

# What is Falling Away?

*Hebrews 6:6*

Nutshell: “Falling away” describes serious departure from Christ, in doctrine or lifestyle. There are levels of falling away that we’ll consider, but especially the most serious kind.

I. Context: The 3 pairs of fundamentals to build from.

II. Text

Heb 6:4 For *it is IMPOSSIBLE* with those ❶ once having been given light, and ❷ having enjoyed the taste of the *free* gift from Heaven, and ❸ having become partakers of *the* Holy Spirit,

5 and ❹ having enjoyed the taste of *the* beneficial Utterance from God, as well as ❺ *the* powers of a Coming Age,

6 then **falling aside**, *it is impossible TO RESTORE* them again to repentance- *they* re-crucifying for themselves the Son of God and making *Him* a public example.

Literal Standard Version with modifications

The next four outline items, III. - VI., are based on the 4 uses of Scripture listed in 2 Tim 3:16 AND the 3 depictions of preaching in 2 Tim 4:2.

III. Teaching

A. Paul wrote an inspired book to a Jewish audience; 2 Pet 3:15-16; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 3:1. Hebrews is the only possibility.

1. The “us” of Heb 2:3 only puts the author outside the original 12

2. Peter speaks of the Apostles in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well, 1 Pet 1:12

B. Outline of Hebrews to this point:

## **The Preeminence of the Son**

*Authority:* God has at last spoken In **Son** (*Ἰερεφῆτ*), ← follow this font

His express image, 1:1-3a

*Theme:* **The SON** purified us from sin (Priest), then sat in authority (**King**), 1:3b

I. Supreme over the angels, Inheritor by ordeal, 1:4-14

Therefore hear Him, 2:1-4

II. Supreme as man, 2:5-9

**Psalm 8-** Since man must inherit, 2:5-8a

but man failed, 2:8b, **Christ** became man, 2:9a

*Theme* reprise: crowned with glory and honor (King), 2:9b  
to taste the death of “each one” of His own (Priest), 2:9c  
to bond with them and help them, 2:10-18

freeing them from bondage to Satan and fear, 2:14-15

Therefore, think hard on **Jesus**, 3:1

III. A **better** stewardship than Moses, 3:1-6

Therefore hear Him, unhardening our hearts, (*Ἰερωφῆτ*)

**Ps 95-** for Moses’ folk didn’t inherit God’s rest, 3:7-19

IV. A **better** Rest than Joshua, 4:1-11

◆ Therefore, fear (4:1a), lest we also miss **God’s rest**

**Ps 95-** David invited his generation into that same rest of  
Creation, a type of Salvation, 4:1b-8

**Christ’s** Salvation has become the final *Sabbatismos*, 4:9-  
10, which we must EXERT ourselves to enter, 4:11

For the Word penetrates, exposing us before God, 4:12-13

*Theme* reprise: Having the highest high priest (Priest), the  
**Son of God (King)**,

Let us hold to our confession of Him (*Ἰερωφῆτ*), 4:14

especially since He felt all our temptations +, 4:15

→ V. A **better** priesthood than Aaron, 4:14 - 10:18

VI. Exhortations based on Christ’s supremacies, 10:19- 13:21

VII. Concluding remarks, 13:22-25

C. “**Let us approach**” (Προσερχώμεθα) in 4:16 and 10:22

brackets section V. above, telling us that Jesus’ priesthood is  
so we will approach God. Prayerlessness, then, dismisses  
Jesus’ priesthood.

**Kid-speak:** What is the main thing the book of Hebrews is  
trying to prove about Jesus? That He’s the only \_ who can  
bring us to God. (Priest)

D. 5:1-10, OT priests from Aaron; Christ from *Ἰερωφῆτ*

1. 5:11-14, The Hebrews were too babyish to learn of *Ἰερωφῆτ*

2. 6:1-2, They needed the fundamentals again:

1<sup>st</sup> pair: repentance from trusting *our* own efforts +  
faith toward God (trusting *Christ’s* doings; 2<sup>nd</sup> pair:  
Washings (esp. baptism) + laying on of hands (for the  
Spirit’s gifts and power), 3<sup>rd</sup> pair: the resurrection of the  
dead and eternal judgment.

- E. ∅ Because if we don't have and build on those, we may lose the whole thing with no chance of getting back! 6:4-8
- F. *Today, we'll consider this dangerous kind of falling away, as well as other kinds, all of which require serious consideration.*

## Outline: Hebrews 6:5

- I. Some who come to Christ, who, falling away, are **locked away from repentance**. God will not dishonor His Son, 6:6.
- II. These apostates (those who "lose standing") • received God's light, • tasted the free gift from Heaven, • partook of the Spirit, • tasted God's good speech & • the powers of His future kingdom, 6:4-5.
- III. Yet they turn aside, 6:6.
  - A. What about those who didn't "taste" this deeply? (I.)
  - B. What about my daily straying? (K.)
  - C. Directions for reclaiming significant strayers (L.)
    - 1. A case like our passage (M.)
    - 2. Comparing modern *institutions* vs. their *adherents* (O.)
  - D. "Fall" in similar contexts (P.)
  - E. "Fall away" in two similar verses (Q.)
  - F. The "unforgiveable sin" (R.)
- G. The key phrase of 6:4-6 is "impossible... to restore to repentance." There is such a state.
- H. Now, today we come to the *occasion* for this grave peril: they "**fall aside**," *para-pipto*, fall aside, connoting **detachment**
  - 1. But what they fall *from* is crucial: they "fall away" from the *state of familiarity* described: the flow, fellowship, freedom, and force of familiarity with the true God (These 5 alliterative words aren't necessarily 1-to-1 terms for the 5 descriptions)

