The book of Hebrews both warns against apostasy and assures that true believers will not fall. A general word about Hebrews is in order here.

The book of Hebrews does not mention its audience nor the reason for writing as the other epistles often do. There is no definite answer concerning its author, this I think does not carry much weight to its interpretation, because all of Scripture is breathed out by God ultimately (2 Tim. 3:16).

The reason that the epistle is called “Hebrews” is because from internal evidence we can see that there is a great stress about the dichotomy between the Old Covenant on the one hand and the New Covenant on the other hand. There is a lot of discussion about Old Testament issues as sacrifices, priests, and the Temple, therefore it is indeed reasonable to conclude as most scholars have done that the epistle was addressed to a congregation mainly made up of Hebrew Christians. These believers were being tempted to go back to the old ways, and the message of the epistle is that there is nothing to go back to. The Old Covenant is done away with. The only way to be the people of God and to have a living relationship with God is through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. They were probably being persecuted by the unbelieving Jews to come back to the old ways and the Book of Hebrews warns against such things. We know also that the Old Testament practices were still living as the author was writing, for example, from Hebrews 8:4 were it is said that in the temple there are priests who offer sacrifices. He speaks about the Temple in Jerusalem in Hebrews 9:1-5 without any mention that the Temple is not standing (i.e., the book was written pre-70 A.D.). This proves that from the point of view of those who were being tempted to go back, there was something to go back to, namely, the Temple and all its regulations. But the argument of Hebrews is that even if the Temple and its regulations are standing and are continuing, there are made nothing by the New Covenant. They are useless since their function of being shadows has been fulfilled by the coming of the reality in Christ.

The writer of the book of Hebrews is deeply acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures and practices, quoting a lot of texts from there to make his point about the divinity of Christ (chapter 1), the eternal priesthood of Christ (chapters 5-7), the fact that the New Covenant is superior and better (chapters 8-10) and so on. He knows what is there and He knows that it is consistent with the revelation of God made in the last days through and in His Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

For the purpose of the present chapter, we must notice the fact that Hebrews does *not* describe people who were regenerate at one time and have become unregenerate later. But Hebrews warns against falling away, without saying that some have *actually* fallen away and have become unregenerate. It is useless to use the “warning passages” to prove that regenerate believers do fall away and become unregenerate. For we too are aware of the warning passages and contend that they do not describe the actuality of the elect falling away. To prove that some true believers do, in fact, fall away, it must be proven that Scripture speaks and describes those who are regenerate and later become unregenerate. Below, I want to take a look at some passages in Hebrews which lead us to believe that God does indeed preserve the elect and does not lose any. I will try to make my comments brief and try to make a case that the epistle to the Hebrews, does, in fact, support the Perseverance of the Saints.

General Passages

1. Hebrews 2:17 describes the Lord Jesus as the “propitiation” for “the sins of the people”. The people are defined to be the “the offspring of Abraham” which are all true believers, both Jewish and Gentile (e.g., Gal. 3:7, 29). Keeping with the general idea of Hebrews being a contrast between the Old and New covenants, the people are defined to be the people of the covenant. It is for the people of the New Covenant, the elect, that Jesus has made a propitiation. Propitiation is the sacrifice which atones for sins and therefore removes the wrath of God from us. The sins of God’s people, the elect, have already been dealt with on the cross. God has forgiven them of all their sins since He has been made propitious toward them thanks to the sacrifice of Christ of Himself. The price for their sins has already been paid for on the cross 2000 years ago, although the application will happen at God’s chosen time for each of His elect. If the sins of God’s people have been already dealt with and satisfied the wrath of God that was against them, how can God’s wrath, after being satisfied for them be aroused against them in Hell again? How can God go back on His word and be wrathful against those for whom Christ was the propitiation and they be condemned (Rom. 8:1)? This leads us to the idea that it is not possible unless God requires double jeopardy which is unjust, for Christ to pay for the sins of God’s people and yet some of them be doomed to hell because they “fell away.” It is Christ Who is the merciful and faithful high priest before God, which one of His functions is to intercede and plead for the people. The people do not make God propitious, but God has become propitious because our sins have been punished in the Substitute and furthermore, it is He Who intercedes and pleads for us before the throne of God above.

2. In **Hebrews 3:1**, the believers are said to be “holy brothers” who share in the “heavenly calling”. This calling is the special and effectual calling of God about which the New Testament often speaks. We learn that

- we have been called to belong to Jesus Christ and be saints (Rom. 1:6-7; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2);
- we have been called to be justified (Rom. 8:29-30);
- we have been called to be vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for glory (Rom. 9:23-24);
- we have been called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor. 1:8);
- we have been called to peace (1 Cor. 17:15);
- we have been called to the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6);
- we have been called to freedom (Gal. 5:13);
- we have been called to the hope of the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18; cf. 4:4);

- we have been called to belong to the one body (Col. 3:15);
- we have been called into God's kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3);
- we have been called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7);
- we have been called *through* the gospel to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 2:14);
- we have been called to eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12);
- we have been called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15);
- we have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9);
- we have been called to suffer for the sake of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21);
- we have been called to bless those who curse us that we may obtain a blessing (1 Pet. 3:9).

The question here is: Can those who share in this heavenly calling lose their calling? None of the passages above place the condition of the believer's calling upon themselves. They were called as a result of God's sovereign election. They did not earn it, but they are, in fact, encouraged and exhorted to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (e.g., Eph. 4:1). But that does not imply that we can lose our calling or lose our salvation. It seems to me when I put all these things together it is impossible for such a one who has been truly and effectually called by God through the gospel to be *un*called or lose his salvation. Romans 10:29 declares: "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." If God has called anyone effectually to any of the things listed above, then He will not go back on His call and there is, therefore, no possibility for the person himself to *un*call themselves.

3. Hebrews 4:14-16 exhorts us to seek Christ knowing that we will find grace in time of need. We are exhorted and encouraged to hold fast our confession concerning Christ and His truth, not wavering in our faith. But even if we were to waver and go in the way of unbelief, we are instead to go to the throne of grace. Christ knows our weakness and our temptations which drive us into unbelief and is therefore fit and able to help us in that. He has been tempted in every way to fall away and reject God, but He has resisted every temptation. Resisting temptation is much harder than giving in, therefore He understands our weakness. We are confident that when we go to the throne of grace, we will, in fact, receive grace from God. This encourages us to know that as long as we "hold fast our confession" concerning Christ, we belong to the Lord. Those who know the Lord will, in fact, remain holding their confession about the Lord for it is the Lord Who gives them faith.

4. Hebrews 5:9 teaches us that Christ, after being perfected through suffering and obedience, has become a source of salvation. He has become a source of *eternal* salvation to all those who obey Him. The order is not obedience and then salvation, rather salvation and then obedience, thereby declaring salvation to be of grace as does the rest of the NT. True and abiding faith will always seek to obey and produce fruits of repentance. What we take note of here is the description of this salvation, it is said to be eternal or everlasting. It is not a temporal salvation that Christ has become a source of, but rather a salvation that is eternal. Salvation that is without end starts now and does not end, just like eternal life. Now someone may say that salvation can be lost when we disobey since the v. says that He is the source of salvation to all who *obey.* But this objection assumes that our obedience finds its origin in us. It is God Who works within us to lead us into obedience. It is He in the words of Hebrews 13:21 Who will "equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight". Obedience is the work of God in us. We see here that those to whom Christ has become the source of eternal salvation, are the same who are in faith obeying the Lord Jesus. Christ is not a temporal Savior, but a mighty Savior Who saves completely, eternally and without losing any sheep.

5. Right after writing about the #1 passage on apostasy, the author of Hebrews speaks of "the full assurance of hope" in **Hebrews 6:11.** After writing the hard words of Hebrews 6:4-6, now the author speaks and says that he feels sure of things concerning salvation about his audience. In a sense, he says that the words of warning do not really apply to them since He is sure that better things belong to his audience. Why is the author sure and knows that salvation belongs to his audience? Because of their present faith working out in love (Heb. 6:10). Their faith is showing itself in works by serving the saints of God. This they have done in the past and they are still doing. God will, in fact, reward the believers for their work of faith. The Author does not want his audience to be afraid and concerned about their salvation after the section on apostasy, but rather he says that "we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end". The author does not only want that his audience have assurance of hope, but *full* assurance of hope. This is certainly possible, even if he spoke about apostasy a few verses earlier. What is their hope but their firm conviction that the future promises of God will be fulfilled? We have full confidence about this hope, it is not wishful thinking, but based on God's character and promises. How can we have this full assurance of hope, without *having* this hope? It is because of this hope that God grants believers this full assurance. This promise of hope and assurance is given so that we will not be lazy, but be all the more move to obedience, that we will follow the example of other believers, primarily in this chapter it's to follow the example of Abraham. How can we truly have this full assurance of hope and yet fall away? I'm not saying that we're not able to deceive ourselves, but I'm saying that the author claims that it is, in fact, possible to have this full assurance even if he had just written about apostasy a few verses earlier. Moreover, he is sure that salvation belongs to his audience even when he warned them about apostasy.

6. In **Hebrews 6:17-20**, the author continues to speak about this sure steadfast hope that we have in Christ our Lord. From

v. 13, the author takes Abraham as an example of one who "through faith and patience" (Heb. 6:12) inherited the promises of God. A specific promise is mentioned in Hebrews 6, namely, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you" and further adds "And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:14-15). He had the promise partially in the sense that in his old age he received the child of promise, but the promise of Abraham has spread to the whole world in Christ and Abraham's offspring have become as the stars of heaven and sands of the sea. His offspring not from the flesh, but from faith, both Jewish and Gentile (Rom. 9:6-7; Gal 3:7, 29; 4:28). God has desired to ensure those who are the heirs of the promise, namely, the elect know the purpose of God. This God has done in two ways. First up, He gave an oath to Abraham concerning His promise for confirmation. Second, He gave this oath by swearing by Himself and thereby pointing to His character–a God for Whom it is *impossible* to lie. God gave His word and promise to Abraham that He will fulfill His promise which He made concerning his innumerable offspring. But not only that, as if that was not strong enough, but He does so by swearing by His own Name, putting His own glory and reputation on the line. Why did God do this? Verse 18 says so that "we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." First, the author exhorted the believers "to have the full assurance of hope until the end" (Heb. 6:11), but now he further exhorts them to "have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope". They are to have a strong encouragement, not based on their performance, but based on the character of God's purpose. Based on God's oath and His own nature. Notice also that v. 17 says that this purpose concerning the heirs of promise is "unchangeable." How does this fit with the idea that genuine born-again believers can be lost? Were they at one time heirs of the promise or not? This hope is a sure and steadfast anchor. It is a sure and unshakable foundation for us to stand fast in trials and under persecution because our hope is based on God Who has made promises to His elect and sealed them with His own glory and reputation on the line and thereby ascertaining us that none of His promises will fall to the ground. We will go to the same place where the Lord Jesus went after finishing His work on the earth. He went before us to prepare a place (John 14:1-3) and to represent us before the Father after finishing His perfect work on our behalf. This is a very strong exhortation and support for the Perseverance of the Saints, and we must keep in mind that this exhortation is in the same chapter as the #1 apostasy text. See also Hebrews 9:15ff.

7. Hebrews 9:11-12 claims that by the offering of Christ's blood he has secured eternal redemption. For whom did Christ die? He died for the elect, those who are in the body of the covenant that He mediates. This is what the High Priest does, he intercedes for the people in the covenant, not for those outside. See here the case for **Definite Redemption**. What does it mean that Christ has *secured* eternal redemption? It is interesting to note the way that Christ secured this redemption. He secured it because He entered the holy places in heaven, not with animal blood, but with His own blood. That is why He secured this eternal redemption because He brought His own precious blood. The HSCB says "having obtained eternal redemption", the NET says "and so he himself secured eternal redemption." For whom was redemption secured but for those for whom His blood was shed? It is for those in the New Covenant of which He is the Mediator and High Priest, that He has offered Himself as the sin-taking Lamb of God. If Christ the Lord by His blood has secured our salvation how then can we lose it? Did He, in fact, obtain and secure eternal redemption for His people, or not? We must also take notice of v. 14 in connection with this which says "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. He had just compared the blood of animals to the blood of Christ. The blood of animals provided ritual purity (Heb. 9:13 NET), how much more Christ's blood through which He obtained eternal redemption? He had to offer Himself once, and not daily and yearly as the earthly sinful priests. The blood of Christ is able to cause us to worship God in the way that pleases Him. The blood of Christ, in contrast to the blood of animals (Heb. 9:9; 10:1-4, 11) is able to cleanse our conscience (Heb. 10:14, 22). How is it possible for those who have the benefits and work of Christ applied to them be lost and perish? Were they at a time part of the New Covenant, but now they're not? Did the Lord Jesus secure redemption for them, but they gave it up (where is such an idea in Scripture)? Were their consciences cleansed by His blood to serve God, but now have returned to their old condition?

8. After a discussion of a few verses from Jeremiah 31:31-34, **Hebrews 10:19-23** encourages us to have confidence and full assurance of faith. This assurance of faith is found in the fact that the Lord Jesus has gone to the holy places before us by His own blood and thereby securing eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12) and the nature of the New Covenant in that all our sins are forgiven. We come to the holy places by the blood of Christ and know that we will be accepted because His blood purifies us. It was His blood which was the means by which He secured eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-12). The author exhorts us to draw near to God. We have the responsibility to seek God, but we know because of our depravity we won't (Rom. 3:11). But all glory be to God Who draws us to the Son (John 6:44, 65), otherwise, we would not come. We draw near to God through the only way, that is through Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14-16) knowing that we will receive grace. We draw near to God with a heart "full assurance of faith." We read earlier of "the full assurance of hope" (Heb. 6:11), but now we read of a "heart full assurance of faith." Both are true and in both the author says that we have "full assurance." We can have confidence that we have not believed in vain and that we will persevere until the end because it is God Who has cleansed our hearts and minds. The author, as in Hebrews 6:17-20, does not want us to doubt our salvation, but rather wants us to be assured and have confidence in it, not because of ourselves, but because of God's work in us and for us. He goes on to exhort the believers to persevere in the faith and hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. Why? For God "who promised is faithful." This links us back to the discussion for the promise and oath of God in Hebrews 6 and reminds the readers how the promise of God is an unshakable foundation on two grounds: (i) God's oath and (ii) God's character. But this also links us to the two other passages that we've discussed above, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 and 1 Corinthians 1:9, and the stress there laid

upon the power and will of God to preserve and sanctify us completely. It is the work of God that preserves us. We do not preserve ourselves by ourselves, rather we persevere *because* it is God Who works perseverance in us. The passage in Hebrews goes on to encourage the believers to persevere in the faith through stirring one another to loving action and meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25).

9. After a warning about apostasy, **Hebrews 10:37-39** claims that this warning does not apply to its audience (as in Heb. 6:9). As in Hebrews 6:10, so also in Hebrews 10:32-34, the author calls attention to the works and fruits of his audience as evidence that they're believers and thus the words of Hebrews 10:26-31 do not, in fact, apply to them. What the believers need is to *endure* and *persevere* in the midst of the trials of this life and the testing of their faith. This is why the book of Hebrews is called a "word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). In v. 36, we are told that when we have done the will of God we will receive the promise of God, which includes life with God on the New Earth, a glorified body like Christ's and complete freedom from sin. To do the will of God, we need the help of God, otherwise, we are useless. It is God Who works in us to do His pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21), therefore, we obey because He grants us the willingness and ability to obey (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27). God is indeed faithful and will not cast away any of His chosen ones or refuse to grant them faith through which they are saved and will persevere. He finishes the chapter by saying that we are not those who were described in v. 38, namely, those who shrink back and are destroyed, rather we are "those who have faith and preserve their souls." In this way, we see that the warning of apostasy in vv. 26-31 does not apply to the believing community that the author is writing to, neither do the words in v. 38. Therefore, this gives the author himself confidence that they will persevere and he wants the believers to also know this confidence and assurance of faith.

10. Hebrews 13:11-12 encourages us to look unto Jesus Who for our sake was crucified outside the camp in order to sanctify us. Again, the group for whom Christ died and the group He died to sanctify are the same, the people of the New Covenant–the elect. The way that He sanctified them was through the shedding of His precious blood. By this blood, He also secured eternal redemption for them (Heb. 9:12) and cleansed their conscience to serve God (Heb. 9:14). He died to set the people of God apart for the use of God. He died and by shedding of His blood He secured their salvation. But that is not all, because according to Hebrews 10:14, we know that through His "offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." All those who are being sanctified at the present time, are the same ones who are perfected in the past tense, i.e., on the cross (**see for more on Hebrews 10:14 below**). So the question now is, can those who are now being sanctified, *un*sanctify themselves and stop the work of God in them (cf. Heb. 2:11)? Can Christ's blood through which He obtained eternal redemption fail to accomplish its purpose? Can they who were sanctified by Christ's blood be lost? Can they who were at one time being sanctified and therefore perfected according to Hebrews 10:14, be *im*perfected and perish?

Now let us move to a little more detail.

Hebrews 7:22-25 – Save to the uttermost

> Heb. 7:22-25 This makes Jesus the **guarantor of a better covenant.** 23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently, he is able to **save to the uttermost** those who **draw near to God through him,** since **he always lives to make intercession for them.**

1. The "this" in v. 22 refers back to the oath of God made in Psalm 110:4 concerning the Messianic Priest, which ensures us that the New Covenant will be better. Why? Because it has a High Priest Who is so not because of genealogy, "but by the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 10:16). He has come as a High Priest not like the weak high priests of the Mosaic Covenant who were never able to finish their job and who were stopped short because of death. But as a High Priest Who is so without end and forever. The fact that Jesus is the Mediator of this covenant, makes it a better covenant for the work of the mediator and priest is crucial to the effectiveness of the covenant.

