

CORRESPONDENCE

Chafer Theological Seminary wishes to encourage dialogue between those who write the journal and those who read it.

Manuscripts

Authors, please send all manuscripts of articles or reviews to the care of Dr. George Meisinger. We require both hardcopy and floppy disk (in Microsoft Word format) along with biographical information from the author. Turabian, *A Guide for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* or *Chicago Manual of Style* are acceptable formats. Please contact us if you need additional editing guidelines. Authors of articles accepted for publication will receive remuneration.

Books for Review

Send all books for review to the care of Dr. John Niemelä.

Address

CTS Journal
c/o _____
1800 E. La Veta Avenue
Orange, CA 92866

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are \$20.00 per year to addresses in the USA. To subscribe please write or send the "Subscription Order" to us. Foreign subscribers, please contact us regarding rates.

Comments or Questions

Readers, please send comments or questions regarding an article to the care of *its author*.

We want to hear from you and appreciate your cooperation.

Chafer Theological Seminary Journal

Equipping believers for the work of the ministry

Volume 9	Number 1	Spring 2003														
<p>We publish the <i>CTS Journal</i> biannually for the students, families, and friends of the seminary.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Credits</p> <p>We begin our credits with the Lord Jesus Christ. His enablement makes the <i>CTS Journal</i> possible.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Editor-in-chief <i>George E. Meisinger</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Editor <i>John Niemelä</i></p> <p>Assistants to the Editor <i>Ann Marshall</i> <i>Bogdana Shuvar</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Production <i>Gary Lincoln</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">©Copyright 2003 Chafer Theological Seminary</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">In This Issue</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; width: 70%;">Articles:</th> <th style="text-align: right; width: 30%;">Pages</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>Fallen Away Or Fallen Down? The Meaning Of Hebrews 6:1-9</i> By Hal Harless</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">2-17</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>Harmony With God (Part 3 of 3)</i> By Zane C. Hodges</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">18-42</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The Meaning Of PROGINWSKW ("Foreknowledge")</i> By Thomas R. Edgar</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">43-80</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>Teaching For Doctrines The Commandments of Men</i> By Ann Marshall</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">81-105</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time</i> By Ron J. Bigalke Jr.</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">106-140</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>Gender-Inclusive Bible Translations</i> By Ron Minton</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: top; padding: 5px;">141-146</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Articles:	Pages	<i>Fallen Away Or Fallen Down? The Meaning Of Hebrews 6:1-9</i> By Hal Harless	2-17	<i>Harmony With God (Part 3 of 3)</i> By Zane C. Hodges	18-42	<i>The Meaning Of PROGINWSKW ("Foreknowledge")</i> By Thomas R. Edgar	43-80	<i>Teaching For Doctrines The Commandments of Men</i> By Ann Marshall	81-105	<i>The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time</i> By Ron J. Bigalke Jr.	106-140	<i>Gender-Inclusive Bible Translations</i> By Ron Minton	141-146
Articles:	Pages															
<i>Fallen Away Or Fallen Down? The Meaning Of Hebrews 6:1-9</i> By Hal Harless	2-17															
<i>Harmony With God (Part 3 of 3)</i> By Zane C. Hodges	18-42															
<i>The Meaning Of PROGINWSKW ("Foreknowledge")</i> By Thomas R. Edgar	43-80															
<i>Teaching For Doctrines The Commandments of Men</i> By Ann Marshall	81-105															
<i>The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time</i> By Ron J. Bigalke Jr.	106-140															
<i>Gender-Inclusive Bible Translations</i> By Ron Minton	141-146															
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Chafer Theological Seminary</i> 1800 East La Veta Avenue Orange, CA 92866 714-288-9555 800-68-GRACE [800-684-7223]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Email: chaferseminary@aol.com WEB: www.chafer.edu FAX: 714-288-1526</p>																

FALLEN AWAY OR FALLEN DOWN? THE MEANING OF HEBREWS 6:1–9

by
Hal Harless

A Brief History of the Problem

Robert Gromacki calls Hebrews 6:1–9, “Probably the most controversial passage within Hebrews.”¹ Especially troubling is its assertion that renewal to repentance is impossible for those who fall. This interpretive problem has a long history.