**Kid-speak:** What does Paul call it when Christians stop following the real Jesus? Falling away.

- 2. It's not just that they fall away. They fall away from a *significantly deep interface* with Christ and His redemption
- ♦ I. There is therefore clearly a depth of real interface with God that ≠ salvation. This is one example of it.

1. [Very relevant sidebar] *As compared to* falling away from a *comparatively shallow* agreement with the Gospel
  - a. Which means that many ‘nominal Christian’ churchgoers might fall away *without* making it “impossible to restore them to repentance.” They hadn’t gone deep enough in spiritual knowledge and realities.
  - b. Of high concern among these deserters is children who grew up in the church. Can they return to God?
  - c. Yes, as long as their depth of interface with God didn’t reach the level of the 5-fold description
  - d. We, of course, worry for any of them who had an emotional conversion experience or seemed deeply committed. Did that bring them into the 5-fold state?
  - e. Not necessarily. For emotional conversions, it could have lacked knowledge. For intellectual assent, it might not have been accurate knowledge *or* might not have captured the heart.
2. Putting us in an odd spot
  - a. When they confess Christ, we want to believe that their conversion is sincere
  - b. But if they fall away, *then* we want to believe that they had not entered so fully into the realities of salvation: i.e., that they don’t fit the 5-fold description; hence, that they can still repent.

**Kid-speak:** Are there some people who fall away from Jesus who can never come back to Him? Yes.

- J. “Falling aside” is always a bad thing
  1. And it *can* be the *worst* thing: irreclaimable
  2. In dealing with specific cases, we just have to make an honest, knowledgeable *comparison* the 5-fold description and the person (knowledgeable of both)
- K. [Caveat] There *is* a “straying” that is due to the “old man’s” very presence within us. A daily straying.
  1. The very best we can do *as* blameless people *with* the Spirit *is still* fraught with frustration, Rom 7:15; Gal 5:17
  2. A blameless Christian will still do ‘course corrections’ every day, Ps 119:176
  3. The kind of serious straying in Heb 6:4-6 is one that will be manifested in:

- a. Wayward **beliefs**: e.g., confessing Christ wrongly, 1 Jn 2:22
  - (i. But what if their heresy goes under the radar, maybe even to them?
  - ii. This is one reason the nature of Biblical preaching is always ‘hunter-seeker’, with “convict” and “rebuke” the first two ingredients, 2 Tim 4:2
  - iii. We have to trust the Spirit to surface hidden issues... or to simply deal with them Himself)
- b. Wayward **actions**, walking in the flesh

**Kid-speak**: Does every Christian stray from Jesus some? Yes. The sin inside us makes it hard to **keep** our eyes right on Jesus.

L. If someone falls away to any **significant** extent, we have some clear directions

- 1. Gal 6:1
  - a. We are to cautiously seek their restoration
  - b. We ourselves will be especially temptable at such times
- 2. Jms 5:19-20
  - a. We are to do heroic rescue
  - b. Knowing that the stakes are very high

☑ M. But 1 Jn 5:16-17 is the one that brings the “impossible repentance” question into the mix

- 1. John urges caution in praying for the restoration of some
- 2. Implying (as Jer 7:16) that they are beyond restoration
- 3. The “impossible repentance” issue, then, is not merely theoretical. It is practical. To pray or not to pray.
  - a. The easy ‘go-to’ answer (“Always pray”) isn’t so pat
  - b. Perhaps our shallowness keeps this from being an issue we regularly confront. We’ve never been deep enough.

N. The Hebrew Christian community would doubtless have faced this very issue after receiving and digesting this letter

- 1. Any of their brothers who continued to treat Old Covenant (OC) shadows as New Covenant (NC) realities (ala Col 2:20), would put the faithful brothers on the spot
- 2. Surely divisions occurred in their midst
  - a. Not the exact division referred to in 1 Jn 2:22 (over the definition of Christ), but a division nonetheless
  - b. (These 2 errors - OC adherence & wrong Christology- probably *both* occurred in some Hebrew churches)

3. And the OC adherents would have continued to *claim* the correct connection to Christ
  - a. Though it's certainly conceivable that some of them simply returned to full-fledged Judaism
  - b. Their case would have been easy to discern
- O. Modern offshoots of OC adherence present us difficulties of detection similar to the original Hebrew Christian audience
  1. We have spoken of whole **BRANCHES** of Christianity that have embraced OC shadows
  2. But do their *members* automatically fit the 5-fold description? No.
    - a. However, it is very telling if, being confronted with the apostate nature of their **BRANCH**, they refuse to separate from it. Now their *own* spiritual stripe becomes more apparent.
    - b. And who's treating them with greater love? The Christian who grants them the **benefit of the doubt**, or the one who treats their case with alarm?
    - c. Again, the ostensible go-to answer (b.o.t.d.) doesn't jive with our passages (Heb & 1 Jn)

