HEBREWS 6:4-6
ITS AUDIENCE AND MESSAGE

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Introduction

One of the most important questions that face a believer is, “Now what?” Now that God has acted on behalf of His creation through the death and resurrection of Christ, what is the proper response to that gift? The epistle to the Hebrews serves as a treatise in answering that question. Although scholars are unsure who the author was, he explains how and why Christ is preeminent, the perfection of all that came before Him. Because of this, the author concludes that there is only one proper response to this revelation – endurance.

However, what is the purpose and role of endurance? Throughout the centuries, students of the Bible have debated the audience of the book and the motivation behind the warning passages’ encouragement to endure. Although there are five core warning passages in the book (2:1-4, 3:12-4:13, 6:4-8, 10:26-31, and 12:14-29), the one that arguably causes the most difficulty is found in 6:4-6. In recent church history, two prevalent views have been held. One group holds that the audience is a group of professing believers who, not truly having eternal life, fail to endure and make their unregenerate state known. A second group sees the warning passages as referring to believers who are in danger of losing their eternal salvation.

While these two have been prominent, there is a third view that needs to be explored. Like the former group, these interpreters hold that the believer is eternally secure in his position in Christ. Like the latter group, however, they hold that the warning passages in Hebrews apply to believers who are in real danger of losing some aspect of salvation – yet it is not eternal salvation in view. Given the author’s audience, especially as demonstrated within the immediate context and the language used therein, it is best to see those who have fallen away as believers...
who have disobeyed the commands to press on to maturity, and therefore will be subject to loss of blessings and rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

Professing Believers Who Fail to Persevere

The first view to be considered is that the audience, at least in 6:4-6, is a group of people who have professed salvation, and have garnered enough revelation so as to seem to be believers. The consequences of falling away are eternal damnation, as the act shows that the people were never truly saved with which to begin.

Support

John Owen, the author of one of the most substantial commentaries on the epistle, holds this view. He painstakingly reviews the five aorist participial phrases, attempting to demonstrate that their subject is unregenerate. Concerning the enlightenment, Owen writes that “there is a saving, sanctifying light and knowledge, which this spiritual illumination riseth not up unto; for though it transiently affects the mind with some glances of the beauty, glory, and excellency of spiritual things, yet it doth not give that direct, steady, intuitive insight into them which is obtained by grace.”\(^1\) In other words, the enlightenment discussed here is not one that leads to justification. It is merely one that presents divine truths to an unbeliever.

Concerning the second clause, tasting of the heavenly gift, Owen writes that \(\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\omicron\alpha\iota\) 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.”\(^2\) To those that hold this view, there is a difference between tasting and eating. If the author of Hebrews wanted to refer to a group of believers, he would have written that the heavenly gift, which Owen identifies as the

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2 Ibid., 3:79.
Holy Spirit, would have been more than tasted. To this end, Owen claims Ps 34:8 as support: “O taste and see that the LORD is good,” claiming that it was found to be so “by experience.” In his closing observation regarding being made a partaker of the Holy Spirit, Owen writes that “many are made partakers of him in his spiritual gifts who are never made partakers of him in his saving graces,” to which he cites Matt 7:22-23.

Proponents of this view believe that the first four participles exemplify a revelation to the unbeliever that stops short of justification. Indeed, MacArthur notes that

we should notice that this passage makes no reference at all to salvation. There is no mention of justification, sanctification, the new birth, or regeneration. None of the normal New Testament terminology for salvation is used. In fact, no term used here is ever used elsewhere in the New Testament for salvation, and none should be taken to refer to in these passages.

If this is clearly the case, then there is little doubt that the audience addressed here is a group of unbelievers.

Before progressing to the final participle, fall away, Owen establishes what he feels are the reasons that the audience in vv. 4-6 are not believers. Instead, they are former Jews who held