The Early Church

Tertullian taught, based on Hebrews 6:1–9, that those guilty of a mortal sin, such as adultery or fornication, could not be restored. The followers of Novatianus saw the word *impossible* in Hebrews 6:4 precluding restoration of those who denied the faith under persecution. Ambrose responded “that things which are impossible with men are possible with God; and God is able whensoever He wills to forgive us our sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. And so it is possible for God to give us that which it seems to us impossible to obtain.”² John Chrysostum taught that re-baptism was impossible, not repentance.³

Calvinist Interpretations

Calvinists generally see this passage as hypothetical or as describing those who stop short of full faith in Jesus. John Calvin taught that Hebrews 6:1–9 refers to the reprobate unbeliever.⁴ However, Albert Barnes took the hypothetical view:

¹ Robert Glenn Gromacki, *Salvation Is Forever* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 151.

² Ambrose, *Libri duo de poenitentia* 2.12, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*, 14 vols., trans. H. de Romestin, ed. Philip Schaff, in *The Master Christian Library* ver. 8.0 [CD-ROM] (Albany, OR: AGES, 1997), 10:690.

³ John Chrysostum, *Homilies on Hebrews* 9.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.21.

Fallen Away Or Fallen Down 3

It is material to remark here that the apostle does not say that any true Christian ever had fallen away. He makes a statement of what *would* occur on the supposition that such a thing should happen—but a statement may be made of what would occur on the supposition that a certain thing should take place, and yet it be morally certain that the event never would happen.⁵

Barnes clearly considered such apostasy hypothetical:

The passage *proves* that if true Christians should apostatize, it would be impossible to renew and save them. If then it should be asked whether I believe that any true Christian ever did, or ever will fall from grace, and wholly lose his religion, I would answer unhesitatingly, *no*. . . .⁶

Arminians, of course, roundly reject both of these approaches.

The Arminian Interpretation

Arminians have held that this passage teaches the real danger of the loss of salvation.⁷ Adam Clarke said, “It appears from this, whatever sentiment may gain or lose by it, that there is a fearful possibility *of falling away from the grace of God*. . . .”⁸ Denying the apostate any chance of repentance in Hebrews 6:1–9 also poses a problem for Arminians. Nevertheless, John Wesley did not shrink from the impossibility of repentance:

⁵ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, 14 vols., ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 13:130.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13:131.

⁷ Curiously, James Arminius, “A Dissertation of the Epistle to the Romans,” *The Works of Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols, William Nichols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1828; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:494, 530, 541; and “A Letter on the Sin Against the Holy Ghost,” *The Works of Arminius*, 2:731–54, agreed with the Reformed position that those mentioned by Hebrews 6:1–9 were not Christians.

⁸ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments*, 6 vols. (reprint, Nashville, TN: Abingdon, n.d.), 6:725.

4 *CTS Journal* 9 (Spring 2003)

Here is not a supposition, but a plain relation of fact. The apostle here describes the case of those who have cast away both the power and the form of godliness; who have lost both their faith, hope, and love, Hebrews 6:10, etc., and that wilfully, Hebrews 10:26. Of these wilful total apostates he declares, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. (though they were renewed once) either to the foundation, or anything built thereon.⁹

Ralph Earle, challenges the hypothetical view, “The Greek clearly indicates that one may become a partaker of the Holy Spirit—obviously a Christian—and yet fall away and be lost.”¹⁰ With such a variety of interpretations, how are we to understand Hebrews 6:1–9?

The Identity of the Fallen

The Problem of Immaturity

The first key to Hebrews 6:1–9 is identifying those who *have fallen away* (6:6).¹¹ The immediate context describes the author’s difficulty in explaining the Messiah’s Melchizedekian priesthood to readers who had *become dull of hearing* (Hebrews 5:11). Although sufficient time had elapsed for them to be teachers themselves, there was *need again (palin) for someone to teach you the elementary principles (ta stoicheia tēs archēs) of the oracles of God* (Hebrews 5:12). They were not mature believers, capable of handling solid food, because (as spiritual infants, requiring milk) they had not progressed past the elementary principles (Hebrews 5:13–14).¹²

⁹ John Wesley, *Notes on the Bible: New Testament* (n.p.: 1754), in *Master Christian Library* ver. 8.0 [CD-ROM] (Albany, OR: AGES, 1997), 741–42.

