

THE MOTIF OF REPENTANCE IN HEBREWS

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Introduction

THE SEVERE warning of Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30 and 12:15-17 has generated considerable discussion among scholars.¹ These passages apparently highlight the impossibility of repentance after apostasy. However, the concept of repentance permeates all scriptures and the concept

¹Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1993), 323; William Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 142; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hermenia: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1989), 169, 172, 293; Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "Towards a New Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6," *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980): 61-73; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964), 109; John Owen, *Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977; Johannes Behm, "ἀνακαίνιζω," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76): 3:451; Adolph Saphir, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1983), 315; James Moffatt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 79.

of God's forgiving nature is also well known to Christians.

There are clear passages in Scripture dealing with many who, having known God, went astray and were accepted by God after they had repented of their sins (e.g., 2 Sam 12:13; 1 Kgs 21:29; Ps. 51; John 10:27-29). At the same time, others are denied of forgiveness if they sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:24-32; Mark 3:22-30; cf. Acts 5:3-10). The question is, what makes repentance impossible after apostasy, according to Hebrews?

The motif of repentance found in Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30, and 12:17 is one of the difficult theological issues found in the book of Hebrews, and thus, has engaged the attention of many scholars. Several questions emerge in relation to it: what does the author mean when he says repentance is impossible after apostasy? What is the nature of the apostasy? Are these passages identical in their description of apostasy? What makes repentance impossible in these passages? Is it the author or God who is responsible for this impossibility? Or is it the offender or the nature of the offence that makes repentance impossible? Is this impossibility relative to the apostate's situation or absolute? Are there some syntactical and grammatical clues to understand these passages? It is in search of satisfactory answers to these questions that this research is conducted.

The intent of this study is to examine the motif of repentance in Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30; 12:15-17 and its theological implications. The study will analyze the motif in the context of salvation. It will help better understand the motif in Hebrews. To this end, this study utilizes an exegetical method which involves a study of syntax and grammar. The study is presented in three main sections: (1) historical interpretations of the passages, (2) historical-cultural context of the

passages and (3) literary and contextual meanings of the motif in Hebrews.

Historical Interpretations of the
Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30; 12:17

In this section, the study considers different views shared by scholars from different persuasions on the motif of repentance in Hebrews. The debate revolves around the question of what or who makes repentance impossible after apostasy. These divergent views can be grouped into four.

To begin with, in the early Church, some church fathers considered the motif as referring to baptism. To them, to repeat baptism was tantamount to crucifying Christ again (cf. Rom 6:4). According to his revelation, Shepherd of Hermas (ca. A.D. 120-140) writes that a second repentance after baptism was impossible.¹ He later pointed out that because of human weakness, the Lord permitted one repentance after baptism.² In his final assertion on the motif, the Shepherd declared that until the end of the world believers may repent but after that period repentance would become impossible.³ However, Tertullian (ca. 225), who argued as a Montanist, holds the view that there is no second repentance after certain sins such as adultery and apostasy. In a similar fashion, after the Decian persecution (ca. A.D. 249-50), the Novatians argued that the apostates should not be accepted in the faith

¹Shepherd of Hermas *Mand.* 4.3.1-7. So also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 2.13.

²Hermas *Mand.* 4.3.1-7; *Vis.* 2.2.4-5.

³Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.

based on Hebrews.¹ It appears that the renewal of apostates is an external work wrought by leaders of the Church.

Ambrose (ca. 397), like Filastius,² tries to soften the force of the Greek word ἀδύνατον “impossible” to mean ‘difficult’. Ambrose understands especially Heb 6:4-6 to mean that it is impossible for man, but not for God (Mark 10:27).³ Ambrose goes further to explain that Hebrews does not prevent lapsed Christians to be identified with the Church but prohibits re-baptizing them, since a second baptism is synonymous with crucifying the Son of God afresh. The thrust of Ambrose’s argument is that repentance is possible after apostasy but not a second baptism.⁴ Ambrose had to deal with the issue of the impossibility of renewing into repentance “again.”

The second school of thought of which Craig R. Koester, like Paul Ellingworth,⁵ is one of the chief advocates, unequivocally expresses that it is impossible for God to restore apostate since He alone “initiates relationships by bringing people to repentance.”⁶ There are several arguments advan-

¹ Filastrius, PL 12.1200-02; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 59.1.1-59.3.5.

² Filastius, PL 12.1200A-02-B.

³ Ambrose, *De Paenitentia* 2.2. So also Pelagius *De Bruyne*, 97-98; Chrysostom, *Homilies* 14.410-11; Ephraem, *Epistolas* 214-15.

⁴ So also Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964), 109. Cf. John Owen, *Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977).

⁵ Ellingworth, 323. So also Charles Edwin Carlston, “Eschatology and Repentance in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” (xxx): 299-300;

⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible, vol. 36 (New York: Anchor Bible, 2001), 322. Cf. Verbrugge, 61-73.

ced in favor of this view. Ellingworth observes that the use of ἀδύνατον as an impersonal construction is an attempt on the author's part to avoid the name of God.¹ Koester understands that ἀδύνατον refers to God's refusal to effect an action. To reinforce this understanding, Koester observes that the idea that it is impossible for God to lie means that He has refused to lie but not that He lacks the power to do so (Heb 6:18).²

With this understanding, Koester deduces that God refuses to restore such people because "they crucify the Son of God to themselves."³

Koester argues that the four participles, describing the positive Christian experience in Heb 6:4-5, are God's gifts. In this sense, those who experience these gifts and fall away do that by turning away from these heavenly gifts. Since it is God who initiates this relationship with human beings by

¹Ellingworth, 319.

