

Can Those Who Have Fallen Away in Hebrews 6:4-6 Be Saved?

In Hebrews 6:4-6 we read:

⁴For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6-NASB)

Before addressing how this passage fits in with the Patristic Universalism view, I'll make a couple of points. First, even among traditional scholars, there is confusion as to whether this passage is referring to true Christians who have fallen away or to those who have not yet accepted Christ (A wide gap in understanding indeed). And while this has no bearing on the Patristic Universalist view, it is interesting that the identity of the very group the author of Hebrews is talking about is in doubt. And according to Ramm, we should only base our theology on passages that are "clear and not upon those that are obscure." (Ramm, Bernard, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977], p. 105.)

Second, In Hebrews 6:6, it does not say that those who have fallen away cannot be saved. It says those who have fallen away cannot be renewed to "*repentance*." Perhaps this is just the author's way of saying those who have fallen away cannot be saved (based on a traditional understanding of the passage), but if so, the wording is a bit ambiguous.

Now let's tackle the most important question. Can those who have "*fallen away*" be saved? First, it would seem logical that those who have "*fallen away*" (Hebrews 6:6) would be counted among those who are to be "*judged in the flesh*" as described in 1 Peter 4:6. Second, applying the principle of 'mercy beyond the grave,' we believe that eschatological punishment and/or suffering is remedial in nature (as opposed to the traditional view that sees punishment as retributive) and thus is administered to help those being punished. In fact, In Hebrews Chapter 5, we read that Christ Himself suffered to help bring Him to perfection.

⁸Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, ¹⁰being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:8-10-NASB)

We know from 1 Peter 3:19 that Christ "*made proclamation to the spirits in prison*" (NASB) which strongly suggests Christ was reaching out to those being punished. Why was Christ making a proclamation to those in prison? Was it to chastise them? Was it to pity them? Operating under the timeless principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture" (Ramm, p. 104), we find the answer in 1 Peter 4:6. Christ was speaking to those in prison so that "*they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.*" (NASB). In other words, Christ was speaking to them to save them! This should not be surprising since we're told in 1 Timothy 1:15 that Christ came into the world to save sinners., Christ, being our model (John 13:13-15), learned obedience through His suffering and likewise those who have "*fallen away*" will learn obedience through their suffering allowing Christ to be their "*source of eternal salvation.*" (Hebrews 5:9)

"He went once for all into the Holy Place [the Holy of Holies of heaven, into the presence of God], and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, having obtained and secured eternal redemption." Hebrews 9:12

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