¹⁰ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 423.

¹¹ All Scripture quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: Lockman, 1995).

¹² Craig S. Keener, “Milk,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 707–9; and Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

Fallen Away Or Fallen Down 5

Therefore, Hebrews exhorts them to leave *the elementary* (*tēs archēs*) *teaching about the Christ* and *press on to maturity* (Hebrews 6:1). In going on to maturity, the author would not be *laying again a foundation* (*mē palin themelion kataballomenoi*) (Hebrews 6:1). The participle *kataballomenoi* (“laying”) and the adverb *palin* (“again”) show that the author of Hebrews did not intend repeatedly to lay down the same foundation.

Six items constitute the foundation. The first is *repentance from dead works* (*metanoias apo nekrōn ergōn*) (Hebrews 6:1). Hebrews uses the same phrase, *from dead works* (*apo nekrōn ergōn*) to refer to the Levitical sacrifices (Hebrews 9:13–14). Significantly, avoidance of persecution is what tempted them to return to Judaism and the sacrificial system with its dead works (Hebrews 10:18–39). The next foundational element is *faith in God* (*pisteōs epi theon*), referring to the promised rest of faith in Hebrews 3–4.

The foundational instruction also includes *washings* (*baptismōn*) and *laying on of hands*, and *the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment* (Hebrews 6:2).¹³ The plural *washings* may point to Jewish ritual washings (e.g., Leviticus 14:8; 16:24, 26) as well as to Christian baptism. The *laying on of hands* appears in the sacrificial system (e.g., Leviticus 16:21) as well as the New Testament (cf. Luke 4:40; Acts 8:18; 2 Timothy 1:6). These elementary teachings are not distinctively Christian, so Orthodox Judaism could have endorsed practically every item. Apparently, existing Jewish beliefs and practices served as a foundation for expounding Christian truth.¹⁴

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 659, show that milk commonly stood for elementary studies.

¹³ R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 12 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 11:176–77.

¹⁴ David Peterson, “Hebrews,” in *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) [CD-ROM] accessible via *Libronix Digital Library System v1.0c* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2000).

Whatever the precise meaning of each of these teachings, together they are the *foundation* that the author of Hebrews determined not to lay again (Hebrews 6:1).

The Description of the Fallen

The pronouns in Hebrews 5:11–6:9 give the first clue that identifies those who have fallen. Hebrews 6:4–8 is the only portion of Hebrews 5:11–6:9 that does not use pronouns addressing the readers. It refers to others, not to the readers.

References to the Readers	References to Others Only
<p><i>you</i> have become hard of hearing, <i>you</i> ought to be teachers, <i>you</i> have need again for someone to teach <i>you</i>, <i>you</i> have come to need milk (5:11–12) <i>let us</i> press on, and <i>this we</i> shall do (6:1–3)</p> <p><i>we</i> are convinced of better things concerning <i>you</i> (6:9)</p>	<p><i>those</i> and <i>they</i> (6:4–8)</p>

As the author continues to identify the “those” and the “they,” who are not the readers, it is important to observe his syntax. One article *tous* governs five aorist participles. The first four describe those who have fallen (6:4–8), while the fifth participle states the fact of their fall. R. C. H. Lenski refers to these as “aorists of fact.”¹⁵ Robertson comments that *hapax* (“once”) “here is ‘once for all,’ not once upon a time (*pote*) and occurs again (9:7, 26, 27, 28; 12:26, 27).”¹⁶ Lenski notes, “We

¹⁵ Lenski, *Commentary*, 11:181.

¹⁶ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932), 5:375; J. H. Moulton, G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (MM)* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 53, s.v. *hapax*; Frederick William Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-Deutsches*

Fallen Away Or Fallen Down 7

confess that we are unable to see why ‘once’ should not be construed with all the participles save the last, ‘fell away,’ which naturally needs no modifying adverb.”¹⁷ Marcus Dods links the description of the fallen with the elementary teachings:

The statement falls into three parts: (1) A description of a class of persons. . . . (2) The statement of a fact regarding these persons. . . . (3) The cause of this fact. . . . First, the description here given of those who have entered upon the Christian life is parallel to the description given in vv. 1, 2 of elementary Christian teaching; although the parallel is not carried out in detail.¹⁸

Thus, the first four participles describe those who fell away.