**Kid-speak:** What's the first thing we should think of doing if a Christian falls away? Try to get them back!

- P. The root word "fall," *pipto*, in similar contexts
  1. "Fall aside" is a compound word that occurs only in Heb 6:6
  2. But the word "fall" by itself is used in a similar way elsewhere
    - a. Heb 4:11 spoke of this kind of fall
      - i. A warning
      - ii. The precursor warning to our passage
    - b. Rom 11:22 speaks of the Hebrew apostasy **as a whole**, warning Gentile converts not to do the same, but it doesn't consider Jews who had first confessed Christ.
    - c. 1 Cor 10:12 is a good, overall admonition about "falling" in relation to our prideful assumption that we stand. It can be applied to all levels of straying.
- \* Q. Another relevant compound word with "fall" is the one occurring in the familiar Gal 5:4: "You are voided from Christ, whoever is declared righteous through Law: you fell from grace"

1. *ek-pipto*, more precisely fitting the phrase “fell away.” Also “fell out of” or “fell off,” connoting **departure**
  - a. This warning was to the mainly Gentile church in Galatia that had been seduced by rogue Jewish-Christian teachers
  - b. The state described is just as alarming: a disconnection from Christ
  - ☞ c. The same issues facing the Hebrews audience may well have been part of the Galatian seduction, esp. circumcision
2. 2 Pet 3:17, to a Jewish-Christian audience
  - a. A warning not to be seduced by an *antinomian* spirit, the particular “lawless” ones he describe in 2 Peter 2
  - b. Antinomian, “against Law.” Strictly speaking, the opposite error from Galatians,
    - i. who had too much Law,
    - ii. but more accurately, the wrong *application* of the Law,
    - iii. since the real Gospel actually *vindicates* the Law, Rom 3:31
  - ❖ c. Specifically, false teachers who used God’s grace as a covering for **FLESHLY PRACTICES**, 2 Pet 2:18
  - d. But here, once again, we learn that their state is beyond dire! 2 Pet 2:20
    - i. Their post-conversion entanglement = a *worse* state
    - ii. Worse than unsaved?? How? It’s permanent.

**Kid-speak:** Some people fall away from Jesus by saying things about Him that don’t line up with the Bible. Some fall away by deciding to do bad things regularly.

- R. One phrase that comes to mind in our connection is the “unforgiveable sin,” derived from Matt 12:31-32
1. When the Pharisees had attributed Jesus’ exorcisms to Satan
    - a. Jesus called this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit
    - b. As opposed to blaspheming even Himself
  2. The only “sin” or “blasphemy” that is unforgiveable
    - a. Note, though, that it is a “word” spoken against Jesus that can be forgiven
    - b. But it is simply “speaking against” the Spirit (“word” not mentioned) that = unforgiveable
  3. Is Jesus’ implication that it is speaking against the Spirit *in our hearts* that imperils us?
    - a. That would line it up with Jn 16:7-11. The Spirit convicts

everyone. Saying “no” to him *all our lives* in our heart = this blasphemy.

b. In Heb 6:4-6, then, the blasphemy issue is settled *before* the end of life. Scary.

(c. The argument that Matt 12:31-32 only applied to Jesus’ earthly ministry would mean that the Spirit ceased to work similarly after the Ascension)

S. Think of Heb 3:17-18 and Jude 1:5. The ancient Jews had certainly “tasted” God’s miraculous presence and were in some sense “saved” (Jude 1:5), yet they “fell away” forever.

V. For the Walking Wounded (1 Thess 5:14, “Uphold the strengthless”) A spiritual limp is just a deeper bruise that we *all* have.

VI. Conviction (2 Tim 4:2, “Convince, rebuke”): **What have I done wrong?  
How have I lost righteousness?**

Do I define the dangerous falling away like God does?

VII. Correction/ Realignment (2 Tim 4:2, “Exhort/encourage”):  
**How will I correct my error? How will I regain uprightness?**

I will humbly consider my *own* standing, lest I fall.

VIII. Schooling in Righteousness: **How do I take this on the road?**

We must • define Christ’s circle of fellowship, then • drag each other across the finish line.

Wrap-up: In closing, let’s think of how we must keep ourselves from falling away. Hebrews is a good book for that. Heb 3:6, 13, 14; 4:1, 11. We already had 1 Pet 3:17. Then there’s 1 Cor 15:58.

To keep from falling away, we must hold fast to our standing in Christ.

Even the ‘easy parts’ of that aren’t easy, as Heb 10:25 affirms. Assembling is a real commitment. If we really fellowship with each other, that will present difficulties at times, just as in any family situation.

But it is a real means of holding fast to our standing. Plus, it has benefits now, and more hereafter.