

HIDDEN TREASURES

FALLING FROM GRACE AND POSSIBLE RESTORATION

Hebrews 6:1-8

J. A. Huffman, D.D.

The subject of Falling from Grace and Possible Restoration is one over which there has been, and continues to be, much controversy. This section of Scripture is confessedly difficult, and since the difficult passage evidently treats this difficult subject, two difficulties are brought together. Let us see if a few Greek words within the Scripture passage will help us in finding a solution of both difficulties.

The exhortation is that of going on unto perfection, Greek *teleiōtata*, verse 1. This word for "perfection" here evidently means full growth or maturity. It is the remotest distance from the starting base. The phrase "Let us go on" is one word in the Greek, *pherometha*, from *phero*, meaning to bring or bear, meaning here, not personal effort only, but of personal yielding to a higher source of influence (Expositor's Greek New Testament.) It is not growing on, or exactly "going on," but being helped on.

The starting base is declared to be the first principles of Christian doctrine with attendant experience, which the Hebrew writer calls a foundation, Greek *themelion*. The several things listed as comprising this Christian base or foundation are as follows: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection and judgment. These fundamentals or principles are not to have been by-passed, but progress is to be registered beyond them.

But the caution is against failure, and the remedy for failure is that of going on or being helped on to "perfection".

Then the writer elaborates upon the failure of going on, and the danger ahead, by delineating Christian experiences or graces, as follows, verses 4 and 5:

1. As being "—once enlightened." The little Greek word *hapaks* translated "once." means sufficiently, or enlightened so as to be made fully responsible. It is the description of the light which awakens a sinner.

2. Having "tasted of the heavenly gift." This word for "tasted," Greek *geousamenous*, is one which describes vividly a personal experience. Jesus is quoted as having used this word several times in relation to tasting of the experience of death, Matt. 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27. The Hebrew writer also uses the word in 2:9, where we are told that Jesus, "by the grace of God, tasted death for every man." Peter also writes of newly born babes in Christ, "tasting that the Lord is good," I Peter 2:3.

That which the individual is declared to have tasted is the "heavenly gift," or the gift from heaven. This "gift" is, in all probability, the gift of forgiveness, or the new birth, the initial Christian experience. It might mean the gift of the Holy Spirit, were that grace or experience not covered by the next statement.

3. Having been "made partakers of the Holy Spirit." The word on which this statement largely depends is the Greek *metochous*, compounded of the preposition *meta* meaning with, and *echo* to have. Here it means to be a sharer of the Holy Spirit, not only in the benefits of his ministry, but of his mind. The same writer uses the word in 3:14, where he writes: "We are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast

the beginning of our confidence, firm to the end."

4. Having "tasted the good word of God." The Greek word for tasted is here the same as in item two. All of God's promises are "good," but it is peculiarly the Gospel of Salvation through Christ, which comprehends all of God's promises, of which this person has experienced.

5. Having (tasted) "of the powers of the age to come." The verb, though not repeated, is understood as the same used in items two and four. It is not only the ministry of Christ in the present age, but of his ministry in the coming age, which projects itself ahead into the present, in which believers have some experience of Christ's second coming, and his glorious reign over the earth, initially experienced by his enthronement, his crowning, his sceptreing in heart and life. These give a spiritual thrill to those who by faith, taste, now and here, or experience them.

High spiritual altitudes these, mountain tops of religious experience, if words mean anything at all! To dispute the conclusion would be to renounce any definite meaning of words, and to repudiate all inspired records.

The next and serious consideration is that of falling: "And having fallen away". This whole series of words is the translation of one Greek word, *parapesontas*, the Aorist Participle of *para* which means away from, compounded with *pipto*, to fall. It is an act already accomplished. It scarcely need be said that the thing from which the individual has fallen away is that high pinnacle of religious experience delineated in the five detailed items which have made up such an exalted experience. But the possibility of falling away is unmistakably predicted.

Our next inquiry concerns any possible restoration from such a spiritual dilemma. Does this Hebrew writer declare that there is no possibility for his restoration? Neither the King James or the American Standard Version makes clear the answer to this exceedingly important question. Fortunately a Greek word in the verse gives the clue.

In verse six, it is declared that it is impossible to restore again such who fall away, unto repentance, "seeing that" they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh." The Greek word for crucify is *anastaurountas*, meaning to crucify again, and is the present, accusative plural participle, literally reading "crucifying". The present tense, represents the act as continuing in the present. The American Standard version has a marginal reading which helps greatly, translating the word "while they crucify". The verse then does not state that the attitude of those who would thus crucify by their actions the Son of God and put him to open shame, cannot be reversed and remedied, but that while they thus crucify Christ, it is impossible to restore them. He who crucifies Christ in his attitude has no Savior, therefore in such a state, his case is hopeless.

Verses seven and eight picturesquely portray in parable, the ungracious soul who has experienced all these heavenly graces, but despite them, bears thorns, and thistles. Not the thorns and thistles only but the earth itself, is "burned."

Let us see the picture: Here is a series of high mountain peaks of Christian experience rising one above the other. But from even the highest there is no immunity from falling. He who has attained such heights may fall, but there is no hint given of any such necessity.

Whether a Christian Hebrew of long ago, or a believer now, should he renounce his faith in the only Savior, and persist in so doing, his case is impossible and hopeless. Unfortunate as such a situation is, the door is still open to the apostate. He may cease to crucify the Son of God and bring shame upon him; may renounce his sin and apostasy, and find his way back to restoration and salvation.

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OUTWARD APPEARANCES

J. B. Chapman, D. D.

God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15).

There is a true outward appearance, and there is a mere outward appearance. A true Christian appears as a Christian, professes to be one, and is one. The hypocrite puts on the appearance, makes the profession, but is not sincere and right in his heart. Outward appearance, therefore, is important, but it is not sufficient. It is important as a sign announcing what is within; but if it belies the content of the heart it is at its best worthless. It is required of a Christian that he dress with the simplicity that becometh godliness, but an unbecoming coat may sometimes cover a proud and unregenerated heart. Humility is a pearl among virtues, but when one becomes conscious of his humility the gem is likely to slip away.

I once heard a minister warn the people in judgment tones that God looks upon the heart, but as I thought of the matter, I reached this conclusion: I am glad God does look directly upon the heart, and does not have to approach through words and deeds as men have to do, for I know my heart is sincere and right. If He looked upon my words and deeds, I fear I should not rate high, for these are but poor channels through which my love for Him must flow. My deeds are faulty, my words are weak. Only my love is strong, and I am glad God looks upon that. Reputation is what people think I am, character is what I really am, and God knows what I am. I do not always make a good impression on those I meet, and they go on their way rating me low, but all the time God knows what I am and what I long to be.

Once the prophet came to David and offered the king his choice between defeat before his enemies and a plague at the hand of God. Without a moment's hesitation, David chose God. Instinctively and logically he was sure God would be more merciful than his enemies. But God will also be better than friends and loved one, for all it takes with Him is that we love Him with all our hearts and sincerely strive to please Him. Our friends and loved ones require a certain degree of efficiency, in addition to sincerity.

I am glad that for the moment I have a body because it enables me to serve those who are in the body, but I am glad also that my body is not myself, and that in the body or out of it, I am saved through the blood of Jesus Christ, and that my heart is assured by the presence of His Spirit. It is well with my soul.

BORN

At Seal Cove, N. B., May 17th, to Rev. and Mrs. Ronald Sabine, a daughter, Cheryl Ann.