First, the fallen in Hebrews 6:4 are those who have been once for all *enlightened*, an aorist passive participle of *phōtizō* (“to enlighten”). The passive voice indicates a work of grace and not self-effort. Leon Morris comments:

Some see in the reference to being ‘enlightened’ a glance at baptism, for this verb was often used of baptism in the second century. But it is not attested as early as this, and so it is better to interpret the term in the light of the general usage whereby those admitted to the Christian faith are brought to that light that is “the light of the world” (John 8:12; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; 2 Pet. 1:19).¹⁹

Hebrews 10:32 uses *phōtizō* for conversion, so the fallen are genuine believers.

Second, Hebrews 6:4 describes the fallen as those who have once for all *tasted (geusamenous) of the heavenly gift*. This aorist middle participle of *geuomai* (“to taste”) indicates that they had

Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur (BDAG), 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 97, s.v. *hapax*.

¹⁷ Lenski, *Commentary*, 11:182.

¹⁸ Marcus Dods, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 4:295–96.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (EBC)*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:55.

tasted for themselves of the heavenly gift. BDAG defines *geuomai* as “fig. *come to know someth. . . . obtain a gift* Hb 6:4.”²⁰ The meaning of experience is supported by the fact that Christ did *taste death for everyone* (*hyper pantos geusētai thanatou*) (Hebrews 2:9) and that we *have tasted the kindness of the Lord* (*egeusasthe hoti chrēstos ho kyrios*) (1 Peter 2:3, alluding to Psalms 34:8). Each of the ten other New Testament uses of *dōrea* (“gift”) refer to receiving Christ, the Holy Spirit, or something given by Christ.²¹ The fallen are believers, because they have experienced the gift of God’s Son and/or the Holy Spirit.

Third, the fallen have been once for all *made partakers* (*metochous genēthentas*) of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4). This stative participle shows that God made them partake of the Holy Spirit, not they themselves. BDAG lists two meanings for *metochos*, “1. *sharing/participating in, as adj. w. gen. of the pers. or thing. . . . 2. subst. (business) partner, companion. . . .*”²² The accompanying participle favors the former. They share in the Holy Spirit, so they are regenerate (cf. Romans 8:9; Titus 3:5–7).

Fourth, the fallen are those who have once for all *tasted* (*geusamenous*) *the good word of God and the powers of the age to come* (Hebrews 6:5). Again, this aorist middle participle of *geuomai* means *have experienced for themselves*. Not only are the fallen eternally saved, but also they had experienced personally the goodness of God’s word and His power.

These four participles describe believers. Barnes says that:

the language here is such as appropriately describes Christians, and as indeed can be applicable to no other. It may be remarked

²⁰ BDAG, 195, s.v. *geuomai*.

²¹ John 4:10; Romans 5:15, 17; 2 Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 4:7 refer to Jesus as the gift. Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17 refer to the Holy Spirit as the gift. The remaining passage, Ephesians 3:7, refers to God’s grace given to believers. However, Ephesians 4:7 connects that gift of grace to the gift of His Son.

²² BDAG, 643, s.v. *metochos*, prefers the first meaning in this context.

respecting the various expressions used here (ver. 4, 5,) (1) that they are such as properly denote a renewed state. They obviously describe the condition of a Christian; and though it may be not certain that any one of them, if taken by itself, would prove that the person to whom it was applied was truly converted, yet, taken together, it is clear that they are designed to describe such a state. If they are not, it would be difficult to find any language which would be properly descriptive of the character of a sincere Christian. I regard the description here, therefore, as that which is clearly designed to denote the state of those who were born again, and were the true children of God; and it seems plain to me, that no other interpretation would ever have been thought of, if this view had not seemed to conflict with the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints.”²³

Therefore, Hebrews 6:4–5 describes believers. They had enjoyed these four blessings and yet fell away.

