

# IMPOSSIBLE TO RENEW THEM AGAIN UNTO REPENTANCE

## **TEXT: HEBREWS 6:1-9**

### **Introduction:**

1. The theme of this epistle is, “Let us go on unto perfection” (6:1).
2. MR De Haan said, “God does not want us to be defeated and powerless. He is appealing to believers who had failed to make proper progress, and urges them not to neglect their great salvation, and although saved, come short of the ‘rest’ of service and the victory of faith” (*Hebrews*).
3. The author of this epistle (probably Paul) is writing to Jewish believers, exhorting them to “go on to perfection” (6:1).
4. I want to emphasize this is written to believers, and for believers, because many believers think this passage of Scripture is a warning to unbelievers.
5. I have stated many times that I love the *Scofield Study Bible*. It is the only Bible I preach from. I highly recommend it. However, I do not agree with all of the notes (most of them, but not all of them).
6. For example, under the passage we are looking at this evening, Scofield’s notes say this: “Hebrews 6:4-8 presents the case of Jewish professed believers who halt short of faith in Christ after advancing to the very threshold of salvation, even ‘going along with’ the Holy Spirit in His work of enlightenment and conviction (John 16:8-10). It is not said that they had faith. This supposed person is like the spies at Kadesh-barnea (Deuteronomy 1:19-26) who saw the land and had the very fruit of it in their hands, and yet turned back.”
7. Therefore, Scofield (and many others) teach that this is a warning to “professed believers who halt short of faith in Christ after advancing to the very threshold of salvation.”
8. That is a popular interpretation, but I do not think it is the correct interpretation. Often we are told there are only two possible interpretations: the Arminian position, which means you can lose your salvation, and the Calvinist position, which holds that these warnings were addressed to the unsaved.
9. But there are big problems with both positions.

## **I. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST (6:1)**

1. Before we attempt to expound this difficult portion of Scripture, we should begin with the “principles” referred to here in verses 1 and 2 (cf. 5:12).
2. Hebrews 6:1 says, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on...”
3. These Hebrew Christians had a good “foundation” (6:1). They did not need to lay the foundation again (6:1). This is what the author of this epistle said in 5:12.
4. There are six doctrines – three pairs of two – referred to here:
  - (1) Repentance from dead works (6:1). This is an Old Testament doctrine; therefore, these Hebrew Christians should have been familiar with it (cf. Isaiah 1:13-18; 64:6). It was preached by John the Baptist. John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” It was preached by our Lord, and by the apostles.
  - (2) “Faith toward God” (6:1) – repentance and faith must always go together. Paul said in Acts 20:21, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - (3) “The doctrine of baptisms” (6:2). This is unusual for several reasons. First of all, while repentance and faith are taught all throughout the Old Testament (“the principles of the doctrine of Christ” – 6:1), baptism is not. Baptism is a New Testament doctrine. Baptism is a church ordinance. Furthermore, the word used here is plural – “baptisms.” This is the only time the word is used in the plural in the Bible. The same Greek word is translated “washings” in Hebrews 9:10, where it clearly refers to Old Testament “divers washings.”
  - (4) “Laying on of hands” (6:2) is another Old Testament ritual. The offerer identified himself with the sacrifice by laying his hands upon the head of the animal (cf. Lev. 4:1-4). This tradition was carried over into the New Testament:
    - Matthew 19:13 says, “Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray.”
    - Mark 7:32 says, “And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.”
    - Acts 6:6 says the first deacons were set before the apostles, “and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”

- Paul said to Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.”
- (5) The “resurrection of the dead” (6:2). In John 11:23, our Lord said to Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again.” She replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). The resurrection of the dead is taught in various places in the Old Testament, including Job 19:25-27 and Daniel 12:2.
- (6) “Eternal judgment” (6:2). This is taught all throughout the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and only a fool could deny it. Psalm 9:17 says, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”
5. These are “the principles of the doctrine of Christ” (6:1). God willing (6:3), we are to leave these principles, and “go on unto perfection” (6:1).

## II. DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF HEBREWS 6:4-6

1. Some people believe that this is a warning that Christians can lose their salvation. Many good preachers have taught this. For example, G. Campbell Morgan believed that. With all due respect to these great Bible teachers, I think they are mistaken (cf. John 10:27-29).
2. If this is a warning that a saved man can lose his salvation, then it is also a warning that once he loses it he can never get it back again! Yet, preachers who teach you can lose your salvation always encourage backsliders to get saved again.
3. But according to Hebrews 6:4-6 that would be “impossible.”
4. Jesus said, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7), not “Ye must be born again and again and again...”
5. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened...If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance...” (6:4-6).
6. Another interpretation holds that this is a warning to professed believers that are not genuinely saved. This is the view of the Scofield Study Bible.
7. This interpretation seems rather forced to me because nowhere in Scripture does the Holy Spirit use these words to describe unsaved people:
  - “enlightened” (6:4) – means “given light,” and walking in that light (cf. Eph. 1:18). The same Greek word is used in Hebrews 10:32, where it is translated “illuminated.”