2. The earthly priests did never finish their job. When they made an offering in the morning and they had to make another offering in the evening also. When they made offerings on the Day of Atonement, they had to repeat the same ritual the next year. When the lamb was slain for the Passover, the same ritual was to be repeated again every year, all the while the blood of animals cannot take away sin (Heb. 10:4, 11). Therefore, these sacrifices did not have the power within themselves, but were used merely as covering for the elect's sins and shadows and types pointing to the sacrifice of Christ, which does away with sin for His elect. In contrast to the old priests who were prevented by death, the Lord Jesus knows no end. His priesthood is not terminated by His death, because He died and came back to never die again. The Christ shall never die!

3. This reason, namely, that Christ lives forever as High Priest over God's people is the reason that He is able to save to the uttermost. And that means that He is able to save completely and without any failure. There is a specific people whom He saves, namely, those who draw near to God through Him. But we know that the natural man does not seek God (Rom. 3:11), nor desires to obey Him (Rom. 8:7-8). Rather, it is only the gift of grace that enables and makes one willing to come to Christ (John 6:44, 65). Therefore, the one who comes to God through Him, comes because they are drawn by God, not because of their own autonomous ability. It is those people whom He is able to save completely. Only those who draw near through Him. He is the only Savior that God has given to the world. All other roads to God lead to damnation, but the road through

the Lord Jesus Christ leads to salvation.

4. The reason given for Him being able to save completely is that He continues His priestly work beyond His sacrifice through His intercession. **Intercession** is merely the continuation of His once-for-all-time sacrifice on behalf of His people. By intercession, the Lord Jesus applies the benefits which He bought for us by His blood on the cross and points the Father to His perfect work on the basis of which He can treat us as righteous and spotless. He pleads before the Father on our behalf when we sin. 1 John 2:1-2 we are given confidence that we will find forgiveness for our sins because Christ is our Advocate before the Father. He pleads for us based on His work. When Christ pleads for us, it is impossible for Him not to get what He's pleading for, for it delights the Father that the Son is glorified and honored just as He is. Christ prays for us that our faith may not fail, as He did for Peter (Luke 22:32). Christ's intercession furthermore is a solid ground for confidence that we will not be condemned (Rom. 8:34). Let us note that this idea of intercession has a connection with the charge given to the Son by the Father to preserve the elect in John 6:39-40. Through His intercession for them, He preserves them in true and abiding faith, working through His Spirit to make them more like Him.

5. Can they for whom Christ intercedes be lost and Christ therefore fail? Will God ever reject Christ? Will Christ fail to save completely because of man? These are important questions that deserve a biblical answer from those who contend that a regenerate person can truly lose their salvation and perish.

Hebrews 8:6-13 – Nature of the New Covenant

Heb. 8:6-13 But as it is, Christ has obtained a **ministry that is as much more excellent** than the old as the **covenant he mediates is better,** since it is **enacted on better promises.** 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 9 **not like the covenant that I made** with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For **they did not continue in my covenant**, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and **write them on their hearts**, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for **they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.** 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and **I will remember their sins no more.**" 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

While we are not talking here about the New Covenant specifically, this passage is important in its teaching that the New Covenant is a covenant whose members are all regenerate, therefore, a few observations are in order.

1. In contrast to the priestly ministry under the Mosaic Covenant, Christ's ministry is more excellent, why? (i) The covenant under which He ministers is better and (ii) the covenant is established on better promises. (i) The New Covenant is better than the Old mainly because it has Christ as its Mediator and High Priest (Heb. 7:21-22). Not only that, but also because the Old Covenant was not a pure covenant of grace and the New Covenant is the Covenant of Grace established in time (see **chapter 7** for more on 1689 Federalism). (ii) The promises of the New Covenant do not merely pertain to the earthly things, but have their focus on the heavenly and eternal things. We do not have shadows and earthly temporary things like the Temple and the sacrifices, but we now have the reality in Christ. This is what makes the priestly ministry of Christ more excellent and places it above the old Mosaic priesthood.

2. The Mosaic Covenant was not without fault for it demanded perfect righteousness from those who were sinful from birth. This did not work together and therefore, the Lord from the days of Moses (and before) declared the coming of the Christ and thereby the New Covenant which will deal with the problem of our sin and will not be a covenant with which the Lord will find fault. This Old Covenant is described as a covenant in which "they did not continue in my covenant"; a covenant that was broken. The people were faithless from the beginning. The covenant contained unbelievers and believers alike. That the covenant was broken from the beginning may be seen from the fact that when Moses came down from the Mountain of God and broke the Ten Commandments, in that way he pictured the fact that Israel had broken the covenant they just ratified with God. They wandered away so quickly from Him Whose voice shook the earth. The Mosaic Covenant is a covenant which demands perfect obedience in all points (Gal. 3:10), and therefore, sinful man is not able to keep the terms of this covenant. The fault of the covenant mainly lies in the fact that it was given to a sinful people and it had not the ability to deal with their sins as did the New Covenant. It was a subservient covenant pointing to the sin of man and the need for redemption (e.g., Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:23-26).

3. In contrast to the Old Covenant, the New is not like the Old. Meaning, it will not be broken and its people will, in fact, continue in the covenant. This is the exact point which is here ascribed to the Mosaic and it is said that the New Covenant is unlike the Old. Therefore, the New Covenant is *at least* unlike the Mosaic Covenant respecting this point. Genuine apostasy from the covenant will be impossible, but that was not impossible under the Old Covenant. This does not mean that all the covenantees will obey God perfectly, but it means that no one will be cast out of the covenant. For the covenant is first of all

made with Christ Who has fulfilled all conditions of the covenant and then *in Christ* with every believer. It is a covenant which certainly has conditions, but those conditions are fulfilled by and in the Mediator of the covenant. There are no covenants absolutely without conditions, but the question is merely what these conditions are and who is to fulfill them.

4. That true believers falling away from grace is impossible in this covenant is seen in the fact that they have the Law of God written on their hearts. The Law of God, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, is upon the heart of every born-again believer. This is a part of regeneration that God Himself will write His Law so near to us, upon our very nature, not in stone, but upon tablets of flesh (2 Cor. 3:3). It is likewise God Who will give the ability to follow the Law as is taught in Ezekiel 36:25-27. The Law is no longer something external, but it is something internal. It is a part of His new God-given nature by which he is able to obey and walk in a manner consistent with it by the grace of God.

5. The New Covenant, as the other covenants of God, has the promise that God will be our God and we will be His people. But there is something different about this covenant. The promise of having God as our God is relevant in meaning and efficacy according to the covenant it is attached to. The promise is now attached to a covenant that actuates complete forgiveness of sins, the writing of the Law upon the heart and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. No covenant before the New had this promise, therefore, it is certain that those who had an outward relationship with God through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants have God as their God, but in a very different sense than in the New Covenant. The New Covenant is a covenant from which apostasy is impossible and therefore the promise means a lot more than what it meant, for example, in the Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenant. It is a covenant that provides an intimate relationship with God through His Son and by His Spirit.

6. The New Covenant, unlike all other covenants, only contains believing members. That this is the case may be seen from the fact that everyone in the covenant "knows the Lord." This does not speak of mere cognitional knowledge, but of intimate relationship with God. We know Him in an intimate way, as our Father. There is no need to teach those who are in the covenant to "know the Lord," because they already know Him by the nature of the covenant that they find themselves in. The text does not say there is no need to know *about* the Lord, but to *know* the Lord. John says that we have his anointing (1 John 2:27). This does not mean that there is no necessity for teaching doctrine. Rather, the salvific knowledge of God comes to us through the Spirit when we believe. There is no need to teach the members of the covenant to know the Lord because, by His Spirit, Who is within them and His Law which is on their hearts, they know the Lord.

7. This New Covenant also includes the promise that the sins of the covenantees will be forgiven. This does not mean that under the Old Covenant sins were not forgiven. But this means that this covenant, by nature, is a covenant that establishes peace between God and man. The Old Covenant, on the other hand, did not have this ability. People were forgiven under the Old Covenant of their sins, but in virtue of the Covenant of Grace in promise form. They were forgiven (Abraham, Moses, David, etc.) in light of what Christ *would do* in the future (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 9:15; see also **chapter 8 paragraph 6**). But under the New Covenant, we are forgiven based on our faith about what Christ *has done* in the past. Only to the New Covenant is the promise of complete forgiveness of sins is particularly attached. The reason given is that the members of the covenant will, in fact, know the Lord is connected with the forgiveness of their sins. They will know Him because their sins, which are the hindrances between them and God (Isa. 59:2), have been dealt with. God promises to the members of the covenant that He will be merciful and their sins He will no more bring to remembrance.

8. Therefore, I conclude that this is concrete proof of the doctrine of the Preservation of the Saints. God, the Almighty, has initiated this covenant with His elect in Jesus Christ and has placed the conditions of the covenant upon Christ and so, therefore, for the believer this covenant is unconditional. In this covenant, we receive the declaration that all our sins are forgiven, the Law of God is written on our mind and heart, we have God as our Father and we will not be able to break the covenant as Israel did to the Mosaic. How is this not a steadfast assurance of the impossibility of apostasy from the New Covenant of Grace? For those who will contend that it is indeed possible, they must say that it is possible to have the Law of God written on your heart and yet, later come to unbelief and therefore do not have the Law written on your heart anymore and perish. They have to say that those who apostatized had a new heart, but now they have their old heart of stone back. They have furthermore to say that the New Covenant is, in fact, like the Old in that it is breakable. They will have to say that God will indeed remember the sins of those who once were part of the covenant. All of the things concerning the forgiveness of sins and having the Law on our hearts is connected with regeneration and therefore they will also have to say that you can become unregenerate after being regenerate! We do not need to contemplate these options since they are clearly against the clear testimony of the Word of God. Rather, we should read the difficult passages in light of the clear testimony of Scripture.

Hebrews 10:10-18 – Perfected for all time

> Heb. 10:10-18 And by that will **we have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time **a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God**, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has **perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.** 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for

> after saying, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my laws on their hearts**, and write them on their minds,” 17 then he adds, “**I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more**.” 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is **no longer any offering for sin.**

1. “[T]hat will” in v. 10 refers to the previous discussion about the superiority of doing God’s will rather than bringing sacrifices. For Christ said to the Father, “Behold, I have come to do your will” (Heb 10:9) and thereby establishing the New Covenant by doing away with the old. Verse 9 further reads, “He does away with the first in order to establish the second.” Therefore, v. 10 says that by Jesus doing the Father’s will we have been sanctified, we have been set apart for the purpose of God. The particular “will of God” here has to do with His priestly work in offering Himself on behalf of His people.

2. Verse 11 contrasts the old way with the new way brought about through Christ. The old way consisted in the offering of the same sacrifices over and over again, while they could never take away the sin of the people. But in contrast, Christ the Victor, the Great High Priest, offers a single sacrifice once for all time for the sins of His covenant people and sits down at the right hand of Power. This is very significant. First of all, the contrast between the repeated sacrifices of the Old Covenant and the singular once for all time sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is pointed at. Secondly, the fact that the Lord Jesus sat down indicates that His work was finished. In the earthly Holy of Holies, there was no seat because the high priest had to do the work and after finishing his work on the Day of Atonement had to go outside. There was no time for rest or a place of rest in the Holy of Holies on earth because the work was never completed. The same sacrifices would be repeated again the next year and the high priest would have to go over the same ritual. In contrast, Christ after offering a *single* sacrifice sits at the right hand of God. He sits and thereby demonstrating that His work was finished and accomplished. He also sits at the right hand of God, which is the side of approval and the side of power. His sacrifice has been accepted and received by God.

3. His singular offering, according to v. 14, was enough to perfect a particular people. As His sacrifice was once for all time, so likewise the effect of His offering is for all time. The ones who have been perfect are the ones who at the present time are being made holy, the ones who are being sanctified. The Greek word for “perfect” here is τελειόω (*teleioo*, G5048) and it is used in the perfect tense, active voice and indicative mood–τετελείωκεν (*teteleioken*). Mounce says the following on the word:

> …*to perfect* a person*, advance* a person *to a completeness* of its kind, which needs no further provision, Heb. 9:9; 10:1, 14;…[5]

The word is further defined by Thayer (G5048) as:[3]

> 1. to make perfect, complete
>   a. to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end
> 2. to complete (perfect)
>   a. add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full
>   b. to be found perfect
> 3. to bring to the end (goal) proposed
> 4. to accomplish
>   a. bring to a close or fulfilment by event
>   1. of the prophecies of the scriptures

Christ the Lord has truly made perfect and complete all those for whom He died. We may not see it in ourselves, but in fact, we have been made perfect through His sacrifice. The next thing to note is the tense of the verb. It’s in the perfect tense and that basically describes a present state resulting from a finished action in the past. The present state under discussion is our perfection. The action in the past from which it resulted was the once for all time sacrifice of Christ.

4. Those who are perfected are the same ones for whom His sacrifice was made and furthermore, they are the ones who at the *present time* are being sanctified. The word behind “who are being sanctified” in the Greek is the present tense, passive voice, participle mood of the verb ἁγιάζω (*hagiazo*, G37), ἁγιαζομένους (*hagiazomenous*) which Thayer’s definitions include “to separate from profane things and dedicate to God” and “to purify…to purify by expiation: free from the guilt of sin”[3]. We have been purified from sin through the offering of Christ and the benefits of His once-for-all-time offering are being applied to us through this continued sanctification and His intercession (cf. Rom. 8:32-34). There is only one place in Hebrews where the concept of sanctification may, according to some, refer to the unbeliever under the New Covenant, but that is disputed and which I will seek to deal with, Lord willing. I’m talking about the one sanctified in Hebrews 10:29 (**see here**). There are really two options, whether it is (i) the unbeliever, or (ii) the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 13:12

claims that through His sacrifice, the Lord Jesus sanctified a particular people. The verse reads, “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” So, His offering has not only perfected the elect, but it was also the means to sanctify them. It was the means to set them apart and to purify them from sin.

5. Therefore, based on this, how is it possible for any genuine believer for whom Christ died to fall away from grace? Would we not have to radically reinterpret this verse? What will v. 14 mean? Do we really want to say that Christ perfected a people through His sufferings, He sanctified them by His death and they were at one time being sanctified, yet they denied their faith and now are unbelievers? It seems to me that such a thing is impossible under the New Covenant. We cannot at one hand affirm this clear teaching here that everyone for whom Christ died, He sanctified by His offering, He has perfected forever by His offering and they are the present time continually being sanctified, and on the other hand, affirm that any one of those could genuinely be lost and spend eternity in hell. To affirm the latter is to deny what this passage is clearly teaching.

7. The passage then goes on to quote portions from Jeremiah 31:31-34 which we discussed above saying “And the Holy Spirit *also* bears witness to us” and thereby demonstrating that the promise of the New Covenant is consistent and the same as with what was said in v. 14. For comments on vv. 16-17, **see above on Hebrews 8:6-13**.

8. Verse 18 reinforce the conclusion that through Christ’s work and the nature of the New Covenant whose Mediator He is, our sins have been done away with. If our sins and lawless deeds have been forgiven, then truly there is no place anymore for any sacrifices. For these sacrifices were instituted by God for various purposes including the reminding of people of their sins and also the goal for these sacrifices was to serve as a shadow of the Ultimate Sacrifice to come. The verse is worded in such a way as to say “If these big things can be forgiven, then there is no more need for any sacrifice” because there was a singular sacrifice that dealt the deathblow to our sin. Therefore, according to the author of Hebrews the Old Testament anticipated the removal of the ceremonial system through its promise of the New and superior Covenant.

9. The same questions concerning the possibility of a genuine, born-again, forgiven, justified and regenerated believer falling away and being doomed to hell are to be asked again in light of this passage and its clear teaching on the perfection of Christ’s work for the elect. Can they for whom Christ died and (at one time) had complete forgiveness of sins, such so that not a single more sacrifice was needed, fall away and that forgiveness they received be taken back by God and they sent to hell to pay for their sins (for which Christ also suffered)? I’m having difficulty simply raising these questions and I can’t imagine anyone understanding the passage and the whole argument of Hebrews about the superiority of the Great High Priest and the Covenant which He mediates, could even entertain such questions.

Hebrews 12:10-14 - Holiness without which no one will see the Lord

> Heb. 12:10-14 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good**, **that we may share his holiness.** 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the **peaceful fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. 14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**

This is the last passage that I want to tackle from Hebrews concerning the doctrine of Perseverance and I will try to keep my comments short.

1. It may seem weird, but a unique way that God demonstrates to us His love and the fact that we are His children is through discipline. Discipline is a “Training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement:” and “Punishment intended to correct or train:”[6] It is a punishment, though its intent is not to condemn, but rather to correct and lead us in the right way. It is the rebuke and instruction of a loving father to a child when he does something wrong or when the child puts himself in danger. Therefore, we should not be surprised if we are in trials or find ourselves in difficult times, for it may be that God is disciplining us. We are not to fear from God’s discipline, but we should welcome it knowing that God intends it for our good. He disciplines us, not because He hates us, but on the contrary says Holy Writ, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 10:6). The purpose of God’s discipline says Paul is that so we “may not be condemned along with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32).

2. The Scriptures ensure us that the discipline from God is for our own good. There is a particular purpose that God has set to achieve through discipline, namely, that we may become holy as He is holy. It is God who sanctifies the believers and a particular way in which He does that we see from here is discipline. For God to sanctify us means that He cleanses us from indwelling sin, reforms our characters, and brings us into closer conformity to Christ’s image. To share in His holiness, means to be holy as He is holy. We see here that the command to be holy directed to us (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:16), is fulfilled by God in us. It is He who makes us holy although we have the responsibility to seek His holiness. Those two things are therefore not contrary, namely, seeking holiness, while at the same time knowing that it is God Who makes us holy. Therefore, when we

seek holiness, we see *His* holiness and we seek it from *Him*, because it is He alone who can make us holy as He is holy.

3. Allow me now to ask a few questions. Can those who are under the Father's discipline (and that means that they're His children and He disciplines them so that they may share in His holiness) be lost? If so, what was the good that God was seeking for them? Why did God fail in His discipline since now (supposedly) they are completely estranged from His holiness and will forever be so in Hell?