The Nature of the Fall in Hebrews 6:6

Is the Fall in Hebrews 6:6 Hypothetical?

The first issue is the factuality of the fall. Some assert that the fall is only hypothetical. A second-class condition would make this clear, but the Greek has no condition at all. The text has an adjectival participle of *parapiptō* (“have fallen away”) (Hebrews 6:6). This participle cannot be conditional, since its controlling article makes it adjectival rather than adverbial.²⁴

Zane Hodges comments, “Far from treating the question in any hypothetical way, the writer’s language sounds as if he knew

²³ Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, 13:129.

²⁴ An article controls the participle in what resembles a Granville Sharp construction, so it is adjectival, not adverbial. Cf. J. A. Sproule, “*Parapesontas* in Hebrews 6:6,” *GTJ* 2 (Fall 1981): 327–32; and Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 632–33. James L. Boyer, “Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek,” *GTJ* 4 (Fall 1983): 185–86, agrees with Sproule on grammar, but still considers Hebrews 6:1–9 to be hypothetical.

of such cases.”²⁵ Walter Kaiser challenges the logic of the hypothetical position:

Is it possible that the author is simply writing about a hypothetical situation? If so, there are two possible ways to understand it. The first is that both the author and his readers know that this cannot happen, so it is hypothetical for all of them. In that case one wonders why the author wasted his ink. His purpose clearly is to exhort them not to return to Judaism. If his warnings are only hypothetical, how would they keep people from apostatizing? The second possibility is that the author knows this is hypothetical, but he believes his readers will take it seriously. In that case it would serve as a warning, but it would be deceptive. Is the author of Hebrews likely to defend the truth with deception? Would he scare his readers with a situation he knows could never happen?²⁶

Thus, Hebrews 6:6 must describe an actual fall.

The Meaning of the Fall in Hebrews 6:6

Although most contemporary commentators define *parapiptō* in Hebrews 6:6 as fall away or apostatize, linguistic evidence does not support this. Liddell and Scott take the basic meaning of *parapiptō* in Classical Greek to be *fall beside . . . fall in one's way . . . go astray, err.*²⁷ They list the meaning of *fall aside* or *away from*,²⁸ but note that this usage precedes the genitive of the object from which one had fallen. Hebrews 6:6 lacks this construction. The text does not read *kai parapesontas tēs pisteōs* (“and fell aside

²⁵ Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck (n.p.: Victor, 1983), 795.

²⁶ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 682–83.

²⁷ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1321, s.v. *parapiptō*.

²⁸ *Ibid.* They cite Polybius 3.54.5; 12.12.2; 8.11.8; and Strabo, *Geography*, 1.1.7 as examples of a usage similar to Hebrews 6:6.

[from the faith]”).²⁹ Moreover, W. Bauder defines *parapiptō* as “lit. fall beside, befall, go astray, err,”³⁰ or as “a mistake, err, meaning an accidental and excusable oversight.”³¹ Michaelis also summarizes the Classical meaning of *parapiptō* as “‘to fall beside or aside,’ . . . ‘to stumble on something by chance,’ . . . ‘to be led somewhere or other’ . . . The sense ‘to be led past,’ ‘to go astray,’ ‘to be mistaken,’ also occurs in Polyb. . . . also abs. ‘to make a mistake.’”³² Thus, in Classical Greek, *parapiptō* does not mean to apostatize.

The Septuagint’s eight uses of *parapiptō* do not support the meaning of apostatize either. Esther 6:10 translates *parapiptō* “to fall short” of fulfilling a command. Wisdom 6:9 uses it for fall into error³³ or transgress.³⁴ Wisdom 12:2 translates it as offend³⁵ or trespass.³⁶ The remaining passages are all in Ezekiel (14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4).³⁷ In Ezekiel 18:24, the phrase *in his*

²⁹ In Acts 13:8, Elymas was “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (*zētōn diastrepsai ton anthypton apo tēs pisteōs*). Paul wrote to Timothy that, in the later times *some will fall away from the faith* (*apostēsontai tines tēs pisteōs*) (1 Timothy 4:1). Hebrews 3:12 exhorts being careful lest anyone *falls away from the living God* (*apostēnai apo theou zōntos*). We see this construction with *ekpiptō* (“fall away”) as well. Paul warned that, in their legalism, the Galatians had *fallen from grace* (*tēs charitos exepesate*) (Galatians 5:4). Peter also warned his readers that they might *fall from your own steadfastness* (*exepesēte tou idiou stērigmou*) (2 Peter 3:17). John used the adverb *pothen* (“from where”) with *piptō* (“to fall”) to remind the Ephesians *from where you have fallen* (*pothen peptōkas*) (Revelation 2:5).

