

I. Introduction and review.

II. Can Christians lose their salvation?

A. From where can we get help in interpreting such a challenging text? II Tim. 3:16-17

B. Notice the pattern and structure of this text.

- 1. The apostates. v. 4-6**
 - a. Their privileges (spiritual). v. 4-5**
 - b. Their response (falling away and re-crucifying Christ). v. 6a,c**
 - c. God's judgment (beyond recovery). v. 6b**
- 2. The good soil. v. 7**
 - a. Its privileges (rain).**
 - b. Its response (fruitfulness).**
 - c. God's judgment (blessing).**
- 3. The bad soil. v. 8**
 - a. Its privileges (rain).**
 - b. Its response (thorns and thistles).**
 - c. God's judgment (cursed and burned).**
- 4. The beloved believers. v. 9-12**
 - a. Their privileges (spiritual). v. 4-5**
 - b. Their response (works of love). v. 9-11**
 - c. God's judgment (reward). v. 10a,12**

C. How should we interpret this warning against falling away?

- 1. Arminians claim this passage teaches that a true believer can lose his salvation.**
 - a. This view contradicts what Scripture teaches about the perseverance of the saints. 3:14 5:9 7:24-25 10:14 Jo. 10:27-29 Ro. 8:38-39 I Pe. 1:5-6 Phil. 1:6**
 - b. The fact that the one who falls could never come back is contrary to Arminian teaching that one can go back and forth between being saved and lost. v. 6**
- 2. Some claim that this is a hypothetical warning to real Christians who would lose their salvation if they were to fall away which, of course, cannot happen.**
 - a. The numerous warnings throughout the book of Hebrews are real. 2:1f 10:26f 3:6f,12 4:12-13 12:25**
 - b. The parable of the grounds (soils) envisions some actually being cursed. v. 7-8**
- 3. This passage speaks of people who professed faith and enjoyed many spiritual privileges, but never were true believers, as was shown by their departure.**
 - a. There are many similar warnings in Scripture. I John 2:19 Mark 4:5-7,16-19**
 - b. There are numerous sad examples of people with spiritual privileges who have irreversibly fallen away. John 9:32**

III. Those who fall away from privilege are beyond recovery. v. 4-6,8

A. They enjoyed great privileges. v. 4-5 Can such things be said of unbelievers?

- 1. They were enlightened. 10:32 John 1:4-5,9-11 12:35-37 II Tim. 1:10 II Co. 4:4,6 Is. 9:2 Num. 22-24 II Pe. 2:15f Jude 1:11 I Cor. 4:15**
- 2. They tasted of the heavenly gift, the good Word of God. 12:25 1:1-3 10:26 4:16 4:2 Ps. 34:8 John 4:10 6:51 Mark 4:16 6:20 Jer. 15:16 I Cor. 10:3-4**
- 3. They were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and tasted the powers of the age to come. 2:4 I Sam. 10:9-12 Mt. 10:1-8 12:28 7:21-23 Acts 8:9-13,18-24**
- 4. Most likely, these people professed repentance and faith and were baptized. v. 6**

- B. They have fallen away. v. 6a 4 What happened?**
1. They followed Israel's bad example of disobedience and unbelief. 3:12 4:11
 2. They were persistently fruitless. v. 8 12:14
 3. They willfully and deliberately chose to renounce Christ. 10:26 13:13
 4. This may be the equivalent of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark 3:29
- C. God has judged them such that it is impossible for them to be restored. v. 6b**
1. It is not merely difficult, it is impossible. 6:18 10:4 11:6 10:26
 2. They are hardened beyond the possibility of repentance. 12:16-17 John 12:36-41
Ro. 1:18f 9:17-18
 3. Israel also reached a point of no return. 3:11,17-19 Ps. 95:11 II Chr. 36:15f
Acts 13:46 Rom. 11:17f
 4. God judges them in this way because they have blasphemously rejected Christ,
Who is the only way of salvation. v. 6c 10:29 II Pe. 2:10-21
- D. They are like bad ground (soil). v. 8 Isaiah 5:1-7.**
1. They have drunk in the privileges of God's rain. v. 7a,4-5
 2. Instead of producing useful fruit, they have yielded only thorns and thistles.
 3. Now they are under God's curse. 12:29 John 15:6 Mt. 21:41 13:40 Gen. 3:17f

IV. We think better concerning you. v. 7,9-12

- A. Our author balances stern warnings with hope and encouragement. v. 9,7**
1. While our author spoke impersonally about the apostate (v. 4-6), he speaks directly to his readers, addressing them as *beloved*.
 2. He is convinced that they are *better* than the apostates.
 3. He believes they are the good ground (soil) which is fruitful and blessed by God.
v. 7 Jo. 15:5 Mt. 13:7,22 Isa. 55:10-13 Phil. 1:6
 4. He is confident they will be saved in the end.
 5. Why then, did he speak to his readers in such a strong way in verses 4-6?
- B. The ground of his confidence is their fruitfulness. v. 9b-10 Mt. 7:20 II Cor. 5:17**
1. For the sake of God's Name, they actively loved the brethren. 10:32-34 13:1-3
 2. In what sense does God's justice demand that He remember their works?
 3. God never forgets your service to Him. I Cor. 15:58
 4. Deeds of kindness done to God's people are reckoned by God as done to Himself.
Gen. 12:3 Mt. 25:40 10:42 Js. 2:15-16 I Jo. 3:16-20 Pr. 19:17 John 21:15-17
- C. Continue to diligently pursue the hope we have in Christ. v. 11-12 4:11**
1. This is no time for sluggishness and spiritual procrastination. v. 11a,12a
 2. The goal is full assurance of hope. v. 11b
 3. You will grow in assurance as you press ahead towards maturity. 5:14
 4. Imitate the good examples of faithful believers. v. 12b, 13f 11:1f I Cor. 4:16 11:1

V. Concluding applications.

- A. To whom does this warning apply? 12:25f II Cor. 13:5
- B. How can you be sure that you haven't committed the unpardonable sin?
- C. How can you know if someone is beyond recovery? II Ti. 2:19 I Jo. 5:16 I Ti. 1:13
- D. Which kind of ground (soil) are you?
- E. How can you gain full assurance?

Discussion questions

1. Why can't this passage be teaching that real Christians can be lost?
2. Why can't this passage be merely a hypothetical warning to real Christians who are at no risk of actually falling away?
3. Who are the apostates?
4. Why is it impossible to renew such people to repentance?
5. How does the parable of the two kinds of ground help us to interpret this text? v. 7-8
6. Give examples of apostates from the Bible.
7. Why is the author convinced that his readers are not apostates?
8. If he is convinced they are real believers, why does he issue such a severe warning?
9. In what sense would God be unjust not to remember our works of love? v. 10
10. What can you do to gain full assurance? v. 11-12
11. What can preachers learn from how this author admonishes and encourages his readers?