4. Lastly, we see that a responsibility is laid upon us to seek holiness in vv. 12-14, but we just saw from the previous verses that it God Who will make us share in His holiness. We see in the passage both divine sovereignty and human responsibility and we do not try to pit these two against each other, but accept them as they are knowing that if people are seeking holiness, it is because God is working in them (this is in essence **sanctification,** which is a work of God in man). The "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" is the holiness which He is working within us through discipline, His sacrifice (Heb. 10:14; 13:12) and other means.

Conclusion on Hebrews

The book of Hebrews definitely supports the Perseverance of the Saints in clear words and therefore the warning passages should be read in light of this clear testimony. Before going into this study concerning Hebrews I did not know how much it said about Perseverance and the perfection of Christ's work, now I do. Knowing that I do not understand everything fully, though I seek to understand this second-favorite-Epistle of mine better.

Jude

Jude 1:1 – Kept For Jesus

> Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are **called**, **beloved in God** the Father and **kept for Jesus** Christ:

1. The author identifies his audience as those who are (1) called, (2) beloved in God and (3) kept for Jesus. For more on the call see **chapter 10** or the **comments on Hebrews 3:1 above**. His audience are further identified with those who are beloved in and by God the Father. This does not speak of God's general love, but of His specific and elective love toward the believers which is restricted in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:39). It is with this love that the Father chose the elect from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5) and it is this love which provided Jesus as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). Can God lose those whom He loved and chose from all eternity? Can He lose those whom He called through the gospel based on His fore-love and fore-choice of them from all eternity?

2. The audience are described as those who are kept for Jesus. The Greek word here is τετηρημένοις (*tetéremenois*), the perfect tense, passive voice, participle mood of τηρέω (*tereo,* G5083) which we also encountered in 1 Peter 1:4. The believers are being guarded, preserved and kept for Jesus in the condition that they are in. They are being kept *for* the Lord Jesus and *by* (alt. reading ESV, HCSB, ISV) the Lord Jesus in the state which they are, because the elect of God are entrusted to His care (John 6:39-40). Therefore, those who are called and loved by God, are also the ones who are kept, guarded and preserved by, for, and in Jesus Christ our Lord. The passive voice of the verb denotes that it is an action done *unto* the subject, but not *by* the subject. The subject is receiving the action of being kept, guarded and preserved. We are not preserving and guarding ourselves, rather it is God Who does that amazing work to keep His elect. The perfect tense of the verb denotes that we are speaking of a present state (being kept) resulting from a finished action. Or, an action that has been completed in the past yet has results still occurring in the present. The fact that we are now being kept by Jesus and for Jesus, is based on a particular thing in the past, whether it be the election of God in love, or the effectual call of God, or the propitiation He provided for the elect. But we are sure that this work of preservation by Jesus is based not on things in us, but of something(s) that God has done in the past.

3. Is it possible for those who are called by God, Whose call is irreversible (Rom. 11:29), loved by God from all eternity and in the present kept by God could lose or *forfeit* their salvation? How will not the purpose of God fail, who declares that He accomplishes all His purpose (Isa. 46:10)? How will He accomplish the purpose to keep the elect, if it is genuinely possible for some of them to wander from the faith and be doomed to hell?

Jude 1:24-25 – Present you blameless

> Now to him who is able to **keep you from stumbling** and to **present you blameless** before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

1. God is here described as the One Who has the ability to (1) keep the believers from stumbling and (2) to present them

blameless before Himself. Before we consider these two things we must not forget the call to perseverance given by Jude to the believers in the previous portion. They are clearly called to keep themselves in the love of God as they wait for the Lord Jesus (Jude 1:21) and build themselves up in the faith (Jude 1:20). This is not the only place we see responsibility laid upon the believer to seek holiness and to persevere (see **Hebrews 12:10-14 above**), but we understand from taking all Scripture together that we persevere because it is God at work in us to cause us to persevere. We do not persevere or seek holiness merely because of our autonomous will, but because God is at work to preserve us for Jesus. The reason that we seek holiness is because God is sanctifying us.

2. The word behind the English "from stumbling", "from falling" (KJV, ISV, NET), is the Greek adjective ἀπταίστους (*aptaistous*, G4417) which is formed from the negative α (*alpha*) and the verb πταίω (*ptaio*) which means "to cause one to stumble or fall"[3]. Therefore, the basic meaning of ἄπταιστος (*aptaistos*, the lexical form) is *not* to stumble and *not* to fall. Thayer defines it as "not stumbling, standing firm, exempt from falling" (Thayer's, G4417). God possesses this ability toward the believers Who is able to make it *impossible* that they stumble so as to fall away from the faith. Why? Because Jesus is keeping them at the present time in the faith (Jude 1:1).

3. God is described also as the One Who will present the believers as blameless and without fault before His glory. This refers to Judgment Day as this expression of being found or presented blameless does elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:23). Not only has God the ability to keep us from falling away, but also to present us as perfect without cause of condemnation in us because of Christ's work for our sake. But He is further to present us before Him with great joy, with no fear of being condemned, and that because we are in Christ. Judgment Day seems such a scary idea, yet because we are in Christ and because God is preserving us, we will be found on that day to be accepted by God and to be filled with great joy, not fear. It is, in fact, He Who will present us before Himself, because it is He Who is at work within us to make us more like His Son. Therefore, it is all the more reasonable that He should receive all glory from now and forever! Amen!

4. How is it possible that God will fail to present some of those who were supposedly true believers yet fell away, blameless before Him, but they will, in fact, be found with tons to be blamed and judged for? How is it possible that God fails in keeping some, who were supposedly true believers, from falling away? Such questions are troublesome in light of so clear a teaching.

Storms and Floods

The Confession declares the confidence that we having concerning the preservation of the elect even in the most difficult times and places when it says "though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon". Thereby obviously does not mean that perseverance is a simple thing and there is no war with sin or struggle, but quite the opposite. Though all the world be against God's elect, yet God will preserve them. This is basically based on the truth of Romans 8:28-39 which we looked upon **briefly above**. No matter what, God will preserve His elect and bring them safely and without blame into His kingdom.

Falling Away From Grace?

There are verses which at first sight seem to support the idea that a true believer can lose their salvation. But if that was the case, then how do we understand the many passages that we discussed above which make such a thing for a true believer an impossibility? We are to interpret the unclear in light of the clear and it is clear that none of the elect will ever perish. In this section, I want to examine a few passages which are often brought up against the Perseverance of the Saints or Eternal Security. I will not discuss every passage brought up against this doctrine, obviously, but I will try to get the most important ones. I do not see any benefit in using warning passages against apostasy to say that it is, in fact, possible for true believers to commit apostasy under the New Covenant. They *warn* against apostasy and of its danger, but they, in fact, do not describe true believers becoming unbelievers.

I come to the difficult passages unashamedly with presuppositions in mind, namely, that none of the elect, on the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture, can fall away completely from grace and so end up in hell. I acknowledge that some of these passages brought up against the doctrine of Perseverance are difficult, but I also want to apply the principle of *Analogia Fidei.* I seek to interpret the unclear in light of the clear and not otherwise. If there is a passage that can only be interpreted in one way, while the other difficult passage can be interpreted in multiple ways, I'm not going to look for a way to escape the first passage.

A General Observation

The writers of the New Testament take those who profess faith at their word. If they were at one time professing the name of Christ, they take them at their word and when they later deny the name of Christ, they, therefore, conclude that they have left the faith that they once professed. But the authors of the New Testament never once claim that those who apostatized were regenerate believers but now have become *un*regenerate, or they were justified believers that now have been *un*justified, or they were Spirit in-dwelt believers that now are Spirit-less. This is the crucial point of all of this. If it can

be demonstrated that such a thing as described is possible, then apostasy from truth and living faith is proven biblical. Therefore, using passages like **1 Timothy 6:10** to claim that true believers do, in fact, fall away from the faith into damnation, is I believe wrong in light of Scripture's clear teaching on perseverance. Passages like **1 Timothy 4:1; 6:10** could better be interpreted to be about professing believers and not about true believers. Those who claimed at one time to belong to Christ, but have rejected that profession they once made. They were never sown in the good soil, to begin with (Matt. 13:22). Or to use **Revelation 3:5** to say that Christ will, in fact, blot out some names goes against what the passage expressly says. That the Lord says He will never blot out the name of the conquerors does not at all mean that He blots out some other names, rather it confirms the conquerors in their faith and shows them that Christ the Lord of all is on their side in the midst of their persecution.

Using warning or conditional passages from Hebrews like Hebrews 2:1, 3; 3:6, 12-14; 12:15-17, 25 will not prove that true believers will, in fact, fall away completely from the faith, therefore, they are inconclusive. They are real and true warnings, but they do not describe true believers falling away from the true faith. That is what we should find, if "losing one's salvation" was a biblical doctrine.

I do now want to admit again that these warning passages when read on themselves sound like they are saying that true believers, in fact, do lose their salvation. Therefore, those who do not hold to the doctrine of Perseverance are seeking to deal with the text fairly. But I also believe that they're reading these texts one-sidedly. I want to, by the grace of God, deal with these texts fairly in my mind, in light of the clear teaching on the Perseverance of the Saints. I do not want to introduce *conditional* perseverance where the text teaches no such thing. Therefore, I seek to interpret these warning and difficult passages in light of the biblical teaching that Christ does not lose a single sheep and therefore, those who are said to wander away from the faith, were never part of His fold. They were church-goers and they did the religious stuff, but they were, in fact, wolves in sheep's clothing, otherwise, they would have stayed. Now I'm reminded of a particular passage in Holy Scripture, **1 John 2:19** which says:

> 1 John 2:18-19 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 **They went out from us,** but **they were not of us**; for **if they had been of us, they would have continued with us**. But **they went out**, **that it might become plain that they all are not of us.**

It is in light of this clear teaching that I want to interpret these difficult passages. Here it is clearly taught that these false teachers, these false professors, these antichrists, which is not a reference to the "endtime antichrist", but someone who rejects Christ (see 1 John 2:22; 4:3), were in fact not part of the believers, not a part of the true faith. The reason that they went out from the believing community and from the faith is so that all might see and know that they, in reality, were never true believers. For, says John, if they truly were part of us and therefore true believers, then according to the essence of true faith, they would have preserved and stayed with us. But in fact, they were not a part of the believing community and therefore had no share in Christ. They were in a sense *temporal,* and therefore not *true* believers (see Luke 8:13, **see also here**), for if they, in fact, were true believers, they would have remained so until the end. Commenting on this passage, John Calvin says:

> *For if they had been of us* He plainly declares that those who fell away had never been members of the Church. And doubtless the seal of God, under which he keeps his own, remains sure, as Paul says, (2Ti 2:19.) But here arises a difficulty, for it happens that many who seemed to have embraced Christ, often fall away. To this I answer, that there are three sorts of those who profess the Gospel; there are those who feign piety, while a bad conscience reproves them within; the hypocrisy of others is more deceptive, who not only seek to disguise themselves before men, but also dazzle their own eyes, so that they seem to themselves to worship God aright; the third are those who have the living root of faith, and carry a testimony of their own adoption firmly fixed in their hearts. The two first have no stability; of the last John speaks, when he says, that it is impossible that they should be separated from the Church, for the seal which God's Spirit engraves on their hearts cannot be obliterated; the incorruptible seed, which has struck roots, cannot be pulled up or destroyed.
>
> He does not speak here of the constancy of men, but of God, whose election must be ratified. He does not then, without reason declare, that where the calling of God is effectual, perseverance would be certain. He, in short, means that they who fall away had never been thoroughly imbued with the knowledge of Christ, but had only a light and a transient taste of it.[7]

And the great Baptist commentator John Gill says the following:

> **but they were not of us:** they were of the church, and of the same mind with it, at least in profession, antecedent to

their going out; for had they not been in communion with the church, they could not be properly said to go out of it; and if they had not been of the same mind and faith in profession, they could not be said to depart from it; but they were not truly regenerated by the grace of God, and so apparently were not of the number, of God's elect: notwithstanding their profession and communion with the church, they were of the world, and not of God; they were not true believers; they had not that anointing which abides, and from which persons are truly denominated Christians, or anointed ones:

for if they had been of us, they would [no doubt] have continued with us; in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the fellowship of the church, as true believers do: if their hearts had been right with God, they would have remained steadfast to him, his Gospel, truths, and ordinances, and faithful with his saints; for such who are truly regenerate are born of an incorruptible seed, and those that have received the anointing which makes them truly Christians, that abides, as does every true grace, faith, hope, and love; and such who are truly God's elect cannot possibly fall into such errors and heresies as these did, and be finally deceived, as they were:

but [they went out]; "they went out from us", so the Syriac version reads;

that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us; the word "all" is left out in the Syriac version. The defection and apostasy of these persons were permitted by God, that it might appear they had never received the grace of God in truth; and their going out was in such a manner, that it was a certain argument that they were not of the elect; since they became antichrists, denied the deity or sonship of Christ, or that he was come in the flesh, or that he was the Christ, and therefore are said to be of the world, and not of God, 1Jo 2:22, so that this passage furnishes out no argument against the saints' perseverance, which is confirmed in 1Jo 2:20.[8]

Therefore, I seek to read all the apostasy passages with this in mind, namely, that it is possible for people to be deceived by the false piety of others, thinking that they're Christian, but they (false believers) in time will demonstrate that, in fact, they are not Christian and are false brethren.

Difficult Passages

With all this in mind that we have discussed concerning the impossibility of apostasy for the elect, the warning passages not being conclusive and those who were not of us from the beginning, now we are in a position to be able to look at these passages which some claim do, in fact, teach true believers can fall away.

Romans 14:15 and 1 Corinthians 8:11 – Destroy the one for whom Christ died

Rom. 14:15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not **destroy the one for whom Christ died.**

1 Cor. 8:11 And so by your knowledge this weak **person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.**

The warning is strong and in fact, it is just that, a warning and not an actual description of someone for whom Christ died being destroyed and perish. The Greek word for "destroy" is clear and unambiguous and denotes eternal destruction in multiple places (Matt. 5:29; 10:28; John 3:16; Rom. 2:12; 2 Pet. 3:9) and therefore, the issue here is not translational, but it is an issue of interpretation: whether this describes an actual situation or whether this is a warning not to make other believers stumble. I believe that the case is the latter.

The evidence for this is in the fact that this word is used to denote the *impossibility* of the elect perishing. In John 6:39 and 10:28, which we discussed above, the same root word ἀπόλλυμι (*apollumi*) is used to denote that the impossibility that the elect could be destroyed or perish. Therefore, this passage cannot in light of the clear teaching on the impossibility of apostasy for the elect, teach that elect persons do, in fact, perish because of food (or perished, since that is not a relevant issue anymore). Paul's point here is not to teach that some of the elect may, in fact, perish, but it is rather to warn stronger believers not to lay stumbling blocks in the way of weaker believers, whether it be food or anything else. We are to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19) and therefore if I know that my weak brother has issues with food that I'm eating, I should not eat that before him, lest his faith weakens even more. These passages warn us against using our liberty in a way to make others stumble. Therefore, Paul calls believers to not be a stumbling block to others because of their liberty saying, "Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble" (Rom. 14:20-21). Paul says that it does not matter if we eat this food or do not before God (1 Cor. 8:8). It doesn't affect our justification neither will one be destroyed or perish because he ate food sacrificed to idols, but the conscience of the weaker brother is wounded if we use our liberty in such a way (1 Cor. 8:12-13). This is not a conclusive proof that some of the elect do, in fact, perish eternally.

Galatians 5:1-4 – You have fallen away from grace

Gal. 5:1-4 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are **severed from Christ**, you who would be **justified by the law**; you have **fallen away from grace.**

Here the phrase "fallen away from grace" appears and therefore some suppose that this is a strong proof that some of the true, regenerate and elect believers do, in fact, fall away and perish. But I do not believe that this is the case. First, let us say a word about the letter to the Galatians.

The letter was written by the apostle Paul around 49 A.D. to a congregation which was being troubled by Jewish Christians who were seeking to place Gentile Christians under the yoke of the Old Testament Law, teaching that they must be circumcised to be saved, like in Acts 15:1. But Paul sees through the deceit of these false teachers declaring that if anyone adds anything to the gospel, even if it was an angel from heaven, let them be damned (Gal. 1:8-9). The apostle further says that the believers must know what it means to be circumcised, namely, it means being *obliged* to keep the whole Law of Moses and thereby place themselves under the yoke of the Law (Gal. 5:3; cf. Rom. 2:25-29). This means that they are trying to please God by works, rather than by faith (Heb. 11:6). The context of the Epistle is therefore between the antithesis of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Epistle is not teaching that Christians do not have to obey God, but rather it is teaching that salvation is not of works, but of faith (e.g., Gal. 2:16). Therefore, what these false teachers are doing is seeking to damn the believers through making them think that their works are the basis of their justification. Now we turn to examine our passage.

He begins v. 1 of chapter 5 continuing the thought from the previous chapter about the antithesis between the Mosaic and New Covenants. The Mosaic is a covenant of slavery, while the New is a covenant of sonship and peace. Furthermore, the apostle claims that his readers are in fact believers in saying "But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" and "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:26, 28). The Epistle is written to warn believers from embracing such a false gospel, which claims that works play a part in our salvation and seeks to place us under the yoke of the law. The apostle directs his word against those who trouble the Galatian believers based on the history of Ishmael and Isaac saying,

Gal. 4:29-31 But just as at that time he who was born **according to the flesh** persecuted him who was **born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.** But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, **we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.**

Those Jews who are persecuting the Gentile believers are themselves actually still under the slavery of the old Mosaic Covenant and they are children of the flesh and therefore not heirs to the promises of God. Just as there has always been war between the seed of Satan and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), so likewise it was between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau and now between Gentile Christians and Jewish "Christians". These Jews who are seeking to draw the Gentile believers from freedom under Christ into the yoke of slavery, may profess the name of Christ, but they demonstrate through their works and beliefs that they are still under the slavery of the Old Covenant and therefore have no inheritance with the children of promise, i.e., they are not true believers.