³⁰ W. Bauder, “Fall Away,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, 4 vols., ed. Collin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:608, s.v. *piptō*.

³¹ W. Bauder, “Sin,” *NIDNTT*, 3:585, s.v. *paraptōma*.

³² Wilhelm Michaelis, “*Parapiptō, paraptōma*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, ed. G. Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:170.

³³ Wisdom 6:9 (New Jerusalem Bible).

³⁴ Wisdom 6:9 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁵ Wisdom 12:2 (New Jerusalem Bible).

³⁶ Wisdom 12:2 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁷ The NASB and the NIV tend to translate *parapiptō* as “act unfaithful” or “treacherously.” However, the KJV, ASV, Young’s Literal Translation, and the

*trespass wherein he has trespassed (en tō paraptōmati autou hō parepesen) parallels and in his sins wherein he has sinned (kai en tais hamartiais autou hais hēmarten).*³⁸ The conjunction *kai* joining these phrases is ascensive.³⁹ The Septuagint of Ezekiel sees *parapiptō* and *hamartanō* as synonyms.⁴⁰ Bauder, who does consider *parapiptō* to mean fall away in Hebrews 6:6, still admits, “The NT sense of to lose one’s salvation has no parallel in the OT. . . . The meaning to sin is found only where *parapiptō* is used. . . .”⁴¹ Thus, the Septuagint does not use *parapiptō* for to apostatize.

Koiné Greek did not use *parapiptō* for apostatizing. Josephus used it twice for to befall⁴² and once as being deprived of something.⁴³ Moulton and Milligan also note the meaning of *parapiptō* as fall into (c. A.D. 330–40), as well as contractual terms to be broken (A.D. 129), and something being lost (A.D. 396).⁴⁴ A literal translation of *parapiptō* as fall aside fits the last two examples. The terms of a broken contract have fallen aside in the same sense as *parapiptō* appears in Esther 6:10 (LXX). A lost document has fallen aside somewhere and cannot be found. Clement of Rome (c. late first century A.D.) used *parapiptō* in the sense of to sin.⁴⁵ In contemporary usage *parapiptō* meant to fall aside, to fall into, or to sin, not to apostatize.

The New Testament uses *parapiptō* only once, Hebrews 6:6. Vincent explains, “It means to deviate, turn aside.”⁴⁶ Thayer

Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* consistently translate it as trespass or transgress.

³⁸ Ezekiel 18:24 (Brenton’s English Translation of the LXX).

³⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 670–71.

⁴⁰ See also Michaelis, “*Parapiptō*, *paraptōma*,” 6:170.

⁴¹ Bauder, “Fall Away,” 1:609.

⁴² Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.362; 16.200. See also Michaelis, “*Parapiptō*, *paraptōma*,” 6:171.

⁴³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.285.

⁴⁴ *MM*, 488–99, s.v. *parapiptō*.

⁴⁵ *I Clement* 51.1; 56.1. This agrees with Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20, who saw the verb referring to mortal sin and not apostasy.

⁴⁶ Vincent, *Word Studies*, 4:991.

correctly defines it as “prop. *to fall beside* a pers. or thing; *to slip aside*; hence *to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wander . . . ; to err . . .*” but unjustifiably claim that it means “in the Scriptures, *to fall away* (from the true faith) . . . from Christianity.”⁴⁷ Michaelis, although writing that “the sense seems to be ‘fallen away’ . . .” notes that *parapiptō* “does not mean ‘to fall away,’ but ‘to offend,’ ‘to fall,’ ‘to sin,’ as in the LXX.”⁴⁸ BDAG defines *parapiptō* as “(. . . In the pap. mostly = become lost) *fall beside, go astray, miss* (. . . = make a mistake) *fall away, commit apostasy . . . whatever sins we have committed* 1 Cl 51:1.”⁴⁹ The lack of evidence from Classical Greek, the Septuagint, and contemporary Koiné Greek makes the lexicographers’ compulsion to add terms such as “fall away” and “commit apostasy” to their definitions hard to understand.

