

## “Posers, Losers or Quitters?”

Hebrews 5:11-6:8

What does it mean to fall away? Who is the audience? Does this warning apply to me? This is a greatly debated passage. Let's survey the options.

Who can “fall away”?

I. Posers – Never had it, never will

A. Assumption: Every genuine believer will end life walking in holiness

“The crucial test of true faith is endurance to the end, abiding in Christ, and continuance in his word. It is true that a believer sins; he may fall into grievous sin and backslide for lengthy periods. But it is also true that a believer cannot abandon himself to sin; he cannot come under the dominion of sin; he cannot be guilty of certain kinds of unfaithfulness... [This teaching] reminds us very forcefully that only those who persevere to the end are truly saints.”

—John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 156

“We will mention some things which, if they are absent, indicate that the ‘root of the matter’ (Job 19:28) is not in the person. One who regards sin lightly, who thinks nothing of breaking a promise, who is careless in performance of temporal duties, who gives no sign of a tender conscience which is exercised over what is commonly called ‘trifles,’ lacks the one thing needful. A person who is vain and self-important, who pushes to the fore seeking the notice of others, who parades his fancied knowledge and attainments, has not learned of Him who is ‘meek and lowly of heart.’ One who is hypersensitive, who is deeply hurt if someone slights him, who resents a word of reproof no matter how kindly spoken, betrays the lack of a humble and teachable spirit. One who frets over disappointments, murmurs each time his will is crossed and rebels against the dispensations of Providence, exhibits a will which has not been Divinely subdued.”

—Arthur Pink, *Eternal Security*, p. 67

Is this assumption correct? Or can a genuine believer fail to persevere?

B. Examples: Failure to persevere

- Lot (Gen. 19; 2 Pet. 2:7-8; last mentioned as incestuous)

- Gideon (Judges 8:27 – died idolatrous)
- Solomon (1 Kings 1-11 – died idolatrous)
- Uzziah (2 Chron 26 – died a leper)
- Demas (2 Tim. 4:10 – deserted Paul)
- Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:18-20 – shipwrecked faith)
- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)
- 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 11:29-30

It appears that a genuine believer can fail to persevere.

In the face of so many apparent illustrations of believers failing to live holy lives, how can they be so confident that believers will live a holy life in the end?

“...Paul says works are the purpose of a ‘forepreparing’ God [i.e. a God who prepares good works beforehand for His people] (Eph. 2:10). Shall a sovereign God’s purposes be uncertain of realization?”

—S. Lewis Johnson, “How Faith Works”

Did he misunderstand sovereignty? God has the right and power to do anything He chooses.

Antinomy – God is sovereign and we are responsible.

We must look at the text. What does the text say about these people?

### C. Author’s perspective

No doubts about their salvation.

1. Preceding context – 1:1-2; 2:1; 3:1, 12; 4:1

2. Immediate context

- Should be teachers (have been believers a long time) – **Heb. 5:12**
- Babes (part of the family) – **Heb. 5:13**
- Enlightened – **Heb. 6:4**; Eph. 1:18; **Heb. 10:32**; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:9;
- Once for all – Jude 3; **Heb. 9:28**; **10:10**
- Tasted of the heavenly gift – **Heb. 2:9**; John 4:10; 1 Peter 2:3
- Made partakers of the Holy Spirit – Heb. 3:1
- Tasted the good word of God; (tasted) the powers of the age to come

Note the progression. All aorist tense.

Heb. 6:6 - renew again – how can you be renewed again if you never experienced anything in the first place?

He could not have more forcefully stated they **are** believers.

D. Practical ramifications

1. No assurance of salvation

“I assert, therefore, that the perseverance by which we persevere in Christ even to the end is the gift of God... Therefore it is uncertain whether any one has received this gift so long as he is still alive. For if he fall before he dies, he is, of course, said not to have persevered....”

—Augustine

“My soul is dying, my soul is damned. Were my soul but in a good condition, and were I but sure of it, ah, how rich should I esteem myself, though blessed but with bread and water.”

—John Bunyan

“Sometimes hope abounds, and at the worst I have never been able dogmatically to pronounce myself unregenerate... Sometimes I have strongly thought that what is formed between Christ and me shall last forever. At other times I fear I may be in hell yet.”

—John Duncan

2. Never ending introspection

“Doubts about one’s salvation are not wrong so long as they are not nursed and allowed to become an obsession.”

—John MacArthur

“More positively we may say that this fear of being *adokimos* [unapproved] or castaway is one of the great hallmarks of those who are elect and who finally do persevere.”

—Maurice Roberts

1 John 4:16-18 – perfect love casts out fear

1 John 5:11-13 – that you may know

3. Additions to the gospel

If people have to endure to the end, we better warn them up front!

“In our own presentation of Christ’s gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything....”

—J.I. Packer

Can a person say he is a Christian and not be? Yes, but that is not who the author is writing to.

If the author had doubts about their salvation, he would not exhort them to press on but to believe.

## II. Losers – Had it, lost it

Genuine Christians who lose their salvation (more true to the text)

“fall away” means to lose salvation – Arminian, Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Wesleyan/Methodist and Church of Christ

How do you motivate children to obey? Threaten them that they might not be your children after all? Doesn’t seem very effective. Threaten them that they might be kicked out of the family?

Problem – then it also teaches they can never get it again.

Doctrine of eternal security – John 10:27-29; Rom. 8

Listen to the following audio messages regarding the topic of eternal security:

- “All Sales Final - The Doctrine of Eternal Security” - Brian Fisher
- “All Sales Final - The Doctrine of Eternal Security, Part 2” - Brian Fisher

## III. Quitters – Have it, waste it

Genuine believers; about to lose something, but not salvation

Warning applies to you and me

Stagnation puts us at risk to fall away

## **Conclusion**

Unhealthy fear – lose salvation, never had salvation

Healthy fear – press on to maturity

Read this passage and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. How does this apply to me? Am I dull of hearing? Do I have a friend who needs to hear this warning?