

Making Sense of Hebrews 6 and 10 (Part one of a five part series)

The doctrine of eternal security is often questioned and doubted due to the controversy surrounding the interpretation of Hebrews 6 and 10. Understanding the larger context of that epistle is essential in any attempt at deciphering the difficulty presented to us in the above chapters. In writing this letter, the author seeks to both warn and encourage a group of first century Hebrews who had made a profession of faith in Christ; but were now struggling in that all-important follow-up to the conversion experience known as the Christian life. They were regressing away from following their Savior and back toward their previous life in Judaism.

At this point in time, the leaders of the early church were already familiar with this pattern of regression. They knew there were two possible reasons for it. If any in this particular group had made a false profession of faith, their departure from a Christian lifestyle would be a sure sign that their pretense was unraveling. As this downward spiral continued, a permanent separation from the faith would be the inevitable end result. No one describes this form of spiritual withdrawal better than the apostle John in 1 John 2:19, where we read this –

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”

The other possibility for what was occurring with these Hebrews is commonly referred to as “backsliding.” This can take place in any true Christian and consists of a return to sinful behavior previously abandoned, or even engagement in a sinful lifestyle never previously experienced. The dilemma facing the author of this epistle is that he was incapable of discerning the difference as to which possibility applied to this group. My impression is that this New Testament writer, in order to err on the side of caution, worked on the assumption that both alternatives existed within this larger group. This accounts for his transition from warning to encouragement and back again; as well as a lack of clear cut clarity in describing what they had experienced. In one instance, he is hypothetical. In another, very real; admonishing, while encouraging.

However, the necessary point of emphasis in closing part one of our study involves the following distinction: **the “loss” that both groups were in danger of suffering was not that of salvation, but opportunity.** I have found that perspective to be very helpful in reconciling and harmonizing these texts in Hebrews with the overall teaching of the New Testament in regard to the doctrine of eternal security.