The New Testament uses the verb only here, but the noun, *paraptōma*, always speaks of “sin” not “apostasy.”⁵⁰ Sanders translates the noun form as “trespass.”⁵¹ Doriani sees *paraptōma* as a “general term for offenses or lapses.”⁵² Other Greek words clearly express the idea of apostasy, such as *aphistēmi*⁵³ and *skandalizō*.⁵⁴ If *parapiptō* meant “to fall away from the faith” or “apostatize” in Hebrews 6:6, it would be the singular exception.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Thayer, *GELNT*, 485, s. v. *parapiptō*.

⁴⁸ Michaelis, “*Parapiptō, paraptōma*,” 6:171.

⁴⁹ *BDAG*, 626, s. v. *parapiptō*.

⁵⁰ A good example is Romans 5:13 compared with 5:20, where *paraptōma* parallels *hamartia*. See Michaelis, 6:172, s.v. “*Parapiptō, paraptōma*”.

⁵¹ E. P. Sanders, “Sin, Sinners (NT),” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:41. See also S. J. De Vries, “Sin, Sinners,” *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 4:371. Although agreeing on *paraptōma*, DeVries renders *parapiptein* as “to apostatize from God.”

⁵² Daniel Doriani, “Sin,” *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 737.

⁵³ 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12.

⁵⁴ Matthew 24:10; 26:31, 33; Mark 4:17; 14:27, 29; Luke 8:13.

⁵⁵ Charles B. Williams translates Hebrews 6:6 as *and then have fallen by the wayside* (The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People).

This warning addresses sinners, not apostates. They had fallen down, not away. They were saved but were not holding fast to their confession (Hebrews 4:14; 10:23). They forsook assembling with other Christians (Hebrews 10:25). Even though Christ has *perfected for all time those who are sanctified* (Hebrews 10:14) and they had been *sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10:10), they returned to the dead works of Levitical sacrifices to avoid persecution (Hebrews 10:32–36). However, the Levitical offerings were no longer valid (Hebrews 10:18; 26) and they were *sinning willfully* by going back to them. This put them under divine chastisement (Hebrews 10:26–31).

The Impossibility of Renewal to Repentance

The Meaning of Impossible

The word *impossible* (*adynatos*) comes first in the Greek for emphasis. Vincent remarks, “It is impossible to dilute this word into *difficult*.”⁵⁶ Calvin commented, “For some take *impossible* in the sense of rare or difficult, which is wholly different from its meaning.”⁵⁷ The author of Hebrews characteristically uses *adynatos* to describe something that is in the nature of the case impossible (Hebrews 6:18; 10:4; 11:6).

What Is Impossible?

Hebrews 6:1–3 expresses the author’s intent to *leave the elementary teaching about the Christ, press on to maturity*, and not *lay again a foundation*. Hebrews 6:3 states, *And this (touto) we shall do, if God permits. This probably refers to all three goals of Hebrews 6:1.*⁵⁸ The audience, whom Hebrews 5:11–6:3 addresses,

⁵⁶ Vincent, *Word Studies*, 2:1121. See also Alford, *Greek Testament*, 4:113 and Dods, “Hebrews,” 4:298.

⁵⁷ Calvin, “Hebrews,” 74.

⁵⁸ This is the same sort of construction as Ephesians 2:8 where *touto* refers to the entire matter of salvation by grace. See Timothy R. Nichols, “Reverse-

must press on to maturity *for*, in the case of the others mentioned in Hebrews 6:4–6, *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance* (Hebrews 6:6). *We* must go on to maturity for it is impossible for *them* to do so. By the transgression of returning to the sacrificial system, they placed themselves beyond repentance. However, their state need not be enduring.