It is in light of this clear teaching that we proceed to chapter 5. We have seen from the end of chapter 4 that Paul identifies his audience as believers and children of promise and contrasts those who are troubling them to be sons of Hagar, sons of slavery. What the apostle now does is call upon the believers to enjoy their freedom in Christ and to resist and reject those who are seeking to bring the believers under the yoke of slavery of the Jews, for this slavery did not merely consist in observing the whole law, ceremonial, judicial and moral, but also in obeying their man-made traditions and commandments not based in Scripture. Paul is against circumcision in this context, not merely because it is circumcision, but because of what it actually means in this context. In this context and for the Jews, it means the obligation to keep the whole law and if anyone fails in any point, he is condemned (Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). In other contexts, Paul says that it doesn't matter if one is circumcised or uncircumcised (e.g., Gal. 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor. 7:17-18). In this context, if one is circumcised he places himself under the obligation to keep the whole law and thereby he is severed and separated from Christ. He has no part in Him. Why? Because thereby he is trying to justify himself by law, rather than by faith. These two things are antithetical and mutually exclusive. Therefore, if one seeks to be justified by law rather than by grace, he has, in fact, fallen away from grace.

We must here notice that Paul, in fact, does *not* say that the believers have fallen from grace, but rather says, taking the teaching of the circumcision party to its conclusion means falling away from Christ and rejecting Him. But as we have seen from Galatians 4:28-31, these false teachers were, in fact, not true believers, they were never part of the New Covenant of peace, but were still under the Mosaic Covenant of slavery and condemnation. In contrast, the apostle affirms, in fact, that

his audience are children of promise and belong to the New Covenant of peace from which apostasy is an impossibility (**see above**). The apostle acknowledges that the believers are, in fact, troubled by this false teaching, but he does not say that *they are* false believers or they *have* fallen from grace. He says:

> Gal. 5:7-10 You were running well. **Who hindered you from obeying the truth?** 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have **confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view,** and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

The circumcision party has caused a lot of trouble for the believers in such a way that they're beginning to doubt the truth of the gospel, but Paul assures them that their teaching is not from the God Who called them to His gospel. He is so set against this false teaching because he realizes that if he allows this to go on, then many will take heed to this false gospel which saves no one. But in the same place where he writes about the danger of these false teachers, he also writes with *confidence* that the Galatians will heed the warning of his letter and reject these false teachings and thereby demonstrate that they have, in fact, *not* fallen away and that they are, in fact, children of promise.

It is also good to mention that the phrase "you have fallen away from grace" may also be interpreted to mean fallen away from the *doctrine* or *principle* of grace. This is supported by the whole antithesis in the Epistle between works and faith. These false Jewish Christians were seeking to place the Gentile Christians under the yoke of the law and thereby making their justification not by grace through faith, but also by the law. Therefore, if these Christians accept what these Judaizers are preaching they will fall away from the principle and doctrine of grace and favor of justification by the law.

Therefore, I conclude that this passage does not, in fact, describe or teach the actual of apostasy for believers from the New Covenant. Rather, it is a warning about the logical conclusion of the circumcision party who are children according to the flesh, unlike the Galatian believers who are children according to promise.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 – Some have made shipwreck of their faith

> 1 Tim 1:18-20 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, **some have made shipwreck of their faith**, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have **handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme**.

The faith spoken of in v. 19 is the Christian religion, not personal faith, but the body of true doctrine. The word "faith" is used in such a way as not to refer to *personal* faith, but to the Christian religion and Christian doctrine in general as in 1 Timothy 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8, 12; 6:10, 21; 2 Timothy 3:8; 4:7. Timothy is to hold fast to the Christian truth revealed in Scripture and in Jesus Christ with a good conscience about its truthfulness and a conscience which will lead him to action. But, says Paul, some have rejected this. The "this" refers specifically to the good conscience, but by rejecting this good conscience they have, in fact, made shipwreck of their faith. The Greek word for "rejecting" does not imply that they, in fact, at any time had "a good conscience" or were possessors of true faith. The verb ἀπωθέομαι (*apotheomai,* G683) means "to thrust away from one's self, to drive away from one's self" and "repudiate, reject, refuse"[3]. It is used in Acts 13:46 with reference to the Jewish rejection of the proclamation of the gospel at Antioch when Paul said "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you ***thrust*** it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." This does not mean that the Jews accepted the gospel and then rejected it, for this is what Paul was proclaiming by "the word of God." Likewise in 1 Timothy 1:19, the rejection of "a good conscience" does not imply that they at one time had a good conscience of were true believers.

Concerning the use of the analogy of shipwreck it is said:

> "with respect to THE faith." *Faith* is the vessel in which they had professedly embarked, of which "good conscience" is the anchor. The ancient Church often used this image, comparing the course of faith to navigation. The *Greek* does not imply that one having once had *faith* makes shipwreck of it, but that they who put away good conscience "make shipwreck with respect to THE faith."[9]

Concerning the second "faith" in the verse which has the article, a particular commentary says:

> ἡ πίστις here (though the presence of the article would not by itself determine this) is to be taken *objectively*, as equivalent to 'the Christian faith,' not *subjectively*, of the faith of individuals. The words πιστός, πίστις have an

interesting history, which cannot be here discussed at length[518]; but a few references must be given. πίστις, which in Philo is used quite vaguely of belief and trust in God, became to the early Christians gradually equivalent to faith in Christ as the supreme revelation of God. This faith grew by degrees in clearness and distinctness, until it embraced the Incarnation, the Atonement, and all the great dogmas of the Gospel; from this the transition was easy to the word being used objectively to signify the *content*, as it were, of a Christian's belief, to signify, in short, the Christian Creed, the Gospel. Among the more conspicuous instances of this use of the word in the N.T. outside the Pastorals may be noted Act 6:7; Act 13:8; Act 16:5; Gal 1:23; Gal 3:23; Php 1:27. In the Pastorals, which give us a more developed form of Christianity, we find as is natural a proportionately larger number of examples of this usage; and out of 33 occurrences of πίστις in these Epistles the *objective* sense seems to be required in 1Ti 1:19; 1Ti 4:1; 1Ti 4:6; 1Ti 5:8; 1Ti 6:10; 1Ti 6:21; 2Ti 3:8; 2Ti 4:7; Tit 1:13. See notes *in loc*. in each case.[10]

These false teachers have made shipwreck of their religion. They have destroyed their profession, but that does not mean that they had true saving faith to begin with (1 John 2:19). Among those who have destroyed their religious profession were Hymenaeus and Alexander. Hymenaeus is mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:17 as someone who taught that "the resurrection has already happened" (2 Tim. 2:18). His condition became worse as he went on. As for the precise identification of this Alexander, there is some difficulty. There are basically two relevant Alexanders which are mentioned in the NT: (i) a certain Jewish Christian in Acts 19:33 named Alexander who was in Ephesus and (2) Alexander the coppersmith mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14. Of the latter, it is said that "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds." But as to his precise identification or what he taught, we don't know. Either way, they seemed to be teachers in the church and thus in a high position that Paul himself had to excommunicate them from the church. The reasons that Alexander and Hymenaeus exercised (some) teaching authority in the church are given by Pastor MacArthur in connection to those "certain persons" in v. 3:

...**certain persons.** The false teachers were few in number, yet had a wide influence. Several reasons point toward these men being elders in the church at Ephesus and in the churches in the surrounding region: 1) They presumed to be teachers (1 Tim. 1:7), a role reserved for elders (3:2; 5:17). 2) Paul himself had to excommunicate Hymenaeus and Alexander, which impels they occupied the highest pastoral positions. 3) Paul detailed the qualifications of an overseer (3:1-7), implying that unqualified men, who needed to be replaced by qualified ones, were occupying those roles. 4) Paul stressed that sinning overseers were to be publically disciplined (5:19-22)...[11]

The expression "handed over to Satan" refers to excommunication whereby one is placed outside of the believing community – the church. He is placed back in the world where Satan's reign is manifest. Away from the Word of God, the power of God, the Lord's ordinances, godly fellowship, and conduct. Notice the purpose of this excommunication, it is namely "that they may not learn to blaspheme." These two were excommunicated on grounds of blasphemy and the purpose of this excommunication is that they may not blaspheme. The word βλασφημέω (*blasphemeo*, G987) means "to speak reproachfully, rail at, revile, calumniate, blaspheme" often with reference to God though not limited to that (e.g., Paul in Acts 13:45). The purpose of this excommunication is that they learn not to blaspheme. Paul describes himself as a blasphemer in 1 Timothy 1:13, but no longer remained a blasphemer when he received the grace of Christ. The apostles wishes the same for Hymenaeus and Alexander and wants to accomplish this through excommunication, which even if it did not lead them to true repentance it would save the church from their false teaching. But will Satan himself, in fact, teach them to seek Christ? No, he will not. But the idea here is that they learn to see the difference of their life within the faith community and outside of the faith community and see the error of their ways. On "learn" and "blaspheme" a commentary notes:

learn—Greek, "be disciplined," namely, by chastisement and suffering.

blaspheme—the name of God and Christ, by doings and teachings unworthy of their Christian profession (Rom 2:23; Rom 2:24; Jas 2:7). Though the apostles had the power of excommunication, accompanied with bodily inflictions, miraculously sent (2Co 10:8), it does not follow that fallible ministers now have any power, save that of excluding from church fellowship notorious bad livers.[9]

To conclude, therefore, this passage does not, in fact, teach that Alexander and Hymenaeus were true and regenerate believers and now are no longer believers and are unregenerate. But it does show that these men have destroyed their previous religious profession and abandoned their Christian profession.

Hebrews 6:4-6 – It is impossible to restore them again to repentance

Heb 6:4-6 For it is **impossible**, in the case of those who have **once been enlightened**, who have **tasted the heavenly gift**, and **have shared in the Holy Spirit**, 5 and have **tasted the goodness of the word of God** and

the **powers of the age to come**, 6 and then have **fallen away**, to **restore them again to repentance**, since they are **crucifying once again the Son of God** to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

This is arguably one of the most difficult and notorious passages in Holy Writ. There is no consensus on its interpretation. I have consulted many commentaries and articles on this passage and I come to it knowing that I don't have all the answers. But I also come to it with presuppositions in mind. I am unashamed to say that the Bible does, in fact, teach the Perseverance of the Saints, therefore this passage cannot be describing the actual apostasy of a regenerate believer from the faith. It may be a warning to true believers; it may be hypothetical, but what it cannot be is a description of some true and regenerate believers completely falling away from the faith. I have argued that even in the **book of Hebrews** itself the doctrine of Perseverance and the perfection of the work of Christ on behalf of the elect is taught. I have consulted the following articles and commentaries and will cite from some of them freely in the following discussion.

The passage **does not say that regenerate believers apostatize**:

- John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. Hebrews 6:4-9. Can also be found at here.
- John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. Hebrews 6:4-9. Can also be read at here.
- Arthur W. Pink. Exposition of Hebrews. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. Chapters 24-27. His commentary on Hebrews 6 can be found here.
- Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Chapter 40.
- John M. Frame. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014). Chapter 44.
- J. Ligon Duncan III – Falling Away? (Sermon)
- Mathew Poole - English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here.
- William Burkitt – Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here.
- Albert Barnes - Notes on the New Testament. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here. He accepts that the descriptions describe a true Christian, but rejects that it is possible for a true Christian to apostatize.
- Robert Jamieson, Andrew Robert Fausset, David Brown – Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here.
- Matthew Henry – Complete Commentary on the Bible. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here.
- Bob Utley – You Can Understand The Bible (Not that explicit). Commentary on Hebrews 6, here and here.
- John Owen – Exposition of Hebrews. Commentary on Hebrews 6, here.
- Steven J. Cole – Lesson 17: When Repentance Becomes Impossible (Hebrews 6:4-8).

The passage describes **regenerate believers who have fallen away**:

- Adam Clarke
- James Burton Coffman
- Charles John Ellicott (Not very explicit)
- John Trapp (Not very explicit)
- Thomas Coke
- Daniel Whedon
- David Guzik
- Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary (Too technical)

I have collected some commentaries, articles, and sermons on this passage in a document that you can download (it does *not* include all the commentaries listed above).

I believe that the passage speaks about false believers, and warns those who have sat under the preaching of the Word of God, the manifestation of the Spirit's work and who themselves have professed to belong to Christ that they will perish

eternally without the possibility of true repentance if they do not have true faith. The description is not definitive proof that those spoken of are true believers, because the analogy in vv. 7-8 moves us to say that those spoken of were unbelievers from the start. I don't claim that by me consulting articles and commentaries on this passage that I will have an answer to every question on this passage. But what I do want to claim is that there are interpretations that are credible and do not force us to deny other biblical doctrines (i.e., the Perseverance of the Saints). I do want to stress the context of Hebrews that it is an epistle written to Hebrew Christians steeped into the Old Testament and Israel's history, therefore I will try to interpret it with this in mind and not try to make a modern application every time.

Audience

Who are the ones being described in this passage? Is the audience the ones being described in vv. 4-6? No, they are not. Rather, they are a different group spoken of in the third person ("those" v. 4, "them…they…their own" v. 6). The Author is not describing his present audience. In fact, he explicitly says that in v. 9. Previous to this passage the author spoke in the plural "you" to the audience (e.g., Heb. 5:11-13), including himself in 6:1 by using "us". After v. 9, he speaks of the "beloved" and those whom he encourages to "have the full assurance of hope until the end". The warning is not about them, but about those who receive a clear light of God's gospel, make a profession of faith and appear to all to be true believers, yet later fall away. It is those who will not be brought to true repentance by God and be left in their sins to perish eternally.

The audience the Author is writing to is one of Hebrew Christians in general who are being tempted to go back to the old Judaism and abandon their current religion. The Author throughout the letter shows that the New Covenant and its Mediator are better and they are the fulfillment of the promises and shadows in the Old Testament and therefore, there is nothing to go back to. The apostasy being spoken of here is that in which a person leaves Christianity to go back to Judaism before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Obviously, it can have modern applications of those who leave their profession of Christianity wherein they have clearly seen God's work and His Word, yet later deny that profession and go openly to another religion or to atheism. But mainly, this passage is about those who are being tempted to apostatize to Judaism. That is the context into which this portion of Scripture is placed.

Impossible

The passage begins by denoting an impossibility, namely, the impossibility of renewing certain people to repentance. I take the word "impossible" here to mean absolute impossibility and not merely impossible in the sense of "very difficult", or "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). The Greek word ἀδύνατος (*adunatos*, G102) literally means no power, ability or strength. The word is used by the Author of Hebrews 4 times. In **Hebrews 6:18**, he says that "it is impossible for God to lie", which does not indicate that it is very difficult, although it can happen, but denotes an absolute impossibility of such a thing happening. In **Hebrews 10:4**, the Author says that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Does he here mean that it is merely very difficult for this to happen, or rather that it is absolutely impossible? The answer seems obvious. The last instance is in **Hebrews 11:6** where it is said of God that "without faith it is impossible to please him". Does the Author mean that it is merely very difficult, or it is simply not possible of such a thing happening? Romans 14:23 says that anything outside of faith is sin. Therefore, is it possible that God be "pleased" by sin? No, rather God is pleased by faith. Therefore, on the basis of the Author's usage of this word I believe that he here refers to the absolute impossibility of a particular thing happening, namely, restoring certain persons to repentance.

The Description of the Apostates

I would like to say from the outset that Arminians who raise this passage as proof of apostasy of true believers do so rightly. This passage is not like some passages wherein some of them find the word "choose", "will", "whole world", "everyone" and try to attack the five points. Rather, this is a passage which at first sight seems to describe those who are genuine believers. Therefore, this passage especially deserves an answer consistent with the rest of Scripture. There are five descriptions given in vv. 4-5 and it describes the apostates as:

1. Those who were once enlightened;
2. Those who have tasted the heavenly gift;
3. Those who shared in the Holy Spirit;
4. Those who have tasted the goodness of the word of God; and
5. Those who have tasted the powers of the age to come.

When we first look at this description, it is understandable that consistent Arminians raise this passage as proof for their doctrine of falling away and it is the job of the Calvinist to provide a consistent exegesis of this passage showing why it does *not* say that regenerate believers will fall away beyond recovery. What we must keep in mind is that these descriptions are given about people who were involved in church life. They are not given about people who were "solo" and Christians on themselves, but rather it speaks of those who lived within the congregation of the believers. This means that we should be

very careful not to personalize every description and make it individual, rather than corporate.

