

Hebrews 6:4-8

“The impossible enlightened”

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I. Introduction

Our study brings us now to the third group that made up the the Hebrew speaking church in Rome and the writer does so with four words that sets the tone of his concern for them: “*For it is impossible*”. He doesn’t say highly unlikely but “*impossible*” and with that one word the author unknowingly set in motion one of the most heated debates in Christianity; “*Can a person lose their salvation?*” Though this debate has raged for a 1000 years the first question that needs to be asked by the Bible student is, “*Was this the question the writer was asking and answering in the first place?*” Before we move to unlock this ill respective of the what the writer intended to say to the original readers this is still a very sobering passage! Before we dig into this passage and exactly what the Greek phrases of verses 4-6 means the context in which the writer makes this statement has already been set: *He is not addressing the question of whether a person can lose their salvation.* Instead he is addressing the issue that this specific group of professing believers were demonstrating; some of them were turning back, because of persecution, to the Levitical sacrifices for their temporary atonement instead of trusting in the finished work of Jesus for their salvation.

II. Vs. 4-5 Five advantages

Vs. 4-5 First the writer gives his readers a fivefold advantage of the spiritual work that God had done for this group of people:

1. *Once enlightened*
2. *Tasted the heavenly gift*
3. *Become partakers of the Holy Spirit*
4. *Tasted the good word of God*

5. (Tasted) the powers of the age to come

The five advantages the Holy Spirit had given these Hebrews is sandwiched in between a warning where we read in verse 4 that, “***It is impossible for those who were once enlightened...***” followed by four more advantages and verse 6 where we read, “***to renew them again to repentance.***” It is only when we combine these two phrases of the warning that we can get its full sobering magnitude of the warning: “***It is impossible for those who were once enlightened... to renew them again to repentance***”. Further more the force of the Greek words “***impossible***” and “***renew***” give no wiggle room for the interpretation for word “***impossible***” to be **diluted** to mean “***difficult***” as it is the same word used else where in Hebrews and in each case it can only mean “***impossible***”. The same is true of the word used for “***renew***”. **The writer is saying that those who once experienced a renewal cannot again have the same like experience, they cannot again be brought to a life-changing repentance.** It is the absolute nature of this statement that makes this such a sobering passage. But in light of the context the responsibility of this impossibility does not fall into the hands of the God of grace who has already given them these five advantages but rather in the hands of those who have already received these five advantages but refused to take full advantage of them by coming to faith. This presents two problems:

- a. How can anyone experience these **5 Spirit-given advantages** and still not be a Christian?
 - b. If they are a Christian, how can they fall away, without any hope of restoration?
- It is over these issues that the battle has been waged throughout the Christian church.

1. **Once enlightened:** Of first importance is that **this phrase makes no reference at all to salvation.** There is no mention of new birth or regeneration and to make the “***once enlightened***” as “***born again***”, without any connecting phrases any where in the Bible is a stretch NOT implied in the text or else where. None of the normal New Testament terminology is used to indicate salvation. In fact, NO TERM used in these five advantages is ever used in the New Testament for salvation. What we have here is two words of a phrase that will indicate who the writer had in mind when he wrote it:

- a. First the word “**once**” in the Greek it means “**once for all**”. This means that the “**enlightening**” **never needed repetition.** From the writer’s perspective to the original readers, **these Hebrews who had listened to the message of the New Testament had experienced the the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment in their minds and hearts to clearly understand what they had heard.** John 16:13-15 clarifies our understanding of this when we read Jesus’ words to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit’s work saying, “***when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.***” The writer is declaring that this happened to the readers and it never needed to be repeated for the purpose of the lack of understanding or to make it clearer.
- b. Second the word “**enlightened**” in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures always has to do “**intellectual perception of biblical truth**”. The

word means to be “*mentally aware of something, to be instructed or informed*”. The word carries NO CONNOTATION of response, neither acceptance or rejection. To illustrate this, we need only look at Matthew 4:16 where Jesus read Isaiah 9:1-2 that declares that those “*who sat in darkness have seen a great light.*” All those who heard in Galilee were not saved but they had ALL SEEN a great light! **Seeing and believing are not the same thing.** Those who had witnessed Jesus words and works in Galilee were to some extent “*enlightened*” as indicated in Jesus warning to these very cities in Matthew 11:21-24 where He says “*If the mighty works which were done in you were done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago..*” **These Hebrews who the writer is addressing had natural knowledge of factual information.** When considering those from the Galilee area who had first hand knowledge of the words and works of Christ and the advantage that such experience afforded them was to a degree that only a few thousand people in all of history who had as much “*enlightenment*” as they did. But most of them didn’t move beyond “*enlightenment*” to faith! The only conclusion you can make of **these Hebrews is that they were “enlightened” but not saved!** And because of this they were in grave danger because their lack had nothing to do with something more the Holy Spirit could give them to inform them further to belief. Peter describes them in 2 Peter 2:20-21 “*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.*”