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1 Ibid., 3:79.
2 Ibid., 3:81. Newell agrees, writing that “it is not said that these were sealed with the Spirit, as were those at Pentecost, and in Samaria, and in Ephesus, who were ‘sealed unto the day of redemption.’” William Newell, Hebrews Verse by Verse (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1947) 187. Likewise, concerning tasting the good word of God, “there is a goodness and excellency in the word of God, able to attract and affect the minds of men, who yet never arrive at sincere obedience to it.” Owen, Exposition of Hebrews, 3:82.
3 John MacArthur, Hebrews (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983) 142. Strikingly, there are some writers in this camp, such as Peterson, who admit that the four former participles “apparently portray believers.” They relent that enlightened means “they heard and understand the gospel;” they admit that “the attempt of Calvinist interpreters to understand the terms tasting and partaking of partial and not full participation is misguided;” and they may even go so far as to say that “these verses seem to describe believers.” Despite the simple and straightforward nature of the participial language, he continues to write regarding the context, and how that demands that the verses be taken otherwise. The illustration in vv. 7-8, according to Peterson, clarifies the preceding verses. It is, as he writes, the “burden of proof” that the Calvinist needs to prove their point. He concludes, “the writer wants us to identify the apostates of vv. 4-6 with the unfruitful land.” Robert Peterson, “Apostasy,” Presb 19 (1993) 21-22. Wayne Kempson also comes to this conclusion: “If we were to read the four phrases of verses 4 and 5 in any other context, we would be comfortable preaching a four point sermon on the content of the Christian experience.” Wayne Kempson, “Hebrews 6:1-8,” RevExp 91 (1994) 571-2.

4 Owen writes that (1) there is no mention of faith in this passage, (2) there is nothing ascribed to these people as to show that they are in Christ, (3) they are compared with what he calls “true” believers in the following verses, and
to a form of Christianity because of the miracles that they not only saw, but also experienced in themselves first hand. Concerning *fall away*, Owen summarizes that it is “a voluntary, resolved relinquishment of and apostasy from the gospel, the faith, rule, and obedience thereof; which cannot be without casting the highest reproach and contumely imaginable upon the person of Christ himself, as is afterwards expressed.”

To this view, to *fall away* is to demonstrate that you were never truly a believer with which to begin. Since an unbeliever never fully received all of the graces of the Holy Spirit, it was inevitable that they either reach the point where they do, or else completely apostasize.

**Critique**

This view, however sincere its proponents are, approaches this passage with a preconceived idea of to whom the author is referring. It is seen in its treatment of the language employed in the participial chain. Although these words will be addressed more in the third view, suffice it to say that these words are being taken out of their NT context, as well as outside their plain meaning. *To be enlightened* is used in Heb 10:32 to describe believers, and Christ is said to

(4) that distinguishes the apostates from the “true” believers in the following verses. All four of these, however, are subjective interpretations of the phrases and contexts at hand. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, 3:84

7 Ibid., 3:87.


9 Probably one of the more blatant examples of this is from Harold Songer: “The question is often raised as to whether a genuine Christian could [fall away]; but this way of posing the issue disregards the fact that genuine Christians persevere, and it is only enduring obedience that can ultimately identify the genuine Christian. The analysis of what constitutes a genuine Christian cannot be ultimately made at any point in life prior to its end and even then may only be made finally by God himself.” Harold Songer, “A Superior Priesthood: Hebrews 4:14-7:27,” *RevExp* 82 (1985) 352.
have *tasted* death on the cross in Heb 2:9, and that was no mere “trial or experiment” as Owen claimed regarding its usage in 6:4. As for the next two phrases, the view stops short of a plain understanding of what those words mean. It is as if they will not allow the text to speak plainly, as they are forcing the author of Hebrews to fit what they want him to say. There are other possible interpretations – it is not as simple as MacArthur’s sweeping generalization concerning NT soteriological terms. As aforementioned, *to be enlightened* is used again by the author himself in 10:32, a fact not mentioned by MacArthur at all.

Although Peterson is correct in his interpretation when he writes that the text seems to refer to believers in vv. 4-6, he is incorrect in his interpretation of the metaphor in vv. 7-8. The author is actually appealing to one land that has two different results. Taking into account the context preceding vv. 4-6, it is seen that the one land is representative of believers, and the two different results are either (1) maturing and being fruitful, or (2) remaining stagnant and being chastised accordingly.

Owen’s idea of what it means to *fall away*, however, is on the right track. In a failure to mature, the believer is voluntarily relinquishing what it means to continue on in obedience and faith. There is no biblical reason – only theological – to see a believer as unable to fall away. The key, as will be discussed in the third section, is the grammatical and contextual clues as to (1) why the audience should be seen as believers and (2) from what is the *falling away*.

**Believers Who Lose Eternal Life**

The second view to be considered is that the audience indeed believes and that they currently have eternal life. However, this belief must be followed with progressing maturity in their life. Should they apostasize, thereby *falling away*, they will have lost their eternal life.

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10 See footnote six.