1. Those who have once been enlightened

What does it mean to be enlightened? Does it mean to be saved? The basic meaning of φωτίζω (*photizo*, G5461) is "to shed rays, i.e. to shine"[12] and "to enlighten, light up, illumine"[3]. It is used in **1 Corinthians 4:5** about the Lord's coming in judgment who will "bring to light the things now hidden in darkness" where the idea given is that secret things will be manifest. They will be brought to light. Paul claims in **Ephesians 3:8-9** that to him grace was given to "bring to light" for everyone the plan of mystery. This is used here in the sense to teach and explain what the "plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God" means. In **Ephesians 1:18**, Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts may be "enlightened" whereby we will know "what is the hope to which he has called you." This does *not* refer to conversion, rather it refers to us receiving more knowledge into the mystery of Christ. It is used in **John 1:9** to speak of Christ being the light who "gives light" to everyone, which *definitely* does not mean that He saves everyone without exception, but rather He gives the light of knowledge. Its use in **Hebrews 10:32** does neither lend the idea that it is a technical term for saving faith or regeneration. John Owen defines this word as "to give light or knowledge by teaching" and gives the following basis of this definition:

> Φωτίζομαι, is "to give light or knowledge by teaching;" — the same with □□□□□□, which, therefore, is so translated ofttimes by the Greeks; as by Aquila, Exo 4:12; Psa 119:33; Pro 4:4; Isa 27:11, as Drusius observes. And it is so by the LXX., Jdg 13:8; 2Ki 12:2; 2Ki 17:27. Our apostle useth it for "to make manifest;" that is, "bring to light," 1Co 4:5, 2Ti 1:10. And the meaning of it, Joh 1:9, where we render it "lighteth," is to teach. And φωτισμός is "knowledge upon instruction:" 2Co 4:4, Εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγάσαι αὐτοῖς τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, — "That the light of the gospel should not shine into them;" that is, the knowledge of it. So 2Co 4:6, Πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως, — "The light of the knowledge." Wherefore to be "enlightened," in this place, is to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a spiritual apprehension thereof.[13]

The true believer *is* enlightened, but he is enlightened in a much deeper way through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit than the apostate through the outward teaching of God's Word and truth and the ministry of the Spirit. The enlightening of the believer leads to a changed life according to the truth with which he is enlightened. These apostates likewise had some kind of repentance and a change of life, obviously. Having once lived with the people of God, they were not wild sinners and Christ-rejecters as they became after their apostasy. Therefore, this enlightening, which is the knowledge they received through teaching did have some effect on them, but it did not have a lasting effect on them because it was not joined by faith neither was this knowledge worked into the believer's life through the Holy Spirit. These apostates had merely natural knowledge of the things of God as they heard them within the congregation and not true and spiritual knowledge of them. John Owen observes that

> "There is a knowledge of spiritual things that is purely *natural and disciplinary*, attainable and attained without any especial aid or assistance of the Holy Ghost. As this is evident in common experience, so especially among such as, casting themselves on the study of spiritual things, are yet utter strangers unto all spiritual gifts. Some knowledge of the Scripture, and the things contained in it, is attainable at the same rate of pains and study with that of any other art or science."[13]

Some in the early church have connected this enlightening with baptism, which was called "illumination", but I believe that this has little to do with the present passage as the Author does not make this connection and the use of "illumination" to refer to baptism came later on in history.[14]

Concerning the word "once" Wayne Grudem says:

> Similarly, the word once that is used to speak of those who "have once been enlightened" is the Greek term hapax, which is used, for example, in Philippians 4:16 of the Philippians' sending Paul a gift "once and again," and in Hebrews 9:7 of entrance in the Holy of Holies "once a year." Therefore, this word does not mean that something happened "once" and can never be repeated, but simply that it happened once, without specifying whether it will be repeated or not.[15]

And he adds in a footnote that:

> This is not the same word as ephapax, which is more regularly used in the New Testament of nonrepeatable events

(Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10).

Finally, Matthew Henry notes that:

> "Balaam was the man whose eyes were opened (Num. xxiv. 3), and yet with his eyes opened he went down to utter darkness."[16]

This description is not particular to true believers alone. But what we also must take note of is the fact that these people, whose renewal to repentance is an impossibility after apostasy, were not regular backsliders. But they were those who knew the truth of the gospel clearly, confessed it and professed the true faith for a time, but then turned their back on it. While in their time of profession, I don't think we would have been able to say that they were not true believers as they appeared to be on all accounts as many apostates are (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

To be enlightened does not mean that we were saved, but rather that we received instruction and knowledge in the truth.

2. Those who tasted the heavenly gift

The word "tasted" is used concerning the heavenly gift, the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. What does it mean to "taste" something? I think that the basic meaning is to **know by experience**.

The word γεύομαι (*geuomai*, G1089) and its basic meaning is "to taste" and "perceive the flavour of, partake of, enjoy"[3]. It is used in **Hebrews 2:9** about Christ who "taste[d] death for everyone." It speaks of an experience that *is* real, yet merely *momentary*. Even in the case of Christ the Lord who died for our sake, His "taste of death" was momentary and not never-ending. It is used in **Matthew 27:34** where it is expressly said that tasting does not mean accepting the thing. I mean, the Lord tasted the wine, He tried it, but rejected it later. Therefore, this word does not have the meaning of tasting and then accepting it. The acceptance of the thing or rejection is not included in the definition of the word. It merely speaks of a knowledge by experience of a thing.

These apostates have tasted–they have had an experience with the heavenly gift, but this tasting does not imply that they've received the heavenly gift in truth. They have tasted it, but after a time rejected the heavenly gift. Arthur W. Pink observes the following on the meaning of "taste":

> Second, they had "tasted" of the heavenly gift. To "taste" is to have a personal experience of, in contrast from mere report. "Tasting does not include eating, much less digesting and turning into nourishment what is so tasted; for its nature being only thereby discerned it may be refused, yea, though we like its relish and savor, on some other consideration. The persons here described, then, are those who have to a certain degree understood and relished the revelation of mercy; like the stony-ground hearers they have received the Word with a transcient joy" (John Owen). The "tasting" is in contrast from the "eating" of John 6:50-56.[17]

Dr. Grudem observes the following in a footnote about the word "taste":

> The word *tasted* is also used in Heb. 2:9 to say that Jesus "tasted death," indicating that he came to know it by experience (but "tasted" is an apt word because he did not remain dead). The same could be true of those who had some experience of heavenly gifts, as can be true even of unbelievers (cf. Matt. 7:22; 1 Cor. 7:14; 2 Peter 2:20–22). In Heb. 6:4–5 these people's experience of the Holy Spirit's power and of the Word of God was of course a *genuine experience* (just as Jesus *genuinely* died), but that by itself does not show that the people had an experience of regeneration.[18]

What is the heavenly gift? Commentators and preachers are divided on this one although the majority think that it either refers to the Lord Christ (e.g., Gill, Com. Cri. & Expl., Steve J. Cole) or the Holy Spirit (e.g., Owen, Pink, Henry, Grudem, Piper). Both have good reasons to think so although as Pink observes, there is not a great difference since 'the difference is without a distinction, for the Spirit is here to glorify Christ, as He came from the Father by Christ as His ascension "Gift" to His people.'[17]

John 4:10 seems to be a strong verse to see "the gift of God" which came down from heaven to be the Lord Jesus Himself. Note that the passage does not speak of *a* gift of God, but *the* gift of God. See also John 3:16; Romans 6:23. This description would then imply that these apostates had some kind of experience with the Lord Jesus, without being regenerated, which is

not impossible. Being within the congregation of His called-out-ones they would have certainly known the Lord Jesus through experience in some way. These are not people who have come to church one day, "accepted" Jesus and then went into the world. Rather, these people were steeped into Christ's religion and then apostatized. They had seen Christianity confirmed in various ways before their eyes and yet still choose to abandon their profession and reject the Christian faith and its founder, Christ the Lord.

For the Holy Spirit being the gift of God, Acts 2:38 is the primary text where the Holy Spirit is said to be the gift given by God to those who repent. He is heavenly because He comes from heaven–He comes from God and is God. John Owen humbly defends this view:

> It is, as many judge, the person of Christ himself in that place which is intended. But the context makes plain that it is the Holy Ghost; for he is the "living water" which the Lord Jesus promiseth in that place to bestow. And so far as I can observe, δωρεά, "the gift," with respect unto God, as denoting the thing given, is nowhere used but only to signify the Holy Ghost. And if it be so, the sense of this place is determined, Act 2:38, "Ye shall receive," τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος— "the gift of the Holy Ghost;" not that which he gives, but that which he is. Act 8:20, "Thou hast thought δωρεὰν τοῦ Θεοῦ," — "that the gift of God may be purchased with money;" that is, the power of the Holy Ghost in miraculous operations. So expressly, Act 10:45; Act 11:17. Elsewhere δωρεά, so far as I can observe, when respecting God, doth not signify the thing given, but the grant itself. The Holy Spirit is signally "the gift of God" under the new testament.[13]

This indeed seems more natural, but even if the gift is Christ, this would not exclude the work of the Spirit as the experience of the believer of Christ is through the Holy Spirit Who indwells us. Owen now expects an objection, namely, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the next clause, so why would the Author repeat the same thing twice? Owen thinks that this is done for (1) emphasis; (2) the following clause ("have shared in the Holy Spirit"), may be exegetical (i.e., explanatory) of "the heavenly gift"; (3) the Holy Spirit is the gift of God in gospel times as he in the previous quote tried to link the gift of God with the Holy Spirit.

These apostates had an experience of the Holy Spirit or the Lord Jesus, which was momentary and they rejected it after a while, turning their back on the Triune God after knowing Him in some non-salvific way. That this experience was merely momentary and not lasting is seen through the use of the word "taste" as we observed above.[19] **See also here for temporal believers**.

3. Those who shared in the Holy Spirit

What does it mean to share in the Holy Spirit, or be partakers of the Holy Spirit as the KJV puts it? Does it imply sharing in the Holy Spirit intimately and being united to Him?

The word μέτοχος (*metochos*, G3353) basically gives the idea of sharing in or partaking of something. It is used 6 times in the NT, 5 of which in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8) and the last in Luke 5:7. In **1:9**, the word is translated with "companions". In **3:1**, it speaks of those who "share" (ESV), are "partners" (NET), "partakers" (KJV) and "companions" (HCSB) in a heavenly calling referring to fellow believers. In **3:14**, it speaks of the believers having "come to share in Christ" (ESV), "become companions of the Messiah" (HCSB), "made partakers of Christ" (KJV) and "become partners with Christ" (NET). In **12:8**, it speaks of the believers, who are sons of God, sharing in God's discipline. Lastly, in **Luke 5:7**, it is translated as "partners" (ESV) when referring to the relationship of Simon Peter to fishers he associates with or with whom he worked. It seems that sometimes the word is used to speak of a close relationship as in Hebrews 3:14; 12:8, for example, while other times such a thing is not necessarily implied as in Luke 5:7; Hebrews 1:9, for example. Therefore, the meaning and extent of this sharing must be decided not merely on the basis of the usage of the word, but more importantly, based on the context. A.W. Pink observes:

> First, it should be pointed out that the Greek word for "partakers" here is a different one from that used in Colossians 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here simply means "companions", referring to what is external rather than internal. It is to be observed that this item is placed in the center of the five, and this because it describes the animating principle of the other four, which are all effects.[17]

To say that these apostates partook and shared in the Holy Spirit in the past is not conclusive proof that they were regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit. It would have been easy for the Author if he wanted to give the idea that these people were regenerate and indwelt by the Spirit to say things like they were "indwelt" by the Spirit or "filled with" the Spirit, etc., but this the Author does not. To partake here means to have some association and participation in the Spirit.[20]Grudem

observes here that

> Hebrews 6:4–6 speaks of people who have been "associated with" the Holy Spirit, and thereby had their lives influenced by him, but it need not imply that they had a redeeming work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, or that they were regenerated. By similar analogy with the example of the fishing companions in Luke 5:7, Peter and the disciples could be associated with them and even to some degree influenced by them without having a thoroughgoing change of life caused by that association. The very word metochos allows for a range of influence from fairly weak to fairly strong, for it only means "one who participates with or shares with or accompanies in some activity." This was apparently what had happened to these people spoken of in Hebrews 6, who had been associated with the church and as such associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, and no doubt had been influenced by him in some ways in their lives.[21]

The question we must next answer concerns the manner in which these apostates shared in the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit only work with the elect? Or does He even work in some of the reprobates? I think that this is an easy answer because we have a clear word from the mouth of our Lord concerning those who worked miracles, yet whom He *never* knew. In Matthew 7, we read of people who will come before our Lord claiming that they're His:

> Matt. 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not **prophesy** in your name, and **cast out demons** in your name, and do many **mighty works** in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, '**I never knew you**; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

These are not people who have "fallen away" who were at some time in the past were true and regenerate believers, rather they were never true believers to begin with. This is seen from the strong language that the Lord uses against them. He does not say "I knew you for some time", but rather the rejection is too strong; He says "I *never* knew you!" There was never a time in which Christ the Lord had a special and loving relationship with these "workers of lawlessness." But He does not refute their claim that they prophesied, performed exorcisms and did mighty works in Jesus' name, because spiritual gifts are not the criteria for knowing if one is a true believer or not. The criteria is fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). How did these "workers of lawlessness" perform these mighty things if it was not by the Holy Spirit? Therefore, they had some sort of relationship and association with the Holy Spirit and His powers. I believe that Hebrews 6 refers to the apostates either themselves possessing spiritual gifts like tongues, prophecy, miracles, healing and other things, or being recipients of the effects of these gifts.

When the Lord gave authority to His disciples "over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction" (Matt. 10:1) do we read anywhere that Judas was not able to perform these? Even to the last moment, they were not saying "yes, it is Judas", but rather questioning individually if they are the betrayers by saying, "Is it I?" (Matt. 26:22). There was not a special signal or sign on Judas which said that he was a wolf. Nowhere do we read that he was not able to perform something which the other disciples were able to perform. But we also know that he was "the son of destruction" (John 17:12) and "the one destined for destruction" (NET) concerning whom the Lord said that "It would be better for him if he had never been born" (Matt. 26:24). Judas did have a share in the Holy Spirit's ministry, while being reprobate and not a true believer. The "workers of lawlessness" did likewise have a share in the Holy Spirit's ministry, yet Christ says to them that He *never* knew them. Therefore, it is possible to share in the Spirit's gifts, while at the same time not be regenerate or truly know Christ.

4. Those who tasted the goodness of the word of God

The word "tasted" is again used here which should be contrasted with the believer who hides God's Word in their heart (Ps. 119:11), treasures His words (Job 23:12) and as Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts." The experience of the apostates with the Word of God is merely natural and not spiritual. Even unbelievers can see that the Bible says a lot of things which even to their sinful worldview seems right and good, but that does not lead them to acknowledge the full authority and inspiration of the Bible as the believer does. I agree with Calvin that by the *Word of God* here is meant primarily the goodness of the gospel message. He writes in his commentary on v. 4:

> He calls it the *participation* of the Spirit; for he it is who distributes to every one, as he wills, all the light and knowledge which he can have; for without him no one can say that Jesus is the Lord, (1Co 12:3;) he opens for us the eyes of our minds, and reveals to us the secret things of God. He calls it a *tasting of the good word of God;* by which he means, that the will of God is therein revealed, not in any sort of way, but in such a way as sweetly to delight us; in short, by this title is pointed out the difference between the Law and the Gospel; for that has nothing but severity and condemnation, but this is a sweet testimony of God's love and fatherly kindness towards us.[7]

They have heard of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ and seen it taught from the Word of God, but they still turned their back and went back to the works-religion that is called Judaism. Their "acceptance" of the gospel was momentary and not lasting, therefore, the gospel was not truly received by them. They merely accepted its truth, but did not conform and transform their lives according to that truth. They had the Scriptures even before Christ's coming in what we know as the Old Testament, yet since Christ's coming we have a greater revelation of God in the last days, namely, a revelation through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2), which is far superior to the previous ways of revelation by God. This "Word of God" would include, I believe obviously, fulfilled prophecies concerning Jesus much like how the apostles began on the day of Pentecost by seeing the fulfillment of the coming of the Spirit, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. They had seen such passages applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, but with this clear knowledge in mind after a while, they abandoned the church and the Christian religion and went back to Judaism without that knowledge in mind.

Therefore, this clause describes those who among other things sit under the faithful preaching of the Word of God, see its transforming effects on people, even experience some transforming effect in their lives, see the prophecies concerning the Messiah fulfilled in Jesus and yet with this knowledge in mind, turn their back on Him.

5. Those who tasted the powers of the age to come

I believe that the word "tasted" at the beginning of v. 5 about the word of God, also applies to the powers of the age to come. This would mean that they had some experience with the powers of the age to come. But what is meant by "the age to come"? The KJV uses the word "world" instead of "age" (ESV, HCSB, ISV, NET, NKJV) as the majority of English translations do, but I believe that the idea is captured in the KJV that this speaks of the renewed world. I believe that the "coming age" or "the age to come" refers to the eternal state. The eternal state where there will be no sin, no sickness, and no pain. About the sin against the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus says that the person committing that sin "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in **the age to come**" (Matt. 12:32) by which He means that the person will never be forgiven, either in this life or in the next. In Ephesians 1:21, Paul writes about the sovereignty of Christ that He is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in **the one to come**." In Mark 10:30, the age to come is connected with eternal life (cf. Luke 18:30).

Based on that, I believe that this verse means that these apostates experienced some things from the new world, like healing and miracles. When God heals, He displays His graciousness and care and He gives a foretaste of the eternal state where all sin and sickness will be removed. These apostates had some experience with the powerful working of the Spirit in the church as Hebrews 2:4 says, "while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." These things are the effects of the Spirit's work in the world and the effect of Christ's Kingdom. God has given us a taste of this even now. In a sense, the age to come has partially arrived, though not fully, just like God's Kingdom which is among us (e.g., Luke 18:21), yet we still pray "Thy kingdom come!" (Matt. 6:10).