- “have tasted of the heavenly gift” (6:4). The same word is used in Hebrews 2:9, where it says Christ tasted death for every man. The same word is used in I Peter 2:3, where it says, “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”
  - “were made partakers of the Holy Ghost” (6:4). The same word is used in Hebrews 3:1, 14, and 12:8 in reference to Christians. Strong’s Concordance says this word means, “sharing in the salvation procured by Christ.”
  - “have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (6:5) – refers to regeneration – being born again by the word of God (I Peter 1:23).
8. These words in Hebrews 6:4-6 can only describe people who have been genuinely born again. Sometimes, believers do “fall away” (6:6), i.e., they backslide.
  9. It is impossible “to renew them again” (6:6). This means they were renewed (regenerated) at one time. But there is much debate over these verses.
  10. The great evangelist RA Torrey said, “There is a quickening short of regeneration.” William Newell, in his commentary quotes Dr. Torrey and refers to Luke 8:13 – “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”
  11. William Newell also refers to Jude 12, where apostates are called “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”
  12. Newell says, “But what does the expression ‘twice dead’ (Jude 12) mean? We profoundly believe that it can only indicate that there was in them ‘a quickening’ connected with their being ‘enlightened.’ At first they were, as were all once, ‘dead in trespasses and sins.’ But how ‘twice dead’ unless there had been such a revelation of the Risen Christ as the ‘natural mind’ knows at all of, connected with their being ‘enlightened’?”
  13. If they shall fall away, it is impossible “to renew them again unto repentance” (6:6). But not to salvation. There is a difference between repentance and salvation. The question is – Where they ever genuinely saved? And, if they were saved, does this mean they will be cast off into hell when they die?

14. In I Corinthians 9:27, Paul said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”
15. Paul was not talking about being cast off into hell. He was talking about being set aside by God and no longer in the ministry.
16. First John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”
17. But the words here in this passage in Hebrews 6 are much, much stronger. It is a very difficult passage to interpret. If verses 4 and 5 sound like they are describing true believers, verses 6—8 sound like a description of unbelievers:
  - “seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (6:6b).
  - “But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected” (6:8).
  - “and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (6:8b).
18. The epistle was written to Hebrew believers. Some Jews, who professed faith in Christ, had changed their minds and had gone back into Judaism. This is likened to crucifying the Son of God afresh (6:6).
19. The Jewish recipients of this epistle were not guilty of this terrible sin, because the author of the epistle says, “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you...” (6:9).
20. The pronouns in verses 6-9 – “those,” “they” and “them” – indicate the writer is not accusing the recipients of the epistle.

### III. THE SYMBOLISM OF HEBREWS 6:7, 8

1. The “earth” (6:7) represents the believer, and the “rain” symbolizes God’s provision for good spiritual growth. Isaiah 55:9, 10 says, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”
2. Ezekiel 34:26 says, “And I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.”
3. “But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected...” (Hebrews 6:8). The Greek word translated “rejected” is the same word

translated “castaway” in I Corinthians 9:27. It means disapproved by God.

4. “Thorns and briers” (6:8) represent sin and unbelief, resulting in fruitlessness. If this is a warning to believers, then the burning does not refer to hell, but to the judgment seat of Christ (cf. I Cor. 3:13-15).
5. Some Bible teachers, such as MR De Haan, believe Hebrews 6:4-6 is a warning about the sin unto death and the judgment seat of Christ (cf. II Samuel 12:13; Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 11:27-30; James 1:13-16; I John 5:16).
6. Because the words used in Hebrews 6:4 and 5 sound like words used to describe genuine Christians, I think this is the best interpretation.
7. And I agree with Dr. De Haan also when he wrote, “This is admittedly one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the entire Bible” (*Hebrews*).

### **CONCLUSION:**

In his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews, William Newell tells of a Gospel meeting held at Bellevue Hospital in NYC:

In 1892 a company of us from the Gospel Tabernacle were holding a gospel service in one of the great corridors in Bellevue Hospital, New York. I was seated on a ledge in the corridor, expecting to give a testimony shortly. In front of me stood a company, singing a gospel hymn which repeated over and over the name of Jesus. Out from the patients seated beyond this singing company, and past the singers, dashed a man in terror. I was just able to seize and hold his arm, beseeching him to be seated. He turned a frightful look upon me, saying, “*I knew Him once!*”

I asked him what he meant.

“I mean Him they are singing about. I cannot bear to hear it. I really knew Him once – but I am lost!”

I turned to every passage of invitation. He simply shook his head in anguish. I said, “Christ will gladly receive any sinner.”

“Look here,” said he. Stooping to his left ankle, he began to unfasten safety pins. Turning back the leg of his trousers – “Look at that,” he said. I saw a hideous mass of syphilitic sores. “I went back to *that*,” he said. Rapidly he replaced and fastened the bandage, and said, “Let me go! *I knew Him once!*”

I followed him down the corridor and held him as long as I could. Judas, on the way to hang himself, must have looked as did he. I went with him (in

vain) as far as I could without His leaving the hospital...But what a lesson he had taught me!