11 The interpretation of παράπιπτω, however, is diversely explained, as will be seen in due course. MacArthur explains it as a lost “opportunity for receiving salvation.” MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 146.
Support

Lenski summarizes this view when he remarks that “those once converted may fall so that it becomes ‘impossible to renew them to repentance,’” and “one may go so far that even God’s grace can no longer reach him.” The result of this is loss of eternal life. Those that hold this view argue that the person described by the aorist participles is, in fact, a believer. When the author writes of enlightenment, Lenski writes that when “the darkness was driven out, the Light, Jesus Christ, the light of this saving truth filled their souls.” The next phrase, tasted the heavenly gift, refers to “the inner, personal experience of salvation,” further solidifying his position that believers are in view.

When it comes to the fifth and final participle, fell away, Lenski writes that “there is no need to say more, this one word tells the whole story. It is tragic to the highest degree… ‘And fell away’ means to fall away utterly.” Despite having all the benefits of salvation, proponents of this view believe that they may then fall away from the faith, thereby forfeiting their status before God.

Once this occurs, there is no turning back to repentance. As Lenski states: “No one, neither God himself, the Holy Spirit, nor his Word and the ministers of that Word are able to produce a renewal of the repentance that is gone.” He continues:

Those who fell from the Son of God openly denounce and revile him before the world, and, having once embraced him, they not only know how to do this most effectively like a friend turning traitor who viciously uses all that his former intimacy provides him, but

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13 Ibid., 181.

14 Ibid., 182.

15 Ibid., 185.

16 Ibid., 186.
do it so that men shall see what they as one-time converts of Jesus have now as disillusioned converts come to think of him.\textsuperscript{17}

Here, simply stated, is the crux of this position. Falling away from the faith results in the open shame and humiliation of Christ, for which there is no repentance. It is the unpardonable sin that is warned of in Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10; as well as in Heb 10:26-31.

This view holds that the believer is in constant danger of denying Christ and falling away, and that to their peril. This is not merely open to unbelievers, but to those who have experienced the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. Those that have believed in Christ and have received all the benefits thereof need to be always on guard, making sure that they continue on in that truth.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Critique}

While it is true that the passage is referring to believers, there are still problems, both exegetical and theological, to be had with this view. Proponents are correct in seeing the first four participles as signifying entrance into eternal life. There is disagreement, however, when it comes to what it means to \textit{fall away}. As will shortly be seen, the context frames this action in terms of not pressing on to maturity. There is nothing inherent in the word itself that would make it necessarily referring to a loss of eternal life.\textsuperscript{19} On the contrary, the author is warning about the dangers of not progressing in their salvation, as they would then, in effect, be nullifying and making light of the sacrifice that God make on their behalf.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 186-7.


\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, the doctrine of eternal security is supported by passages such as John 6:35-40 (“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”), John 10:27-30 (“I give them eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand”), and Rom 8:29-30 (“For those whom He foreknew… predestined… called… justified… glorified”).
Believers Who Fail to Persevere

Although the previous two views have been held by the majority of theologians, especially since the Reformation, there seems to be yet a better way to view the passage, which is known by some of its proponents as the Partaker position. Dillow writes that “the Partaker is one who, like the Calvinist, holds to the eternal security of the Christian but, like the Arminian, believes the warning passages in the NT apply to true Christians.”\(^{20}\) It is derived from the meaning of μέτοχος, which happens to be a crucial word in the passage at hand. This view holds that the people in Hebrews 6 are believers who, after falling away, receive “spiritual impoverishment, severe discipline in time, and a forfeiture of reward.”\(^{21}\) Eaton also explains it “as referring not to apostasy but to a persistent rebelliousness comparable to the Israelites’ failure of faith in the wilderness.”\(^{22}\)

The theme of Hebrews

The first line of evidence for this conclusion is the thematic elements: what is the OT background, what does that inform the reader as to the audience, and how should the warning passages be viewed? Finding these answers will further guide the reader in the immediate context, as well as the passage itself.

The OT background. One look at Hebrews demonstrates that the author was well-versed in the OT. Indeed, the second of the warning passages (3:7-4:13) contains a large quotation of Ps 95, as well as allusions to Num 14 and 32. While a cursory treatment of the warning passages is forthcoming, this warning passage deals with entering rest, and the author is drawing parallels


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{22}\) Michael Eaton, No Condemnation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 212.
from the OT. The passages from Numbers contain the account of the Kadesh-Barnea rebellion, when the Israelites failed to enter into the land and obtain rest. Ps 95, to Benware, does not look upon that event as an apostasy, but “an unwillingness to put forth the necessary effort to obey God’s directive to enter and conquer the land of Canaan.”