These apostates had some taste and experience of the Holy Spirit's work, yet it was not evidence that they were truly regenerate believers. They merely tasted the Spirit's work, but we're not being filled or indwelt by the Spirit

6. Putting the descriptions together

These apostates had (1) received instruction in the word of truth and have been made familiar with the way of truth. (2) They've had an experience with the Holy Spirit and His Work. (3) They had participated in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (4) They had seen the truth of the gospel from the Word of God, the fulfillment of the long-awaited Messiah in the Lord Jesus. (5) Finally, they had seen and themselves were recipients of God's powerful working in the church by the Holy Spirit. After experiencing all these things, which would have naturally led to their true conversion (as the land analogy in vv. 7-8 shows), they still remained unfruitful and in their unregenerate state. They had a form of godliness, but it was not the true godliness of the regenerate believer. These apostates were like Judas as we described above. Sam Storms observes the following about the apostates:

> Those in Matthew 7:22-23 preached, prophesied, performed miracles, and cast out demons in Christ's name . . . *but were not saved*. Jesus said to them: "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (v. 23). These, then, "have tasted" the power and blessings of the new covenant, but *they have not personally prized, cherished, embraced, loved, trusted, treasured, or savored the atoning death of Jesus as their only hope for eternal life*.[22]

Dr. Grudem observes the following on these apostates:

> What has happened to these people? They are at least people who have been affiliated closely with the fellowship of the church. They have had some sorrow for sin and a decision to forsake their sin (*repentance*). They have clearly understood the gospel and given some assent to it (they have been *enlightened*). They have come to appreciate the

attractiveness of the Christian life and the change that comes about in people's lives because of becoming a Christian, and they have probably had answers to prayers in their own lives and felt the power of the Holy Spirit at work, perhaps even using some spiritual gifts (they have become 'associated with' the work of the Holy Spirit or have become *partakers* of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the heavenly gift and the powers of the age to come). They have been exposed to the true preaching of the Word and have appreciated much of its teachings (they have *tasted* the goodness of the Word of God). These factors are all positive, and people who have experienced these things may be genuine Christians. But these factors alone are not enough to give conclusive evidence of any of the decisive beginning stages of the Christian life (regeneration, saving faith and repentance unto life, justification, adoption, initial sanctification). In fact, *these experiences are all preliminary to those decisive beginning stages of the Christian life*. The actual spiritual status of those who have experienced these things is still unclear[22]

Lastly, Dr. John Frame weighs in on this with the example of Judas who experienced these things:

> Can we regard the people in this passage as false believers? I think we can. Think of Judas Iscariot, chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve disciples. By joining Jesus' band of followers, he turned away from the sinful world, a kind of repentance. Doubtless he received the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, either from Jesus or from John. He was enlightened by hearing Jesus' teaching. He tasted the heavenly gift [Dr. Frame understands this to refer to supernatural gifts] as he watched Jesus heal and prophesy.1267 He shared the Spirit, at least as much as King Saul did when he prophesied, and people asked, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:11). Judas also tasted the good word of Christ and Jesus' miraculous powers, the powers of the age to come, the powers of the coming kingdom. Judas himself preached Christ and worked miracles in his name (Matt. 10:1–42). But he proved to be reprobate, unbelieving. He betrayed Jesus, Who said of him that it would have been better if he had not been born. Externally, he seemed to be a believer, and indeed, he had many advantages that believers have, hearing Jesus' words and watching his miracles.
>
> Perhaps even more to the focus of the letter to the Hebrews: OT Israel was much like this—enlightened in comparison with the other nations, experiencing all sorts of heavenly gifts, powers, and words. But many of the Israelites were wicked and turned against God.[23]

Then have fallen away

This falling away is a total falling away and not a falling *into* sin, for example. It is a falling by which the person renounces the Christian faith completely. They have not fallen from their regenerate state, they have not fallen from the hand of God, but rather, they have fallen away from their previous profession. Though all of the descriptions given in vv. 4-5 could describe a true Christian, yet they are not conclusive as Judas and the "workers of lawlessness" of Matthew 7:21-23 experienced many of the same and similar things.

The word "then" is not in the original Greek, but it is supplied by the translators for a better translation in the English and a better understanding of the passage. In this way, their falling away is described against the background of their experience with the Christian faith as described in vv. 4-5. It is as if the Author said, "if even after experiencing these things, which, if regeneration were a natural work, would have undoubtedly led you to regeneration and you fall away from your previous profession, then there is no hope for you after having so much knowledge and yet rejecting it."

Impossible to restore them again to repentance

Why is it impossible to restore them to repentance? Two reasons are given which are one: (1) they are *re*-crucifying the Son of God and thereby (2) holding Him up to contempt. But let us first inquire as to what it means to "restore them again to repentance." Does this imply that these apostates at a time where truly repentant? Only if this is the only way repentance is spoken of.

Μετάνοια (*metanoia*) is simply "a change of mind" (Thayer's, G3341), but does not imply a genuine and *godly* repentance. Repentance has also an idea of grief in it for doing things that we now change our minds about. John Gill observes that:

> repentance does not suppose that persons may have true repentance and lose it; for though truly penitent persons may lose the exercise of this grace for a time, yet the grace itself can never be lost: moreover, these apostates before described had only a show of repentance, a counterfeit one; such as Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas had; and consequently, the renewing of them again to repentance, is to that which they only seemed to have, and to make pretensions unto; now to renew them to a true repentance, which they once made a profession of, the apostle says is a thing

"impossible".[8]

In **2 Corinthians 7:10**, Paul the apostle teaches that "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation" while on the other hand "worldly grief produces death." Grief is a part of repentance, but true *godly* grief produces repentance that leads to life, while on the other hand worldly grief does *not* produce repentance leading to life, but on the contrary produces death. This does not mean worldly grief produces no repentance at all, but the point of the apostle is that it is not repentance unto life. Judas displayed some kind of repentance when it is said of him "when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, *he changed his mind* and brought back the thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. 27:3) where a different though a synonymous word is used, μεταμέλλομαι (*metamellomai*, G3338) to express Judas' change of mind. Judas was grieved and changed his mind and realized the wickedness that he did in delivering Someone completely innocent in the hands of the wicked, though his change of mind and repentance were not godly. This repentance was worldly, which indeed did produce death, leading him to suicide.

The repentance of the these Hebrew apostates may have also consisted in some points of doctrine as for example in v. 1 "repentance from dead works". The Epistle surprisingly says nothing about the Judaizing heresy with which the apostle Paul, for example, was concerned when he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians where some Jews were troubling the Gentile Christians. These apostates in Hebrews 6 may have given even intellectual assent to the doctrine of justification by faith rather than works, yet mere intellectual assent does not justify. It is not the *profession* of the doctrine of justification by faith that saves, but the *possession* of the faith that justifies the sinner. John Owen observes that repentance can be in twofold, (1) inward renewal and regeneration, or (2) outward renewal and change. On the second he observes:

> It is *outward in the profession* and pledge of it. Wherefore renovation in this sense consists in the solemn confession of faith and repentance by Jesus Christ, with the seal of baptism received thereon; for thus it was with all those who were converted unto the gospel. Upon their profession of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, they received the baptismal pledge of an inward renovation, though really they were not partakers thereof. But this estate was their ἀνακαινισμός, their "renovation." From this state they fell totally, renouncing Him Who is the author of it, his grace which is the cause of it, and the ordinance which is the pledge thereof.[13]

Their repentance and change of mind was merely outward and not internal and produced by the Spirit of God, otherwise, it would have lasted. Therefore, this "renewal" or "restoration" spoken of is about their outward repentance. It is impossible to bring them back to that state again because of two reasons.

(1) By falling away and rejecting the Christian faith, they are in a sense re-crucifying Christ the Lord. They are siding with the Jews who shouted "crucify Him!" and demanded His death. They are siding with the enemies of Christ after their rejection of the Christian religion. They are crucifying Him once again *to their own harm.* They are rejecting the only way of salvation. They are siding with those who will be judged severely by Him. They reject the only way of salvation that God has provided and therefore, it is not possible that they be saved, for there is salvation in no One else and no other way. True and godly repentance is granted by God (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:25), yet God has declared here that He will *not* give it to such apostates.

(2) The apostates by their rejection of Christianity hold the Lord Christ up to contempt, they hold Him as an object of hate and scorn, siding again with His enemies who demanded His death. They, in a sense, say that His death was well deserved for a false prophet (as they perceived) and if He were, here again, they would have done the same again. On this point, Albert Barnes observes:

> Their apostasy and rejection of the Saviour would be like holding him up publicly as deserving the infamy and ignominy of the cross. A great part of the crime attending the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, consisted in exhibiting him to the passing multitude as deserving the death of a malefactor. Of that sin they would partake who should reject him, for they would thus show that they regarded his religion as an imposture, and would, in a public manner, hold him up as worthy only of rejection and contempt.[24]

Therefore, the restoration to their previous state is impossible because they have rejected the only way of salvation, *after* knowing and experiencing it.

How the apostates were not described

We have tried to argue that all of these five descriptions given in vv. 4-5 were not exclusive to regenerate believers, but could also be applied to false professors. By giving these descriptions, the Author was not intending to say that these persons were regenerate and true believers, but rather, as seen from a human viewpoint, they would have been identified as true Christians. It is important to note how these apostates are *not* described in contrast to how the believers *are*

described in the book of Hebrews. The following is taken from Sam Storms' article:[22]

1. God has forgiven their sins (Heb. 10:17; 8:12),
2. God has cleansed their consciences (Heb. 9:14; 10:22),
3. God has written His laws on their hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16),
4. God is producing holiness of life in them (Heb. 2:11; 10:14; 13:21),
5. God has given them an unshakable kingdom (Heb. 12:28),
6. God is pleased with them (Heb. 11; 13:16,21),
7. They have faith (Heb. 4:3; 6:12; 10:22,38,39; 12:2; 13:7; etc.),
8. They have hope (Heb. 6:11,18; 7:19; 10:23),
9. They have love (Heb. 6:10; 10:33-34; 13:1),
10. They worship and pray (Heb. 12:28; 13:15; 4:16; 10:22),
11. They obey God (Heb. 5:9; 10:36; 12:10,11,14),
12. They persevere (Heb. 3:6,14; 6:11; 10:23),
13. They enter God's rest (Heb. 4:3,11),
14. They know God (Heb. 8:11),
15. They are God's house, his children, his people (Heb. 3:6; 2:10,13; 8:10),
16. They share in Christ (Heb. 3:14),
17. They will receive future salvation (Heb. 1:14; 7:25; 5:9; 9:28).

It would have been easy if the Author said "they had their sins forgiven" as he says concerning the believers. Or "those who once had their consciences cleansed". Or "those for whom Christ died". Or "those who had the law of God written on their hearts". Or "those who had faith" and so we could go on, but the fact is that no such definitive descriptions are given to the apostates, because these descriptions may and do apply to a true Christian, but these are not the evidences of his true faith. Rather, as our Lord taught, fruit is the evidence of a true and lasting faith (Matt. 7:16-20). These five things are true of those who were unbelievers but are engaged in the church.

The land analogy

Our interpretation is further strengthened by the analogy or parable given by the Author following vv. 4-6. Let us read the inspired text:

> Heb. 6:7-8 For land that has **drunk the rain that often falls on it,** and **produces a crop useful** to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if **it bears thorns and thistles**, it is **worthless and near to being cursed**, and **its end is to be burned.**

The land here signifies a person and the rain signifies blessings. When we connect v. 7 with vv. 4-6, we understand that the land here intended is the professor (whether true or false) and the rain are the five things described in vv. 4-5. Notice what is said of the rain, namely, that it "often falls on it [the land]". This is not speaking of people who went to church one or two times and then rejected the faith. No, it speaks of those who were daily and weekly immersed in the Christian church and teaching and had the (outward) blessings of God all around them.

It is important not only to see this "land" or "earth" to be the professor in the church, but also to see it as a reference to the land of Israel whose destruction was nigh when the Author was writing. In connection with the often falling rain and Israel, Pink says:

> The reference is to the repeated and frequent ministerial showers with which God visited Israel. To them He had called, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord!" (Jer. 22:29). It was looking back to these multiplied servants which Jehovah had sent to His ancient people that Christ said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together" (Matthew 23:37). This then was the "earth" in which were the plants of God's husbandry.[25]

The Jews, in general, did not bear fruit and turn to Christ and in accordance with the Lord's prediction in Matthew 23-24. They were destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. as a judgment from God for apostasy. Therefore, the land analogy is to be seen in two ways, (1) a reference to the believer (whether true or false) and (2) the land of Israel.

Now we continue with v. 7. If the land produces fruit it will receive a blessing from God. The fruit specified in v. 7 is said to be "crop" or as the KJV has it "herbs", which is said to be "useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated". The herb, crop and vegetation (HCSB, NET) which this land produces thanks to the rain that has gone into the earth (drunk) and that often fell on it is useful for God, the Vinedresser and therefore God blesses such persons. On the other hand, if this land produces "thorns and thistles" it is said to be worthless and its end is to be burned. Notice that there is nothing said about the bad land receiving less rain or drinking less rain. The same amount of rain is assumed for both the bad and the good land. The issue is not in the rain, but rather in the land.

The bad land produces "thorns and thistles", a reminder of the consequences of the Fall of man. The Lord told Adam that because of his disobedience the earth is cursed and "thorn and thistles it shall bring for you" (Gen. 3:18), the words are identical in the LXX and Hebrews 6:8. These apostates, who are the bad land which is "near to being cursed" is applied, *still* bear the effects of the Fall. They were not at some time reformed, but then became a bad land again, but rather this analogy leads us to say that the land was *from the beginning* bad. This is similar to the **Parable of the Sower** (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23). There were four kinds of land and only one kind of seed:

1. Some seed fell along the path and were devoured by the birds (Matt. 13:4, 19).
2. Some seed fell on rocky ground, did not have much soil, immediately sprang up and later withered away (Matt. 13:5-6, 18-19).
3. Some seed fell among thorns and were choked as soon as they grew up (Matt. 13:7, 20).
4. Some seed fell on the good soil and produced grain (Matt. 13:8, 21).

They all received the same seed, but the ground was different and therefore their response was different. We should obviously not see this as "there are some good people who will accept the gospel, while bad people will not." This parable is not a treatment on the human condition and we should not force it to be. It is rather a treatment on how the gospel proclamation works among those who in some way receive it. Only the good soil produced fruit, all the others fell away. Why? Because their ground was not good. In Luke 8:13, it is even said of the seeds which fell on the rock that they "believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away". **Temporary faith** is nowhere said to be true faith because true faith, worked in the heart by God, is everlasting. There seems to be no problem with the idea that some unbelievers were at some time, temporary believers. They gave assent to the truths of God's Word and the gospel, but they had no root, and therefore fell away.

We turn again to the Hebrews passage and say that the issue is with the land and not the rain. From the beginning, it was not a land which was appropriate for fruit, but one which was fitted for destruction. The bad land, in contrast with the good land, which both received and drunk the same rain, is "near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned." As we said above this refers to the land of Israel as well as to the apostates. The Lord worked in His vineyard, but it did not produce fruit and therefore now that all His work is done, He will send to destroy His vineyard as in Isaiah 5. The true believer and the apostates both participated in the five things described in vv. 4-5, but these blessings lead to true fruit only in the good land, i.e., the true believer and not in the false professor, which increases their liability to judgment. Concerning this analogy, Dr. Grudem says the following:

> For this reason he immediately passes from this description of those who commit apostasy to a further analogy that shows that these people who fell away never had any genuine fruit in their lives. As we explained above, verses 7–8 speak of these people in terms of "thorns and thistles," the kind of crop that is brought forth on land that has no worthwhile life in itself even though it receives repeated blessings from God (in terms of the analogy, even though rain frequently falls upon it). We should notice here that people who commit apostasy are not compared to a field that once bore good fruit and now does not, but that they are like land that never bore good fruit, but only thorns and thistles. The land may look good before the crops start to come up, but the fruit gives the genuine evidence, and it is bad.[26]

And finally, in addition, as cited by Storms:

> "the idea of land that once bore good fruit and now bears thorns is not compatible with this picture. The implication is this: While the positive experiences listed in verses 4-6 do not provide us enough information to know whether the people were truly saved or not, the committing of apostasy and holding Christ up to contempt do reveal the true nature of those who fall away: all along they have been like bad ground that can only bear bad fruit. If the metaphor of the thorn-bearing land explains verses 4-6 (as it surely does), then their falling away shows that they were never saved in the first place" ("Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews," in *Still Sovereign,* Baker; 156-57).[22]

Though we speak in this way

> Heb. 6:9 **Though we speak in this way**, yet in your case, beloved, **we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.**

Finally, we turn to v. 9 to conclude our discussion of Hebrews 6. Hebrews 6:9 is the proof that this passage is *not* spoken about the audience of the Author, but rather is spoken of those who might have such an experience. The Author admits that he spoke in some strange or difficult way. It was a sober warning to those in the church who were merely professors. But assures them after such a stern warning that his audience, in fact, will share in "better things." He addresses them as "beloved." They are beloved by the Author, but evermore by the God of their salvation who predestined them in love from eternity past and demonstrated His love for them in the cross and their redemption. This address is never used of unbelievers, but always of the believers.

The Author is convinced and feels sure of better things. He doesn't merely wish for better things, but rather he is convinced and has confidence that in fact, better things are in store for his audience. This could not have been said if he, in fact, described his audience in vv. 4-8, but it could be said if he wanted to give them a strong warning including to those who might want to draw them away from Christ. What are the better things? What are they better than? I agree with Dr. Grudem that the better things contrast the good things in vv. 4-5. The five items there are good things, but what the Author is convinced of about his audience is that they have and will have greater evidence of their faith than these things in vv. 4-5.

> But the question is "better things" than what? The plural "better things" forms an appropriate contrast to the "good things" that have been mentioned in verses 4–6: the author is convinced that most of his readers have experienced better things than simply the partial and temporary influences of the Holy Spirit and the church talked about in verses 4–6.
>
> In fact, the author talks about these things by saying (literally) that they are "better things, also belonging to salvation" (Gk. kai echomena sōtērias). These are not only the temporary blessings talked about in verses 4–6, but these are better things, things having not only temporary influence, but "also belonging to salvation." In this way the Greek word kai ("also") shows that salvation is something that was not part of the things mentioned in verses 4–6 above. Therefore this word kai, which is not explicitly translated in the RSV or NIV (but the NASB comes close), provides a crucial key for understanding the passage. If the author had meant to say that the people mentioned in verses 4–6 were truly saved, then it is very difficult to understand why he would say in v. 9 that he is convinced of better things for them, things that belong to salvation, or that have salvation in addition to those things mentioned above. He thus shows that he can use a brief phrase to say that people "have salvation" if he wishes to do so (he does not need to pile up many phrases), and he shows, moreover, that the people whom he speaks of in verses 4–6 are not saved.[27]

What are then the "better things"? I believe they are the things mentioned in the following discussion, namely, (1) "your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints"; and the Author desiring that they (2) "have full assurance of hope until the end"; and (3) be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." These things display whether these people had true salvation or not. **See above** for our comments on this passage.

As observed above by Dr. Grudem, these "better things" belong to their salvation, they are not *added* to their salvation, but they are an aspect of true salvation. John Owen says the following on the phrase:

> For of these things it is added, Καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, — "Such as accompany salvation:" literally, "such as have salvation;" that is, such as have saving grace in them, and eternal salvation infallibly annexed unto them, — things that are not bestowed on any, such as are not wrought in any, but those that shall be saved; that is, in brief, true faith and sincere obedience. For in whomsoever these are found, they shall be saved, by virtue of the faithfulness of God in the covenant of grace.[13]

This is, therefore, proof that the things in vv. 4-5 where not things which "accompany salvation", but rather the fruit of faith is that which accompanies and belongs to true salvation wrought by God in the sinner and that is the evidence of whether one is a true or false believer.

