



"In Hebrews 6:4-6, most translations use the phrase 'it is impossible to restore again to repentance' those who have 'tasted the goodness of the word' and then have fallen away. Their sin is 'to crucify again the Son of God on their own account'.

Please explain what it means to 'crucify again the Son of God', and, at what point in a person's 'falling away' do they become guilty of this?"

Here, then, are the two questions that have been asked.

- 1. What is meant by 'crucify again the Son of God'?**
- 2. When does one who falls away from the faith become guilty of this offence?**

A Brief Survey

I suggest that, before I attempt to answer these questions, we need to look at the verses to which they refer, in their proper context. Many years ago I was taught that, when studying a difficult passage of scripture, it is important to consider both what preceded and what followed it. In the case before us, there is, throughout this letter, a great deal of information that should help us to understand both the problem with which the writer is dealing and the message he sends to his readers.

We know, from the title, that this letter was written to Hebrews; that is, to Jews who had obeyed the Gospel. Whether it was sent to those living in Italy, or those still in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem, is really not important.

What is important and what the writer makes very clear is that these Hebrew Christians had become discouraged and perhaps even disillusioned to the point of being ready to abandon the Christian Faith and return to their old Jewish religion.

Why Discouraged?

The reasons for this become evident when we read the letter.

- a) It seems that, when they were converted, these Jewish converts thought that the Gospel would take Judaism by storm and there would be a continuation of the mass conversions of those early days. But they had been disappointed.**

When this letter was written, probably 25 or maybe 30 years after the excitement of Pentecost had become history; nothing in Judaism appeared to have greatly changed. The old Jewish religion was still alive. The Temple in Jerusalem was still its vibrant centre, as Heb. 9:6 reveals. The Aaronic priesthood was still active and the daily sacrifices required by the Mosaic Covenant were still being offered. We learn this from Heb. 10:11.

b) Furthermore, these Hebrew Christians were doubtlessly unsettled by the followers of Judaism who delighted in pointing out that this new Faith had no Temple and no High Priest to represent its adherents before God. In fact, it had none of the ceremonies or the tangible symbols and visible emblems of religion, with which they had been brought up and to which they were accustomed.

In short, it seemed that the Hebrew converts to Christianity had cut themselves off from their historic past and from links with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of whom, as Hebrews, they were naturally proud.

The result was that they felt they had become nothing more than a little island of Christianity in a vast sea of Judaism, with the result that they had begun to have grave doubts about the step they had taken and were wondering if they had not made a grave mistake in leaving their old religion. Some, at least, were seriously considering abandoning faith in the Lord Jesus and going back to the Jewish faith.

It was in such circumstances that the writer issued the warning in chapter 6, which has given rise to the questions we have been asked to consider.

This is not the place at which to detail the numerous arguments advanced by the writer in order to convince these Hebrew Christians of the danger that lay in the course they were contemplating, but we might briefly notice that he constantly used the word '*better*', when comparing the two faiths; the one which was based on the Old Covenant ratified at Sinai, of which Moses was the mediator, and the other created by the New Covenant, mediated by the Son of God and ratified by the shedding of His blood at Calvary.

Remember that the word, which, in the Authorized Version is rendered '*better*', is the word '*kreisson*', occurring in the Greek text of this letter no fewer than 12 times in the 13 chapters. It means '*stronger*', or '*more powerful*', and it emphasizes the superiority of the New over the Old.

The Hebrew Christians were told that the new Faith is based on a ***better covenant***, ratified by a ***better sacrifice***, offering ***better promises*** and a ***better hope***, mediated by a ***better Prophet*** and has a ***better High Priest***.

Question 1. This is the clue that helps us to answer the first question concerning 'crucifying afresh the Son of God'.

Because, the Christian faith is, in every conceivable way, superior to the Old Jewish religion, the thrust of the warning issued in chapter 6:4-6 is that if these Hebrew Christians went back to Judaism, not only would they be returning to something that is old, out-dated, worn-out and effete, they would become guilty of an offence even more serious and sinful, because by deserting Christ, they would in effect be siding with those who crucified Him and saying that His enemies were right in calling Him a blasphemer and a deceiver. They would be agreeing that His death was nothing more than the death of a common criminal, and – worse still – they would be '*putting Him to an open shame*'. The Greek word used here – '*paradeigmatidzo*', is used just this one time in the N.T., but it also occurs in the Greek version of the Numbers 25:4, and

it means 'to expose to public ignominy and shame', as when the bodies of executed criminals were left hanging for all to see.

Obviously, there could be no possibility of the Lord Jesus actually being 'crucified again'. He died 'once for all'. But, for these Hebrew believers to reject the faith they had clearly embraced, the blessings of which they had certainly enjoyed, would be tantamount to 'crucifying Him afresh', and if they became guilty of this act, they would, indeed be **"holding Him up to contempt"**. (v.6).

This is the sin to which Heb.10: 26 refer. **"If we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin"**. Reject the sacrifice of Christ and forgiveness becomes impossible, because God has made that sacrifice the only basis and means of salvation.

I suggest that, when this letter was sent, matters had not yet reached that point, because in Heb. 6:9, the writer says, in effect, 'Although I am saying this, in your case I feel confident of better things'. He had reached a settled conclusion and did not believe that they would become guilty of so terrible an act, and he even speaks affectionately, calling them 'Divinely loved ones' using the word 'beloved' for the only time in this letter.

Question 2. "When does one who falls away from the faith become guilty of this offence?"

I do not think that the specific offence with which this letter deals is one which we commit today. It was a form of sin, or transgression, to which those early Hebrew converts were uniquely exposed, and the passage describes a situation that for the majority of us does not exist.

This does not mean, of course, that a present-day Christian cannot fall-away from the faith and become 'lost' again, even though there are religious groups and writers who deny the possibility of apostasy, declaring 'once saved – always saved; once in grace, always in grace'.

I must admit that I cannot understand how anyone can read the New Testament and reach such a notion! I imagine that we all know people who once embraced the Christian faith and obeyed the Gospel, but later, for whatever reason, became unfaithful and left the Church. Of course those who hold the view to which I have just referred have a very easy explanation! They would say that those who fell away were never really saved – never really Christians in the first place!

But if their doctrine is true, we have to wonder why the writer of the Hebrew letter was so concerned about those people described in the passage at which we have been looking if they were never in real danger!

However, I have run out of space, and the question concerning the possibility of apostasy is one that must be left for another 'Question Box'!

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