2. **Tasted the heavenly gift:** At issue in this advantage is the understanding of what the writer meant by using the word “*tasted*” and what he meant by the phrase “*heavenly gift*”. The word used to describe the advantage given to them by the Holy Spirit was a “taste” and it is worthy to note that if the writer intended to describe those he was writing to as believers then why did he say that they merely “TASTED” of the “heavenly gift” instead of saying that they “RECEIVED the heavenly gift”? The writer is clear on this, the “*heavenly gift*” was not feasted on he was only sampled which had left an impression of the distinct flavor of his goodness. It appears that these Hebrews were like their forefathers in Kadesh-Barnea outside the land of promise who had in their hands the blessings of the fruit of the land of promise but still turned back. The interpretation of the words “*heavenly gift*” can be one of two persons, the Holy Spirit as He is spoken of as such or it can be a reference to Jesus who is the greatest “*heavenly gift*”. Seeing that the Holy Spirit is the focus of the third advantage I don’t believe that He is what the writer is speaking of here. I believe that these Hebrews had tasted of the blessings of salvation in Christ but had yet to feast upon Him fully as they hadn’t received Him. They had tasted in what they had seen and heard but turned back and didn’t fully partake of Him.
3. **Become partakers of the Holy Spirit:** Here the main issue is what does the word “*partakers*” mean in reference to the Holy Spirit? The word in the Greek is in the aorist tense not the perfect tense. Which means that the reference to the meaning

- of “*partakers*” is not to a “**permanent**” state but a mere fact of a work of the Holy Spirit. Had it been in the perfect tense it would have spoke of the finished work of the Holy Spirit having permanent results. The fact that the writer doesn’t use the perfect tense instead uses the aorist tense **points to the incompleteness of the work of the Holy Spirit in the case of these Hebrews.** “*Partakers*” of the Holy Spirit doesn’t mean “*possessors*” of the Holy Spirit. They weren’t indwelt by Him, He had NOT taken up His permanent residence in their hearts, they were not sealed by Him, born again by Him, or baptized by Him into the body of Christ by Him! Instead they were mere participators in His work co-operating in His pre-salvation work that was ***leading*** them to the act of repentance from their sins and trusting alone in the finished work of Jesus for their atonement. This work had not yet been completed because these Hebrews had resisted its completion! The Bible never speaks of Christians as being only associated with the Holy Spirit, it speaks of Christians being INDWELT by Him. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to come along side the unbeliever as they partake of His work of revealing Jesus to them, convicting them of sin and revealing His work on their behalf. These Hebrews didn’t “*possess*” the Holy Spirit, they were only “*partakers*” of His work.
4. **Tasted the good word of God:** At issue in the fourth advantage is two phrases “*tasted*” and “*word of God*”. The word “*tasted*” is the same as above and refers to having “*sampled*” the word of God but didn’t eat of it. What I find interesting is what the “*sampling*” is; the writer doesn’t use the normal reference to the “*word of God*” “*logos*” in the Greek but instead uses the word “*rhema*” which emphasizes the parts of the word rather than the whole! The writer uses this word as it fits the sampling of parts of God’s word instead of the partaking of the whole of it. These Hebrews had sampled parts of the word of God and may have done so with enthusiasm and appreciation but they hadn’t done what Jeremiah describes he did in Jeremiah 15:16 where we says, “*Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.*” Instead they were like the description of Herod towards John the Baptists words in Mark 6:20 where he enjoyed listening to John preach was fascinated by his words but when pressed to make a decision forsook the message and had him beheaded. There is nothing wrong with “*tasting*” as it is the first step to eating but if all you ever do is taste and never eat you will eventually die of starvation.
 5. **(Tasted) the powers of the age to come:** Same word “*tasted*” is implied here as well but we will need to understand what the writer meant by the phrase “*the powers of the age to come*”. The word “*powers*” in the Greek is repeatedly used to refer to miracles, wonderful works or mighty works. The word “*age*” in the Greek refers to a period of time characterized by miracles. It differs from this present age in which we live where “*mighty works*” are not the common every day norm. What the writer is saying is that these Hebrews had witnessed “*mighty works*” from the apostle’s healings and other “*wonderful works*” that will be common in the millennial kingdom of Christ. Yet though they had tasted of such things they had not come to faith in Christ.

III. Vs. 6-8 The impossible to renew

Vs. 6-8 The writer has carefully pinned his case against these Hebrews who have had

every advantage given by the Holy Spirit to the degree that the Holy Spirit has nothing more to offer these Hebrews, there was nothing lacking in the information He had given them in fact they had participated in it right up to the point of their salvation but then had refused for no reason of lack and returned to trusting in the Levitical system of sacrifices for their atonement.

The use of the word “*if*” indicates that the case the writer is presenting is hypothetical and as such is intended as a warning to those Hebrews who fit this category. The Greek words “*fall away*” are on used here in the New Testament and in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures in Ezekiel 14:13, 15:8 where it is used of Israel falling away from true worship of God. The word means to deviate from the right path, to turn aside. It describes an as yet hypothetical situation whereby these Hebrews break away from the completed work of the Holy Spirit’s advantages. The word “renew” is a word the means “*to restore back to original condition*” and simply implies that having rejected the five advantages the Holy Spirit had given them they wouldn’t be able to recapture what they had already rejected as if they had never heard it. It is here that we must remind ourselves who this letter was being written to before we move to an application for us today! The writer was addressing pre-temple destruction Hebrews who were being tempted to go back to the Levitical system of temple sacrifices. And in so doing they would be renouncing their professed faith in the Messiah for the sacrifices of the first testament. Should they do so they would render their hearts so hard that the five advantages already granted them would no longer have any effect. They would be irrevocable lost, nothing more the Holy Spirit could do for them. With that said, the situation that these Hebrew professing believers faced cannot be repeated today in the

same sense as there is no temple in Jerusalem and no way to go back to the Levitical system of sacrifices at the present time. There are no sacrifices to leave and return to. The sin they were in danger of committing isn't the same as the rejection of Christ by unbelievers today.

The analogy found in nature represents the free bestowal of spiritual enlightenment as one piece of ground reacts by producing useful herbs, this reveals that some of these Hebrews had bore fruit in accordance to the five advantages. Others bore thorns and briers and is likened to some of the Hebrews who went back and rejected what they knew to be true.