The purpose of the passage

We have continually argued that this passage does not speak of those who are true regenerate believers, members of the New Covenant and indwelt by the Spirit and then they fall away. But rather of professors who, from the outside, could not

have been separated from the true believers and then fall away, reject and oppose Christianity. This does not speak of the people who stop going to church because of scandals, personal problems or the difficulty in believing in a good God in a wicked world. But rather it speaks of those who have great privileges, knew the truth of God's Word, gospel and power, and even after that they turned their back to God and did not come to true and godly repentance. This is, therefore, a warning about those people who have crossed the line. They will not repent, because God has set to judge them for their sins and not grant them repentance.

The purpose of the passage is then to warn professors in the church to examine themselves and not be like those described in the passage. Furthermore, it leads the true believer who is not sure of their salvation to seek the Lord for assurance and to examine themselves and their fruit. It is, among other means, through the warnings about apostasy that the Lord preserves His saints. Some object and say that "if it is impossible for the elect to fall away, then the warnings are useless." I do not agree with that. The impossibility for the elect falling does not consist within themselves, but rather consists in God who works perseverance within them. Therefore, theoretically, it would be possible for an elect person to fall away from the faith and therefore it is not a brute impossibility for an elect person to fall away. But in reality and as the Bible teaches, apostasy from true faith is impossible *because* God preserves us through many means, including warning us to examine ourselves and warning us about apostasy.

Conclusion

This passage does not, contrary to many brothers and sisters, teach that true believers actually fall away. But rather teaches that those who make a profession, know and experience the truth and then apostatize will be damned forever with no chance of repentance. Now we move on to a passage with similar input.

Hebrews 10:26-29 – Profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified

> Heb. 10:26-29 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the **knowledge of the truth**, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, 27 but a **fearful expectation of judgment**, and a **fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.** 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has **trampled underfoot the Son of God**, and has **profaned the blood of the covenant** by **which he was sanctified**, and has **outraged the Spirit of grace**?

I will try to keep my comments here shorter than on Hebrews 6 because this passage is in many ways similar to Hebrews 6 and I understand it in light of Hebrews 6. Let us notice again that the Author is not describing an actual situation here, but gives a hypothetical situation. He is not saying that people within the congregation of the Hebrews to which he is writing to, have in fact committed apostasy in the way of Hebrews 10:29. The main difficulty of this passage concerns the identity of the one sanctified.

A little bit of context

This section begins at v. 19 and goes all through until the end of the chapter in the ESV. We must notice that assurance of faith is given us before this warning about apostasy and not neglect it. In vv. 19 and 22, we read "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus… let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." We can have assurance of faith, but not merely assurance, but *full* and complete assurance. Why? Because of the nature of the New Covenant, that is the "therefore" there for (**see Heb 10:1-18 above**). And based on this truth and the nature of the New Covenant, we are encouraged to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (Heb. 10:23), "stir[ring] up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24) and not neglecting to gather for church, but rather encouraging each other to fellowship (Heb. 10:25). This is the background of this warning about apostasy. The background is not one of doom, but one of hope for the believer.

Sinning deliberately with knowledge

The passage begins with the conjunction "for" which is referring back to all that was said in previous verses which I tried to summarize above. The idea that we get is that if we reject all that was said in vv. 19-25 and likewise vv. 1-18 which are the basis of vv. 19-25 then we are without hope. If we know and understand what is said here, yet still reject it, choosing rather to sin *while knowing* the truth then there is no longer a sacrifice for sin for us. This is similar to the apostates of Hebrews 6:4 who were "enlightened" (**see my comments**) and while knowing and experiencing the truth, rejected it and went back to Judaism.

If after knowing the truth of the gospel, they profess it, reject it later and apostatize back to Judaism, there will be no

sacrifice for them anymore as the institutions of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the work of Christ. If they reject the only sacrifice that can deal with the problem of sin, then there is no other sacrifice for sin that they can look forward to. As the Author explained at the beginning of the chapter (Heb. 10:1, 4, 11), the sacrifices under the Old Testament never took away sin, but rather were shadows of Christ's once for all time perfect sacrifice to do away with sin. There is no sacrifice for them for the sin of apostasy which God will not forgive in the case of those spoken of here and Hebrews 6, but they will also find no effectual sacrifice for sins in the Temple sacrifices, even though at the time of writing the Temple was standing and the sacrifices were offered every day. They will find no forgiveness for their sins, but rather fall into the hands of an angry God. As they apostatize from their profession of Christianity, while knowing the truths of Christ, they at the same time reject the only way for forgiveness of sins and can expect nothing but the wrath of God to consume them without mercy.

How much worse and the One sanctified

If anyone who breaks the law of Moses willfully and deliberately is put to death on the basis of 2 or 3 witnesses, how much worse should the punishment be who rejects the true religion after knowing and experiencing that it is indeed true? The comparison is from the lesser to the greater and this concerns the severity of God's judgment. On this point John Calvin observes:

> This severity of God is indeed dreadful, but it is set forth for the purpose of inspiring terror. He cannot, however, be accused of cruelty; for as the death of Christ is the only remedy by which we can be delivered from eternal death, are not they who destroy as far as they can its virtue and benefit worthy of being left to despair? God invites to daily reconciliation those who abide in Christ; they are daily washed by the blood of Christ, their sins are daily expiated by his perpetual sacrifice. As salvation is not to be sought except in him, there is no need to wonder that all those who willfully forsake him are deprived of every hope of pardon: this is the import of the adverb ἔτι, more. But Christ's sacrifice is efficacious to the godly even to death, though they often sin; nay, it retains ever its efficacy, for this very reason, because they cannot be free from sin as long as they dwell in the flesh. The apostle then refers to those alone who wickedly forsake Christ, and thus deprive themselves of the benefit of his death.[7]

The apostate is described as:

1. Someone who has trampled underfoot the Son of God;
2. Someone who has profaned the blood of the covenant;
3. Someone who has outraged the Spirit of grace.

(1) To trample the Lord Christ underfoot has the same meaning as "they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt" as in Hebrews 6:6 (**see my comments**). They, rejecting the only sacrifice that can atone for their sins, are putting Him under their feet as something unworthy to be adored, thanked, worshiped, and praised. This is spoken about people who at one time claimed to belong to Christ which heightens their sin. They claimed to know what it means to be Christian and what His sacrifice means. They rejected Him and His sacrifice with the knowledge of what it actually means and not with ignorance of what it means.

(2) Someone who has profaned the blood of the covenant, which is the blood of Christ (e.g., Heb. 13:20-21), has declared the blood of Christ to be "an unholy thing" (KJV) and counts the blood of Christ as "a common thing" (YLT), just like the blood of the animal sacrifices. The apostate rejects and treats as unholy, rather than glorious and holy the efficacy of Christ's blood and sacrifice. The important thing we must inquire about is who is the "he" who "was sanctified"? There are two options really, either it is (1) the apostate or it is (2) Christ. I believe that it is the latter and for the following reasons.

First of all, the closest antecedent of "he" is "the Son of God" and therefore it seems probable that the one sanctified, i.e., set apart, is, in fact, the Son of God. **Second**, the word "sanctify" is used only once concerning outward sanctification for the purification of the flesh under the Old Testament sacrifices (Heb. 9:13), but all the remaining uses do not refer to an unbeliever (Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12). We see the perfect work of God in these texts. In all these texts, except Hebrews 9:13, we see the perfect work of Christ in our lives. He has sanctified us, made us holy and set us apart for God through His offering. There is nothing in these passages about an incomplete work of sanctification, rather the contrary, the Lord has perfected (past tense) those who are now being sanctified (present tense). Therefore, it would be unusual for the Author to go out of his way and use this word for the apostate, while all the other references except 9:13 and 10:29 have to do with the perfect work of Christ on behalf of His people. **Third**, there is positive proof that Christ was sanctified and set apart by His sacrifice. In John 17:19, we read the Lord Jesus saying in His High Priestly Prayer:

> And for their sake **I consecrate myself**, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

The same word (though in a different form) is used in this passage and in Hebrews and thereby making it more probable that the One sanctified in Hebrews 10:29 by His own blood is indeed the Lord Jesus – God's faithful High Priest. His consecration or His sanctification (setting apart) is for the sake of His people so that they would be sanctified in the truth. This agrees with Hebrews 2:11 where it is written that "For he [the Lord Jesus] who sanctifies and those who are sanctified [the believers] all have one source." See also Hebrews 13:12 where Jesus sanctifies His people by His blood. In John 10:36, we read:

> John 10:35-36 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— 36 do you say of **him whom the Father consecrated** and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

Here we learn that Christ was set apart and consecrated by God before His incarnation and sent into the world. John Owen advocated that the "he" who was sanctified is the Son of God, rather than the apostate believer. He starts by giving the option that this sanctification spoken of concerns outward sanctification rather than internal, but then says the following:

> But the design of the apostle in the context leads plainly to another application of these words. It is Christ himself that is spoken of, who was sanctified and dedicated unto God to be an eternal high priest, by the blood of the covenant which he offered unto God, as I have showed before. The priests of old were dedicated and sanctified unto their office by another, and the sacrifices which he offered for them; they could not sanctify themselves: so were Aaron and his sons sanctified by Moses, antecedently unto their offering any sacrifice themselves. But no outward act of men or angels could unto this purpose pass on the Son of God. He was to be the priest himself, the sacrificer himself, — to dedicate, consecrate, and sanctify himself, by his own sacrifice, in concurrence with the actings of God the Father in his suffering. See Joh 17:19; Heb 2:10; Heb 5:7; Heb 5:9; Heb 9:11-12. That precious blood of Christ, wherein or whereby he was sanctified, and dedicated unto God as the eternal high priest of the church, this they esteemed "an unholy thing;" that is, such as would have no such effect as to consecrate him unto God and his office.[28]

John Gill likewise proposes the option that this refers to the outward sanctification of the apostate and then proposes that it refers to Christ the High Priest:

> or rather the Son of God himself is meant, who was sanctified, set apart, hallowed, and consecrated, as Aaron and his sons were sanctified by the sacrifices of slain beasts, to minister in the priest's office: so Christ, when he had offered himself, and shed his precious blood, by which the covenant of grace was ratified, by the same blood he was brought again from the dead, and declared to be the Son of God with power; and being set down at God's right hand, he ever lives to make intercession, which is the other part of his priestly office he is sanctified by his own blood to accomplish.[8]

I find this interpretation to be more consistent with the rest of Hebrews and the New Testament in general rather than advocating that someone for whom Christ died and was sanctified, may apostatize and perish forever.

And here I come to my fourth and last reason. If the one sanctified was the apostate, then this would be contradictory to what Hebrews elsewhere says about sanctification. For example, in Hebrews 10:10 we learn that we have been sanctified by Christ's death (see also Heb. 13:12) and in v. 14, we read that:

> For by a single offering he has **perfected for all time those who are being sanctified**.

How could these apostates fall from perfection? How could the sacrifice of Christ fail? There is nothing said about the person sanctified here and it is in the same chapter as the text on apostasy! The text does not say "you are perfected as long as you sanctify yourself", but rather, the whole work of sanctification is laid into the hand of Christ Who sanctifies us *by* His offering. On the basis of this, it seems impossible for me to say the apostate was internally sanctified by the blood of the New Covenant. Rather, it was Christ Who was sanctified by His own blood, just like He was the Priest Who offered the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice that was offered. This interpretation seems not only far more consistent with the message of Hebrews itself, but also with the rest of the New Testament teaching on sanctification (**see chapter 13**) and the Spirit's work in the believer.

(3) The apostate has outraged the Spirit of grace because he had at one time shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the powers of the age to come, but now has apostatized and rejected all of that. But most of all, the Spirit is outraged because the apostate has trampled underfoot the Son of God Whom the Spirit seeks to glorify (John 16:14).

Conclusion

Those who receive a clear knowledge of the truth, go through some sort of outward reformation in their new profession of Christianity. They experience and know its truths and then apostatize. Therefore, they have no hope as they reject Christ Who is the only way to God and are thereby doomed to Hell. The Author, just like in Hebrews 6:9, after giving this stern warning, goes on from 10:32 to tell his audience that the case described of those who sin deliberately and apostatize does not apply to them by pointing to their fruit. This warning is not to scare them off, for the Author says that they should "not throw away [their] confidence, which has a great reward" (Heb. 10:35), but what they need is endurance (Heb. 10:36), which God will work in them through the warnings given to persevere. And just like in Hebrews 6:9, the Author ends this section by a strong statement on the fact that his audience consists largely of true believers in saying that we are "those who have faith and preserve their souls" (Heb. 10:39). Those who apostatize in the way spoken of in Hebrews 6 & 10, were not true believers, to begin with, otherwise, they would *not* have apostatized as the nature of true faith is lasting, rather than temporary (1 John 2:19).

James 5:19-20 – Wanders from the truth

> Jas. 5:19-20 My brothers, if anyone among you **wanders from the truth** and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that **whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering** will **save his soul from death** and **will cover a multitude of sins**.

There is a general interpretation of this passage by Calvinists and there is another which I read from Sam Storms and I believe that it sticks closer to the context, though there are some minor difficulties with it. First up is the general interpretation.

General Interpretation

"Wandering from the truth" means having an error in doctrine and concerning the Word of God (see Jas. 1:18 where truth is connected to the Word of God). The KJV translates it with "err from the truth". It is most likely an error in practice or principle. Therefore, the one who sees their brother wandering into error and confronts him with his error and shows him the error of his ways, will be an instrument in the hand of the Lord to save the erring brother and thereby save him from eternal destruction. The passage does not say that some true believers will fall into error and thereby becoming unregenerate and subject of eternal damnation. Rather, it merely warns the stronger believers to bring back others who are following after error into sound doctrine. Those who hold this general Calvinistic interpretation as Gill, MacArthur, Calvin, ESV Study Bible understand the death spoken of here to be the second death, i.e., eternal death.

Sam Stormsian Interpretation

I was searching the net on this passage and came across an **article by Sam Storms** on this passage and the interpretation sounded very contextual to me, more than the "general interpretation" view. "Wandering from the truth" according to this interpretation likewise means erring in doctrine and/or practice. The one who brings this erring brother back will save his *soul.* What is meant by *soul*? At first sight, we may conclude that this refers to our immaterial part, but the word ψυχή (*psyche*) is translated as "life" in the HCSB with a footnote saying "**life**: The same Greek word (*psyche*) can be translated life or soul." This is the only place that James uses *psyche* and therefore, we cannot say that it *must* mean the immaterial part of man. It is, therefore, better to follow the general meaning of the word as life and not specifically a reference to the immaterial aspect of man.

As for the words "save" and "death" we must go back a little bit in the context. We must first realize that this section is about prayer. The author begins in v. 13 by declaring, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray." And he goes on from vv. 14-16 to talk about prayer for healing. I believe that the key for this interpretation is to see the connection between the verses in the section on prayer and healing, and vv. 19-20. In vv. 14-15, those who are sick are encouraged (and commanded?) to call the elders to pray for them and anoint them so that they may be healed. This "healing" is referred to with the word "save" in v. 15 although it was not about their salvation, but about healing (saving) from physical illness. The same exact σώσει (*sosei*) for "save" in v. 15 is used in v. 20, which lends more support to the interpretation that vv. 19-20 are not about eternal salvation since the same word is used to refer to *salvation* from physical illness. What is also interesting is that forgiveness of sins is mentioned alongside healing. In fact, v. 16 connects forgiveness of sins and healing saying, "Therefore, **confess your sins** to one another and pray for one another, **that you may be healed.**" Why is this significant you ask? Well, because the idea of "save" and forgiveness of sins ("cover a multitude of sins") appears in v. 20. Therefore, if it is true that "save" in v. 20 does *not* refer to eternal salvation, but to physical salvation, i.e., deliverance from sickness, then "death" in v. 20 does not refer to *eternal* death, but *physical* death.

How does one understand vv. 19-20 according to this view? This passage refers to someone, who because of their

unconfessed sin, which is wandering and erring from the truth, is being disciplined by God through sickness which will lead to his physical death if he does not repent of sin. There is nothing said about the erring brother's *eternal* salvation, but rather he is now sick and James calls on those (including elders) who know of this erring brother and of his sins, to bring him back to the sound way by repudiating his errors (confession of sin), which will result in physical healing if the sickness came because of the error (see Jas. 5:16 where confession of sin and healing are connected). I believe that this view has merit and is more faithful to the context of the passage as a whole, though there will be questions concerning some things.

Either way, there is no conclusive proof that this passage is talking about a regenerate believer who has wandered from the truth and someone *may perhaps* bring him back so that there is the possibility that he could be lost forever. Even if this brother was regenerate and erring in some way that he's in danger of falling away, I believe that God in His sovereignty would not allow that and will use believers who will "save his soul [or life] from death and will cover a multitude of sins." He will never allow His elect to perish, but as the Good Shepherd, He will go and seek the lost sheep and bring it back to the fold.

2 Peter 2:20-22 - Turn back from the holy commandment

> For if, after they have **escaped the defilements of the world** through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the **last state has become worse for them than the first.** 21 For it would have been better for them **never to have known the way of righteousness** than after knowing it to **turn back from the holy commandment** delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

We cannot disconnect this passage from the whole context of chapter 2. The apostle is speaking throughout the chapter about the false teachers from the church. Beginning with the fact that they brought destructive heresies, so great that they even denied "the Master who bought them" and thereby "bringing upon themselves swift destruction." **See chapter 8** on my interpretation of this difficult passage when brought up against Definite Redemption, but the interpretation works also against the idea that these people were once true Christians. He goes on and on in describing them and telling the faithful that their destruction is certain and judgment is coming upon them. Then comes our passage.