Due to their disobedience, they were disqualified to enter the blessings of the land, despite still being God’s chosen nation.

A second important OT allusion in Hebrews is of Esau in 12:16. Esau hastily sold his birthright, and in so doing, forfeited the blessings that were contained therein. It was not a matter of losing his status as a son, but of giving up his right to his inheritance. If the author is using these examples from the OT to help substantiate his claim, perhaps this could aid the NT reader in identifying the audience and purpose of the book.

The audience. Given the OT background of the book, as well as no evidence to the contrary, it would be best to see the recipients of Hebrews as Jewish believers who have a need to mature in their faith. Just as their ancestors failed to obey God’s commands to enter the land, the believing recipients of the epistle are in danger of failing to obey God’s new commands, therefore leaving them outside of the rest and reward promised anew to them. This is further fleshed out by an analysis of the warning passages.

The warning passages. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author found it necessary to warn his audience in very grave terms. The language of the warning passages, let alone the

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24 Ibid., 44-48.

25 See also David Matthewson, “Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament;” and Randall Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *BSac* 155 (1998) 62-91, although neither of these authors hold to the view currently being discussed.

26 As Benware writes, “Calvinists and Arminians have toiled over these warnings and their theological systems have forced them to arrive at certain conclusions… [T]he suggestion being made here is that they might be fighting over the wrong issue. Hebrews is not focused on the doctrinal matters of justification, eternal security, or the
The letter as a whole, is concerned with perseverance in the faith, and specifically that it is not automatic and inevitable. In ch. 2, the author is concerned about those “who will inherit salvation,” that they would “drift away” from what they have already heard (1:14, 2:1). In ch. 4, the concern is missing out on the blessings of rest, just as the generation at Kadesh-Barnea did. The author reminds his audience in ch. 10 that there is not a higher level of sacrifice than Christ, so it would be best not to “go on sinning willfully” by drifting away due to persecutions (v. 32). Finally, in ch. 12, the author warns his audience “not to refuse” the discipline that is brought by Christ, and this should be the case because they “receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken.”

It is within this same vein that 6:4-6 is presented.

**The context of 6:4-6**

When seen in its immediate context of 5:11-6:12, the warning of 6:4-6 is seen with greater clarity. In ch. 5, the author begins discussing Melchizedek, someone with whom the audience should have been familiar by this point. Although he will pick up the Melchizedek theme at the end of ch. 6, the verses in between serve to admonish and encourage the believers concerning their spiritual growth. In 5:11-14, the author writes that they are still infants in the faith needing milk and the elementary principles, although they should be teachers, mature in their faith and craving solid foods. This is yet another indication that his intended audience is a group of believers who need to mature in their faith.

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loss of salvation. Rather, the book is emphasizing the matter of rewards and the need to faithfully endure in order to receive those rewards.” Benware, *The Believer’s Payday*, 159.

27 For an more extensive analysis, see Benware, *The Believer’s Payday*, 159-66.

28 The word ψυχρός, sluggish, only appearing twice in the NT, marks off this section as an inclusio. As Tanner states: “Within this inclusio, the author will confront them about their immaturity, exhort them to mature, warn them about the failure to do so, and finally encourage them.” J. Paul Tanner, “But If It Yields Thorns and Thistles: An Exposition of Hebrews 5:11-6:12,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (2001) 23.
In 6:1-3, the author tells his audience to leave the beginning teachings about Christ, and to press on to maturity, not dwelling on the issues of \( \text{μετανοια} \) and \( \text{πίστις} \) any longer. What was occurring was that these believers received these heavenly gifts, and failed to respond properly by acting out their faith (vv. 4-6). In vv. 9-12, the author commends those that are ministering to the saints. In 6:11, he calls on all to show diligence, and to be imitators of those who live in that manner, of which he gives examples in vv. 13-20.

Furthermore, the author transitions his use of pronouns from first person in vv. 1-3 to third person in vv. 4-6. Ellingworth writes concerning this transition when he observes that “the author does not wish explicitly to identify the people described with the readers of the epistle” perhaps due to “tact.”

All that is necessary to observe in the pronoun shift is that while the author is including himself in the verses leading up to 6:4, he is referring to a specific group of people who are characterized by the participial string.

Therefore, the Hebrews needed to progress in their salvation. They were already justified, already secure in their salvation, but they needed to persevere. This perseverance was not to demonstrate that they were, in fact, saved, nor was it to keep their salvation, but it was to press on to maturity. If they were unbelievers, as so many contend, the author should be encouraging them to believe, not to endure!

