

HEBREWS & FALLING FROM GRACE
A Christian Can So Live So As To Loose His Salvation:
As Taught by the Book of Hebrews
By Benjamin J. Williams

No situation is more distressing than when a child of God turns away from the gospel of Christ to live a worldly life again. Sadly, this situation is compounded by the teaching of many that ignores this fact, claiming that a Christian may never loose his salvation. Before an alien sinner is converted from err, he must know of his sad condition. Likewise, before an erring child of God will turn again to serve the living and true God once more, he must know that he is living a life that makes forfeit the salvation of his soul.

The first clear statement in this regard is made in Hebrews 2:3 in the form of the question, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ...?” The first term to be noted is the term “we”, wherein the inspired writer groups himself with those who are able to neglect salvation. This point is important because the every ready reply from many is that these people who neglect their salvation are either lost or not “truly” saved. First of all, it should be noted that not being “truly” saved is to simply not be saved, for there is no middle ground. Therefore, these that could neglect salvation are either saved or lost. When the inspired writer says “we”, he puts himself in the same company as those that could neglect salvation, as did Peter (I Pet. 1:1; 2:20-22). If these people who neglect their salvation are not children of God, then the inspired writer of Hebrews is not a child of God. These same people are later called “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (ch. 3:1). Surely, they were children of God. The second term of interest is “neglect”. Even without a deep understanding of the term or the original language, we see that it results in a person being without escape. Neglecting salvation is equated to forfeiting the escape afforded by the gospel from the consequences of sin (Rom. 6:23). Those that stood in the same spiritual condition as the inspired writer were able to neglect and thereby forfeit that great salvation.

In chapter 3, these same people are told to “harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness” (ch. 3:8). This provides a vivid image for comparison. Our minds are pointed to the people of Israel in the wilderness whose doubt and worldliness caused that entire generation to remain outside of the promised land of Canaan. They hardened their hearts such that they neither believed nor obeyed the God that had brought them out of bondage in Egypt. Now, they wasted their deliverance by keeping themselves out of Canaan on account of their hardened hearts. Likewise, the Christian can harden his heart. After being brought out of the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:6-7), the child of God can disbelieve and disobey his Redeemer. In so doing, he wastes the deliverance from sin by returning to serve it again. He keeps himself out of the promised inheritance laid up in heaven. To warn them away from taking this path, they are told, “For we are partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (ch. 3:14). The statement is conditional, and that condition is remaining faithful unto the end (Rev. 2:10). The zeal and dedication of conversion must continue in order to be partakers of Christ. A one-time action is clearly not sufficient.

In verse eleven of chapter four, the writer says, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” You can’t fall if you

are already on the ground. Clearly, those that were told not to fall were Christians being tempted to turn back to Judaism. They desired the rest of Joshua instead of the rest provided by Christ. The “fall” would be to return to the example of Israel in rejection of God. Therefore, a person who had inherited Christ’s rest could reject it and “fall after the same example of unbelief”. To warn from this, they are told to “hold fast” their profession (ch. 4:14). The Christian needs only to remain loyal to the commitment he has already made in order to receive the promised rest.

In chapter six, verses 4-6, the writer says, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.” It is possible for one to fall from the faith once delivered. The “impossibility” is found in renewing them! This does not mean that if you fall away, then you can never come back. The renewing is impossible for two reasons. First, the writer refers to those that hardened their heart and would not listen to the gospel. Such person cannot be renewed because it takes the gospel, God’s power unto salvation, to change a person, and they have already shut that out. Second, these that fell away in the book of Hebrews were turning back Judaism. As long as they sought salvation at the altars of the Old Law, it was impossible to renew them. The sacrifices would be made in vain. Jehovah would no longer accept them now that His perfect sacrifice had been made. The person seeking salvation under the Law of Moses would never find it there, for “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (ch. 10:4). In turning to the Old Law, they made a mockery of Christ’s sacrifice and rejected the only power that could renew them.

In the chapter ten, the inspired writer makes several appeals to them that they should not fall away. In Hebrews 10:23, he says, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised:)”. Based on the firm foundation of the promises made by God, they are admonished to remain faithful so that they do not waver. This statement is meaningless if it is impossible to waver in the first place! In the same chapter in verse twenty-six, they are told, “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” This parallels what was said earlier about Hebrews 6:4-6. Those that had become Christians and heir according to the promise could forsake that promise by sinning willfully. In so doing, they rejected the only sacrifice for sin that would ever be acceptable to Jehovah God. Our point is that they were fully capable of sinning willfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth. In case we miss the ramifications of that, the next verse says that instead of the Messiah’s sacrifice for sins, they had “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” He tells them in verse 31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Why say such a thing to people who could not fall?! He tells them in verse 35 to “cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.” This is meaningless unless they both had the confidence in the first place and were then able to cast it away. In verse 38-39, he says, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” He quotes the prophecy of Habakkuk and tells them that now is the time to stay strong and live by the faith once delivered unto the

saints. Twice he refers to those that had “drawn back”. Drawn back from what? Surely it was the gospel that they had left in exchange for vain Judaism and sin.

The writer saves the clearest statement on the subject for chapter twelve where he says, “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;” (ch. 12:15). Can a man “fail of the grace of God” and not fall from it? No. The expression is clearly referring to the ability of a Christian to forsake the one hope of his calling wherewith he was called. If this is impossible, all the admonishments and encouraging words of the book of Hebrews and in all of the New Testament are in vain. If once a man is saved he is always saved, the warnings against sin and hard heartedness are hollow. The God of all creation makes no vain command and utters no hollow warning. We are commanded to hold fast our profession because it is possible to let it go, as the Israelites once did in the wilderness, and in so doing to forfeit the promises of a heavenly rest made to us by our great and loving God. “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”