The impossibility of renewing them to repentance remains while they continue to *again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame*. The present infinitive *anakainizein* (*to renew*) governs two dependent adverbial participles, *anastaurountas* (*again crucify*) and *paradeigmatizontas* (*put Him to open shame*).⁵⁹ Most translations take them causally.⁶⁰ Robertson comments, “This is the reason why renewal for such apostates is impossible. They crucify Christ.”⁶¹ The point is that it is impossible to bring them to repentance as long as they continue in this transgression. Returning to the sacrificial system was tantamount to crucifying Christ *to themselves* (*heautois*). This *put Him to open shame* because it implies that the death of Christ, instead of being *one sacrifice for sins for all time* (Hebrews 10:1–12), was no better than the repeated Levitical offerings.

The Analogy of the Field

Hebrews 6:7–8 illustrates this warning with an agricultural analogy. Blessing and curse terminology establishes a covenantal context. The author of Hebrews refers to God’s judgment of the believer’s works. The land (representing the believer) receives the rain, God’s blessing (Hebrews 6:7). The land may either yield fruit or thorns (Hebrews 6:7–8). Fruit is a common metaphor for

Engineered Outlining: A Method for Epistolary Exegesis, “*CTSJournal* 7 (April 2001): 34–38; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 334–35.

⁵⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 622–23.

⁶⁰ The NASB, ESV, NKJV, NJB, NAB, and RSV all add *since*. The NIV, BBE, and the NLT all add *because*.

⁶¹ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 5:375.

good works.⁶² In the same way thorns, recalling Genesis 3:18, are a metaphor for bad works.⁶³ The end of the non-productive land is burning. Hodges notes that many misunderstand this image:

Naturally, the reference to “burned” has caused many to think of hell. . . . In fact, to think of hell here is to betray inattention to the imagery employed by the author. The burning of a field to destroy the rank growth it had produced was a practice known in ancient times. Its aim was not the destruction of the field itself (which, of course, the fire could not effect), but the destruction of the unwanted produce of the field. Thereafter the field might be serviceable for cultivation.⁶⁴

We may compare the Parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1–16). Derickson demonstrates that the practices in the passage seek to promote growth,⁶⁵ which is very appropriate when speaking of believers, but not unbelievers. Hebrews 6:7–8 does not refer to eternal salvation but *things that accompany salvation*.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Hebrews 6:1–9 does not support the traditional Calvinist interpretations because the fallen are clearly believers and the situation is not hypothetical. Furthermore, the text does not support either the traditional Calvinist or Arminian positions for it does not concern apostasy.

⁶² See Matthew 3:10; 7:16–19; 12:33; 13:23; 21:43; Mark 4:20; Luke 3:9; 6:43–44; 8:14–15; 13:6–9; John 4:36; 12:24; 15:1–16; Romans 1:13; 7:4–5; 15:28; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9; Philippians 1:11; Colossians 1:6, 10; Hebrews 12:11; 13:15; James 3:18.

⁶³ See Matthew 13:7, 22; Mark 4:7, 18; Luke 6:44; 8:7, 14.

⁶⁴ Hodges, “Hebrews,” 795–6. See also Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4–8,” *BSac* 155 (January–March 1998): 86–90. Interestingly, a few years after Hebrews was written, the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system ended.

⁶⁵ Gary W. Derickson, “Viticulture and John 15:1–6,” *BSac* 153 (January–March 1996): 34–52. See also 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.

⁶⁶ Morris, “Hebrews,” *EBC*, 12:57.

Fallen Away Or Fallen Down 17

Hebrews 6:1–9 refers to Christians who sin, not who apostatize, teaching the danger of continuing immaturity. We must progress on to maturity, since renewal to repentance is impossible as long as we re-crucify Christ by returning to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Moreover, the text teaches a real danger of divine discipline to correct our sin and prepare us for good works. However, Hebrews never threatens believers with the absence or loss of salvation.

—**End**—

Hal Harless holds a B.A. in German (University of Texas, Arlington, Texas), M.S. in Management Information Systems (University of Texas, Dallas, Texas), and a Ph.D. in Theology (Louisiana Baptist Theological Seminary, Shreveport, Louisiana). Hal is an ordained minister and Bible teacher in Garland, TX. His email address is halharless@attbi.com.