**The language and syntax**

To see the recipients of this warning as regenerate is, as Hodges says, “obvious to all who have not already decided that the remainder of the passage cannot refer to Christians.”

Looking at the words used to describe the recipients, the author writes concerning one who *has been*...
enlightened (φωτισθέντας). The author uses the same word in 10:32 to refer to the act of becoming a believer. In that context, those that experienced φωτίζο were then persecuted for their acts of endurance.

Second is the term and tasted of the gift from heaven (γευσαμένους τῆς δοξας τῆς ἐπουρανίου). The word γεύομαι is not merely tasting, as opposed to eating or digesting, it is “to experience something cognitively or emotionally.” Again, the best way to determine this author’s intent is by his other usages of the word. While it is used in v. 5 in reference to the good word of God and the powers of the coming age, it is used a third time in 2:9 to convey that Christ tasted death for everyone. Just as Christ had fully experienced death, so also the people in 6:4 fully experience the gift from heaven. The same argument can be made for the word’s use in v. 5.

The third qualifier the author uses is having been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (μετόχοις γεννηθέντας πνευματος ὕγιον). BDAG defines this usage as “sharing or participating in.” In the NT, it is always used to denote direct participation, and therefore should be taken to mean that the recipients have direct participation with the Holy Spirit and are believers.

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31 Φωτίζω is used eleven times in the NT. Five times it refers to something being revealed: Luke 11:36; 1 Cor 4:5; Rev 18:1, 21:23, 22:5. Three times it is used of spiritual illumination that reveals God in general: John 1:9; Eph 3:9; 2 Tim 1:10. Two times it is used of spiritual illumination to the point of regeneration: Eph 1:18; Heb 10:32. Despite MacArthur’s claims to the contrary, there is overt soteriological language found in this passage as the usage in Heb 6 seems to be in accord with its usage in Heb 10, the only other time the author makes use of the word.

32 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, BDAG (3rd ed.; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 195. The word occurs fifteen times in the NT. Six of those refer to instances where food or drink are being eaten or drank: Matt 27:34; John 2:9; Acts 10:10, 20:11, 23:14; Col 2:21. Seven of those refer to instances of intimate experience (e.g., death): Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27, 14:24; John 8:52; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 2:3. This leaves the two instances in Heb 6. In matters other than food, γεύομαι seems to indicate an intimate experience with the object.

33 Ibid., 643.

34 The word occurs once in Luke and five times in Hebrews. In Luke 5:7, the apostle is recounting the narrative of the fishermen receiving a huge catch after an unprofitable day. When the catch comes in, they call to their μετόχοι for help in bringing it in. It is used in the same sense in Heb 1:9; however, the other four instances have an even more intimate meaning. In 3:1, the clearest indication, the author identifies his readers as ἀδελφοί ὕγιοι who are κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μετόχοι. It is used in 3:14 to denote an even more intimate level of μετόχοι τοῦ χριστοῦ. Other than 6:4, the author uses it in 12:8 to convey that some are μετόχοι of πατείας.
But what does it mean to fall away? The word παραπίπτω is only used once in the NT, so a comparison of usages therein is not available. Based on external evidence, as well as the compound nature of the word, a definition of “to fail to follow through on a commitment” is plausible. The author has in mind a group of people, whom, after receiving all of the benefits of justification, failed to follow through with the process. As Benware writes, “the falling away has nothing to do with a departure from justification but a wandering astray from the path leading to maturity (6:1) and reward… It is the opposite of pressing on to maturity.”

In the discussions concerning παραπίπτω, it is important to recognize that it is the fifth and final aorist participle in the string that is governed by one particle, τοῦς. Although many translations, most notably the KJV and NIV, treat this final participle as adverbial, which leads to a translation of if they shall fall away, the presence of the particle should lead to an adjectival-substantival rendering – and have fallen away. The former allows for παραπίπτω to be conditional, while the latter indicates that the group the author is discussing has all of these characteristics true of them. As Hodges notes, “the writer clearly talks as if he knew of such cases.”

Once this rebellion is committed, the author writes that to renew them again unto repentance is then impossible (ἀδύνατον... πάλιν ἀνακαίνιζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν). This is because

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35 BDAG, 770. Although παραπίπτω is not used elsewhere in the NT, it does appear eight times in the LXX. It is used to convey the idea of falling short in Est 6:10; and Wis 6:9, 12:2; and of acting unfaithfully in Ezek 14:13, 15:8, 18:24, 20:27, and 22:4. Both of these meanings solidify an understanding of falling short of maturity, which is, in and of itself, an act of unfaithfulness.