Herein Peter describes them as people who had at one time "escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ". Does this mean that they were regenerate? I don't think so. Peter himself is against any such idea that God could lose any of His elect (see 1 Pet. 1:3-5 **above**) and other passages that we discussed. Rather, the idea given is that through the false teachers' involvement with the community of believers they had learned what the godly way of living is. When you find yourself at church and with the community of believers, even if you're an unbeliever you will learn to do and not do certain things. The community of believers is a safe place where godliness is practiced and the "defilements of the world" are shunned. These persons in v. 20 have, through their involvement with the believing community, escaped those things, but they were not internally changed. They are "slaves of corruption" and overcome *by* corruption who promise lies (2 Pet. 2:20).

In their last state, i.e., after denying their once-held profession, their situation is worse for now they have seen how we ought to live, they had heard the Word of God and it speaks about how we should live godly lives. They had seen the power of God in the church and are rejecting it. They now know the way of righteousness, but reject it. Therefore, their judgment is much harsher, because their knowledge is much greater of what is right and what is wrong (see Luke 12:47-48). They would have received a lighter punishment if they were ignorant of biblical teaching and Christ, but as they were living in the community of believers and hearing the Word of God, they have greater knowledge than someone who hasn't heard of Christ, therefore, they will receive a severe beating. As the dog returns to its vomit, so likewise these people are returning to "the defilements of the world" and are being overcome by sin. This passage doesn't prove that they once were truly believing, for if they were truly believing they would have remained (1 John 2:19).

---

§2 This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will

2. This perseverance of the saints **depends not upon their own free will,** **1** but upon the **immutability of the decree of election,** **2** flowing from the **free and unchangeable love of God the Father,** upon the **efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus** Christ and union with him, **3** the oath of God, **4** the **abiding of his Spirit,** and the seed of God within them, **5** and the nature of the **covenant of grace;** from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof. **6**
    1. Phil. 2:12-13; Rom. 9:16; John 6:37,44
    2. Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Rom. 8:30; 9:11, 16; 11:2, 29; Eph 1:5-11

3. Eph. 1:4; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:31-34; 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 8:35-38; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; John 14:19; 10:28-29
4. Heb. 6:16-20
5. 1 John 2:19-20, 27; 3:9; 5:4, 18; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14
6. Jer. 31:33-34; 32:40; Heb. 10:11-18; 13:20-21

Our **perseverance** and remaining in the state of grace and in Christ does not depend upon our **free will**. It does not come from our own power and strength. If it be dependent upon our free will then we would all fall from grace. Rather, it depends upon a few things from the side of God.

1) Our perseverance depends **upon the immutability of the decree of election**. We "are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ" (**chapter 3:3**). This decree of election cannot be altered and if one of the elect would not obtain eternal life in eternity, then this would mean that it failed and it was, in fact, mutable. This immutability flows **from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father** for the elect, Whom He "in love" predestined (Eph. 1:4-5). This amazing love was set on the elect before the creation of the world and will never cease or change. 2) Our perseverance depends **upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with Him** (Rom. 8:34-38). He obtained for us everything necessary for us to be saved and remain in the state of grace. Furthermore, He keeps interceding for us before the Father for forgiveness, grace, strength, and everything necessary for our final salvation and perseverance. 3) Our perseverance depends upon **the oath of God** (Heb. 6:16-20). God has promised to save us and will not break His promise. He will not go back from His word and therefore, this is a sure foundation of faith and perseverance for us. 4) Our perseverance depends upon **the abiding of His Spirit, and the seed of God** in us (1 John 2:19-20; 3:9; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The **seed of God** probably refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One Who grants us grace, strength, faith, and the ability to do that which is pleasing to God. He is the guarantee of our final salvation (Eph. 4:30). The fact that we have the Spirit means that we forever belong to God. He has come to make His abode in us and will never leave His abode. 5) Our perseverance depends upon **the nature of the covenant of grace** (Jer. 33:31-34; 32:40), which is fully gracious, granting that which it requires.

The **certainty and infallibility** of the final salvation of the elect and their perseverance do not depend on things in them, but external to them. Things that God does and God has set in place. Our salvation, from the beginning and unto all eternity, solely due to grace—the amazing grace of the triune God!

Much of what is described in this paragraph has already been argued for when surveying the passages for the Perseverance of the Saints, therefore, I will refer the interested reader to the relevant passages.

Perseverance Depends Not On Man

God is the One Who sanctifies us. It is He Who works in us to do His will (Phil. 2:12-13). It is He Who works in us what is pleasing in His sight (Heb. 13:20-21). The work of perseverance is the work of God within the redeemed for His own glory and their good. This work of perseverance is not dependent on man, but on God alone. It is *not* monergistic, but synergistic, i.e., God and man cooperate, yet this does not mean that God will not be able to do all that He intends because man's "free will" will not allow Him. If we persevere, it is because He is working in us to do His good pleasure. We persevere because He preserves us, not the other way around and this is why it is dependent on God and not man. It is dependent upon God's character and God's promises. That the Bible calls on us to persevere is not a refutation that perseverance is not dependent on us, because we do not deny the responsibility on our side that we should walk in holiness and persevere. But we stress that *when* we persevere, we do so *because* God preserves us.

Perseverance Depends On

Perseverance does not depend on man, but rather depends upon (1) God's decree of sovereign election, (2) God's everlasting love for the elect, (3) Christ's perfect work, (4) God's oath and promise, (5) the Holy Spirit in the believer, (6) the Seed of God in the believer, and (7) the perfect New Covenant wherein they find themselves.

The Decree Of Election

The fact is: God chooses who gets saved, and leaves the rest in their sins to be damned. God, by His almighty power, has called them effectually through the gospel and regenerated them, without hindrance from their will, in fact, renewing their wills, giving them faith and repentance so that they may respond positively to the gospel. God does not go back on His word, nor thinks that He has made a bad choice and wants to change His intentions. If God has chosen who will be saved, He will

likewise make sure that they're saved and remain in the state of grace until the end. See our comments on Romans 8:28ff **above**.

The Unconditional Love Of God

This is very closely connected to election. God elected us in love. It is His love that moved Him to elect us. He did not elect us to love us, but rather He elected us because He loved us. See Ephesians 1:3-6 and perhaps our comments on Romans 8:28ff **above**.

The Merit & Intercession Of Christ

It is through the intercession and work of Christ that the redeemed are preserved. It is thanks to His perfect work and continued intercession that their faith may not fail. See our comments on **John's Gospel**, Romans 8:28ff **above** and the book of **Hebrews** which stresses this point a lot.

The Oath Of God

God has promised to preserve the elect. He will not go back on His word. He has called us to salvation and He will preserve us in it. See our brief comment on **Hebrews 6:17-20 above**.

The Abiding Of Spirit

God has given us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, as a pledge of all the promises that He has given us and which He will fulfill in the world to come. The Spirit also functions as the seal of God upon the believer. In Ephesians 1, we read:

> Eph. 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**, 14 who is the **guarantee of our inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

At the moment we place our faith in Christ we are sealed by the Spirit. What does that mean? John Calvin says the following on this passage:

> *In whom also, after that ye believed.* Having maintained that the gospel is certain, he now comes to the proof. And what higher surety can be found than the Holy Spirit? "Having denominated the gospel *the word of truth,* I will not prove it by the authority of men; for you have the testimony of the Spirit of God himself, who seals the truth of it in your hearts." This elegant comparison is taken from Seals, which among men have the effect of removing doubt. Seals give validity both to charters and to testaments; anciently, they were the principal means by which the writer of a letter could be known; and, in short, a seal distinguishes what is true and certain, from what is false and spurious.[7]

And Dr. Mounce says the following on the word seal and its use in the New Testament:

> Ancient documents were often sealed using a waxy substance not only to close them up and thereby protect the contents but also to authenticate the document by imprinting the seal (called a bulla) of the writer in the soft wax (cf. Jer. 32:11). This verb is used in both literal and figurative senses...In a figurative sense, *sphragizō* certifies the truth of something (Jn. 3:33; cf. Rom. 15:28), and particularly the approval of God (Jn. 6:27; Rev. 7:3-5, 8). Paul says that believers "are sealed" with the Holy Spirit as a "deposit guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:22; cf. Eph. 1:13). In addition to marking believers as authentic, the Holy Spirit "*has sealed* [believers] for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).[29]

The Holy Spirit living within us is the assurance that we are indeed children of God and God will never disown any of His children (Rom. 8:15-17). The Spirit is identified as our guarantee in Ephesians 1:14. What does that mean? The word ἀῤῥαβών (*arrhabon*) refers to a pledge, a down payment and a deposit which guarantees something. If I may use an example from my youth, when I lived in Iraq and on a hot day wanted to get an ice cream, but didn't have money at the moment, I went to the shop and told the man that I will bring the money from home directly. Sometimes I gave him something (ID card, toy, etc.) whereby I gave him assurance that I will pay, otherwise, I would lose the thing (pledge) that I gave. The same idea is present about the Spirit Who is said to be the "*promised* Holy Spirit." He was promised from the Old Testament to dwell and work specifically within the believing (e.g., Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-30). God has given us Himself,

the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Spirit Who is a pledge is a guarantee of even better things, even unending fellowship with the Triune God in eternity among other things.

God has set His seal on His elect and that seal is the third Person of the Trinity. He gives us confidence and assurance in our faith. He is what authenticates us. If a person does not have the Spirit, he cannot be a believer (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit is the One Who sanctifies us and protects us, that is part of what being the *seal* means. Furthermore, Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:30 that we were "were sealed for the day of redemption." This means that we were sealed, for authentication and protection, with the day of redemption, i.e., the last day of judgment, in view. We were sealed so that on that day we will be proven to be authentic and God's own special possession, belonging to Him and will be received by Him. Therefore, to have the Spirit of God indwelling the believer is a sure sign that that person will persevere to the end for God will protect those whom He has sealed with His Spirit Who at the same time is the One Who sanctifies us and slowly changes us into the likeness of our Savior.

The Seed of God

The expression the seed of God or God's seed appears in 1 John 3:9 where it is said:

> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for **God's seed abides in him**, and **he cannot keep on sinning** because he has been born of God.

The fact that a person is born of God, meaning He has been caused to be born again by God and regenerated, ensures two things: 1) the regenerate will not make a practice of sinning, neither 2) will he keep on sinning, which two are the same thing, actually. The reason that the regenerate person cannot do this, is in the fact that God's seed abides in Him. It is not dependent upon the person himself, but rather on God's seed in him through which continual in a life of sin becomes impossible. This passage clearly teaches that it is not possible for a person who is regenerate to apostatize, for how can a person who was truly regenerate be *un*regenerated and turn to a life of continual sin without Christ? Will God's seed not have failed in that person? But does the passage give us any idea of God's seed actually failing? No.

We now understand the meaning and effect of God's seed in the life of the regenerate believer, but who or what is it? Three options seem most probable to me. 1) The Spirit of God, 2) the Word of God, or 3) the principle of new life. I take options 1 and 2 together as I don't believe that we can truly treasure, love, and conform our lives according to the Word of God without the Spirit of God Who led the authors of Scripture to write what He wanted to communicate to us. But how was this principle of new life given to us other than through the Spirit using the Word of God (the gospel proclamation)? Therefore, I take God's seed to refer to the abiding work of the Spirit through the Word of God wherein He begets us to new life. Support of this is found in 1 Peter 1:23 where it is said that we have "been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God". Here, the word of God is said to be the imperishable seed that gave birth to us. Therefore, this is the easiest option for the meaning of the phrase "God's seed" in 1 John 3:9. This seed within us which is God's word and the new life given to us by God is said to be imperishable, just like John says that the born again believer "cannot keep on sinning" so as to perish, so likewise, the word of God and the new life within the believer is imperishable. The word of God in 1 Peter is defined specifically as the "good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:25). It refers to the gospel truth which lives within us and moves us to change our lives according to the Lord's will and demands.

Even if my understanding is messed up, the passage remains unshakable as to its teaching the fact that true believers will, in fact, persevere and not live in continual sin. Notice that the apostle is not saying that the regenerate does not sin, but rather, he does not keep on sinning as a continuous lifestyle of sin for if he referred to sin, in general, he would have contradicted himself (1 John 1:7-9).

The Covenant Of Grace

Technically, in 1689 Federalism understanding (**see chapter 7**), the Covenant of Grace is the New Covenant before it was established in the blood of Christ. But here, it is used of the New Covenant. Perseverance is dependent upon the nature of the New Covenant which is unlike any other covenant in Scripture. The New Covenant is the only covenant in Scripture whose members are all partakers of salvation, i.e., it is a covenant that does not have unbelievers in it. Rather, all who are in the covenant are regenerated, Spirit-indwelt believers. See our comments on **Hebrews 8:6-13 above** and **Hebrews 10:10-18 above**.

---

§3 Yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith

in Christ Jesus to the end

3. And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the **neglect of means of their preservation,** fall into **grievous sins, and for a time continue therein**, **1** whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, **2** come to have their graces and comforts impaired, **3** have their **hearts hardened,** and their **consciences wounded,** **4** hurt and scandalize others, **5** and **bring temporal judgments** upon themselves, **6** yet shall they **renew their repentance** and **be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.** **7**
    1. Matt. 26:70, 72, 74
    2. Ps. 38:1-8; Isa 54:5-9; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:14
    3. Ps. 51:10-12
    4. Ps. 32:3-4; 73:21-22
    5. 2 Sam. 12:14; 1 Cor. 8:9-13; Rom. 14:13-18; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:5
    6. 2 Sam. 12:14f; Gen. 19:30-38; 1 Cor. 11:27-32
    7. Luke 22:32, 61-62; 1 Cor. 11:32; 1 John 3:9; 5:18

The elect are able to **fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein** (Matt. 26:70, 72, 74), yet they can never be finally severed from Christ. This comes from 1) **the temptation of Satan and of the world**, 2) the **corruption remaining in them**, and 3) the **neglect of means of their preservation**. Through their fall into **grievous sins**, they will **incur God's displeasure and grieve His Holy Spirit** (Heb. 12:3-17; Eph. 4:30). God will be displeased and will discipline us to bring us back to repentance and renewal, and not to condemn us. But at this time and through the discipline of God, they come to have **their graces and comforts impaired**, i.e., diminished, damaged, or weakened. It is a time of dry wilderness where the presence of God cannot be felt and the desire to be in His presence is absent. They have **their hearts hardened** against God and His ways and **their consciences wounded** and thereby not only affect themselves but **hurt and scandalize others**. Sin does not only have to do with us, but most of the time touches other people. By these things, they will **bring temporal judgments upon themselves**. God will discipline them in love so that they would share in His holiness (Heb. 12:10). Nonetheless, here comes the nature of true faith and of God's almighty power: **they shall renew their repentance** (**chapter 15**) and **be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end** (Luke 22:32, 61-62). Notice that for restoration into a state for the enjoyment of God's blessings and 'back to normal', repentance is necessary. Furthermore, notice what the *means* of this restoration is: **faith in Jesus Christ** (1 John 5:4; 1 Pet. 1:5). They have not lost their faith. They have neglected to nourish it and they may have it weakened, but not lost. God will ensure that they will be restored and will remain in the state of grace.

That God will preserve us to the end is a sure promise and biblical teaching. But that doesn't mean that it will be an easy ride, not only from the world around us, but also of the remaining corruption in us. Yet through all of this, the elect will be delivered into God's kingdom. I refer the interested reader to other chapters for a similar discussion, rather than repeating here what I elsewhere have written on (**chapter 15:2**; **chapter 11:5**).

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Footnotes

1. ^ *Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). p. 788.*
2. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
3. a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
4. ^ *William D. Mounce. Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. (Zondervan, 2006). pp. 993-994, number 1011.*
5. ^ *Ibid., p. 1289, number 5457.*
6. ^ *The Free Dictionary, Discipline.*
7. a, b, c, d *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
8. a, b, c *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
9. a, b *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Abridged). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
10. ^ *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
11. ^ *John MacArthur. The MacArthur Study Bible: English Standard Version. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2010). p. 1812, note on 1:3.*
12. ^ *Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. G5461.*
13. a, b, c, d, e *John Owen. Exposition of Hebrews. in loc. See also Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary on this word here.*
14. ^ *"And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone. For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness. And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed." Justin Martyr. Apology, chapter 61.*
15. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. Chapter 40, p. 797.*
16. ^ *Matthew Henry. Complete Commentary. Hebrews 6.*
17. a, b, c *Arthur W. Pink. Exposition of Hebrews. Chapter 24.*
18. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. pp. 797-798, n. 15.*
19. ^ *John Owen writes on the word "taste": "The expression of tasting is metaphorical, and signifies no more but to make a trial or experiment; for so we do by tasting, naturally and properly, of that which is tendered unto us to eat. We taste such things by the sense given us naturally to discern our food; and then either receive or refuse them, as we find occasion. It doth not, therefore, include eating, much less digestion and turning into nourishment of what is so tasted; for its nature being only thereby discerned, it may be refused, yea, though we like its relish and savor, upon some other consideration."*

20. ^ *"Ephesians 5:7 uses a closely related word (symmetochos, a compound of metochos and the preposition syn ["with"]) when Paul warns Christians about the sinful acts of unbelievers and says, "do not associate with them" (Eph. 5:7). He is not concerned that their total nature will be transformed by the unbelievers, but simply that they will associate with them and have their own witness compromised and their own lives influenced to some degree by them." Grudem. Systematic. P. 798.*
21. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. p. 798.*
22. a, b, c, d *Sam Storms. Hebrews 6:4-6 And The Possibility Of Apostasy.*
23. ^ *John M. Frame. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014). Chapter 44, p. 1001.*
24. ^ *Albert Barnes. Notes on the New Testament. Hebrews 6:4.*
25. ^ *A.W. Pink. Exposition of Hebrews. Chapter 26.*
26. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. p. 800.*
27. ^ *Ibid., p. 801, footnote references removed.*
28. ^ *John Owen. Exposition of Hebrews. Hebrews 10:28-29.*
29. ^ *Mounce, Expository Dictionary. p. 620.*