36 Benware, The Believer’s Payday, 162.


38 Sproule concludes: “Παραπεσόντας is an adjectival-substantival participle, one in a series of five, governed by the article τοὺς which initiates the series. [It] functions as one of five substantival direct objects of the infinitive ἀνακαίνιζειν. The series is limited by the connectives... and as such, it would seem that παραπεσόντας cannot be adverbial and thus it should not be regarded as conditional.” John Sproule, “Παραπεσόντας in Hebrews 6:6,” GTJ 2 (1981) 331.

they are, in essence, recrucifying the Son of God (ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ) which put Him in open shame (παραδειγματίζοντας). Instead of seeing repentance as a necessary part of saving faith, as some do, it is important to see it in a different light, according to the context. This repentance is one that leads to the believer being fruitful again.\(^{40}\)

The metaphor in vv. 7-8 serves to explain this further. As Hodges writes, “The burning of fields was a practice known in antiquity and would doubtless be a familiar idea to the readers of the epistle. But this practice was not to destroy the field, but to destroy the unacceptable growth which made it unfruitful.”\(^{41}\) In other words, God may initiate His divine judgment, which in some cases may lead to the restoration of the believer to fruitfulness, but only after the divine discipline burns away the fruitlessness.\(^{42}\)

**Critique**

Although the first view discussed in this paper would argue that the terminology used in 6:4-5 clearly refers to unbelievers, it is more due to a theological conundrum that it creates for them rather than plainly taking the terms in their normal meaning. Consequently, although they may raise objections to the handling of the terms in this latest section, the burden of proof rests greatly upon them to explain why they are manipulating the words so.

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\(^{40}\) Just like the Kadesh-Barnea generation and Esau could not repent and reverse their disobedience, neither will the believer who falls away. It may very well be that God is able to bring about the repentance, although man may not: (1) the author tells his audience to “encourage one another daily,” and not to “forsake assembling together” so that they would mature; (2) maturity is seen as something that God permits (6:3); and (3) the illustration in 6:7-8 indicates that there may be fruitfulness after divine judgment has taken place. See Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 444.


Concerning the possibility of repentance, Kent remarks: “To qualify the meaning with suggestions that all things are possible with God, and therefore the impossibility must be only on man’s side, is gratuitous… The statement then becomes a meaningless truism.”43 This Partaker view, however, is not necessarily being gratuitous with the grace of God. God always reserves the right to deal with His people as He sees fit. Indeed, when the warning of impossibility is given, it is given in light of the commands for believers to encourage one another daily (3:13) and to not forsake the command to assemble together (10:24). In that context, it may be feasible that the impossibility rests in man’s ability to encourage one another to maturity.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the paper, arguments have been made for three views of Heb 6:4-6. The final view discussed, however, fits the evidence the best. Concerning the theme of the book, it was demonstrated that the extensive OT quotations harkening back to disobedient Israel in the wilderness would carry over the idea that the audience is a group of believers who need to be obedient and endure. Within that context, the warning passages are then to believers who are in danger of failing to mature in their faith, which would cause them to miss out on the blessings not only in their mortal lives, but also on the future blessings and rewards given at the Judgment Seat. The immediate context of 5:11-6:12 strengthens the argument that the audience is a group of believers as the author is telling them to leave the elementary teachings of their faith and to mature into the real sustenance. Finally, it was demonstrated that the language and syntax employed by the author leaves little room for doubt as to the regenerate nature of his audience.

Concerning the other two views handled in this paper, fatal deficiencies were found. For the first view, as simplistic as the critique is, it needs to be reiterated that an unbeliever is unable to mature in belief. If his audience were unbelievers, the author would be encouraging them to

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43 Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 110.
believe, not to mature. The second view was found to be deficient as a believer is eternally secure in their position in Christ. Despite their faulty beliefs, the second view does interpret one thing correctly – there is great loss to be had by not maturing in the faith.

Considering that the audience is a group of believers, and considering that there is a great loss to be had for these believers, it is vital that churches today understand the gravity of the situation. Far too often, believers take their position in Christ for granted. In the circles that teach eternal security, there is sometimes great laxity when it comes to maturing in the faith. The Bible clearly teaches in passages such as Heb 6:4-6 that to fail to mature, while having no bearing on eternal life, brings about a great loss of blessings and rewards. As a believer reads the NT, they should constantly be asking God for the grace to endure and mature in the faith which He gave them.
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