²Koester, 313.

³Koester, 322. Cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 221, believes that in the first place, it is impossible for God's people to apostatize because "the mystery of divine election" is sure. He thinks that the Lord's words are sure: all that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6:37) Hughes seems to allude to the Calvinist view that God's chosen people will not fall from grace irrespective of the circumstance that they may find themselves. In this case, the author of Hebrews addresses those who are not of God. However, it appears that, for example, Heb 6:4-5 demonstrate that the potential apostates are ones who once had positive Christian experience; thus, their call is of heaven (Heb 3:1). Although it seems the author does not address a real event, the danger of the apostasy is threatening. This severe warning of the author suggests that he was preventing believers' drifting from the faith. Therefore, the people addressed are God's people.

giving these gifts, He has the sole right to initiate this relationship again. By rejecting these gifts, God allows their decision to stand (cf. 10:26; 12:16-17).¹ Following this reasoning, Herschel H. Hobbs argues, based on Num 14:41f, that just as it was impossible for Israel to repent for God had decreed, so it is in Heb 6 (cf. 12:16f).²

There are several problems with this school of thought. First, the use of ἀδύνατον in 6:18 with God as the subject makes the view that ἀδύνατον in v. 4 is used as an attempt to avoid the name of God, out of reverence, or stylistic reason suspicious. In the Greek text, the subject of ἀδύνατον in v. 18 is in accusative case (θεόν), but in v.4 the subject is not so clear as has been argued. Second, it is true that it is God who initiates relationship with human beings and that He is the source of the heavenly gifts. Yet, the idea of a human agency/choice should not be minimized. Third, the understanding that avdu,naton depicts God's refusal to change the situation of the apostate raises some theological questions. Koester makes this allegation without enough backing. God was faithful to his promise to Abraham after he had patiently endured, says the author (vv. 13-15). God swore by himself to fulfil this promise. Verse 10 indicates that God is not unrighteous to forget the love that believers have shown to one another. This seems to parallel the impossible idea in v. 18. This indicates that it is unnatural/unrighteous with God to lie. Fourth, Hobbs' attempt to apply Num 14:41f to Heb 6 is an eisegesis.

The context of Num 14:41f does not talk about God's decree over the impossibility of Israel's repentance. There is

¹Koester, 321-21, 456, 541-42.

²Herschel H. Hobbs, *Hebrews Challenges to Bold Discipleship* (Nashville: Broadman, 1971), 60.

no need to link Num 14:41f and Heb 6.

The third school of thought holds that it is impossible for God's servant to renew an apostate since the apostate had repudiated the gospel. Thus, after repudiating the gospel, God's servants have no other message to proclaim to them. ¹Arthur W. Pink, like John Albert Bengel and Johannes Behm,² observes that God's servants are His instruments through which the evangelical purpose is attained. Pink cites Paul's statement to augment this view that "I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15; cf. Gal 4:19).³ Bengel observes that the infinitive *avnakaini,zein*, 'to renew,' is active. Thus, it is impossible for man not for God. Bengel argues further, based on Heb 6:3, that the author indicates his willingness to repeat the basic Christian teachings (vv. 1-2) if God permits.⁴ This understanding leads Bengel and Westcott to assert that *avdu,naton* refers to Christian teachers.⁵ This suggests that the restoration of the apostates is the sole

¹Johannes Behm, "*ἀνακαίνιζω*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76): 3:451, n. 1.

²John Albert Bengel, *New Testament word studies*, trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1971), 617-19; J. Behm, "*ἀνακαίνιζω*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 3:451.

³Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964), 295-96. So also Brooks Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1914), 147.

⁴ Bengel, 619. So also Westcott, 150.

⁵Bengel, 617, 619; Westcott, 148.

responsibility of the Christian teacher.

Seeing the Christian teacher as the one responsible for restoring apostates is attractive. However, it is less convincing how Bengel and Westcott arrive at the conclusion that ἀδύνατον refers to Christian teacher. In Heb 10:26-31; 12:16-17, there is no indication that it is the Christian teacher for whom it is impossible to restore the apostate, as demonstrated in their analysis. At least, Pink, Bengel and Westcott see the motif of impossibility of repentance after apostasy as unique to 6:4-6; 10:26; 12:16-17.¹ Hence, one would expect that the same thesis for 6:4-6 should be applied to 10:26; 12:16-17. However, this is not the case in these passage, which naturally makes this thesis less convincing.

William Lane, one of the main proponents of the fourth school of thought, is of the view that repentance after apostasy is impossible “because the apostate repudiates the only basis upon which repentance can be extended . . . to repudiate Christ is to embrace the ‘impossible’”². Lane essentially drives home his point on the nature of the offence. Neither God nor His servants are held responsible for not restoring the apostates. Following this line of reasoning, Robert Jewett expresses the view that since the author uses *avnakaini,zein* in active voice, not passive, it excludes any outside agency in restoring apostates. Like George H. Guthrie, Harold W. Attridge augments this idea by saying that “the impossibility of attaining this repentance is based on the situation of the apostates.” The reason for this assertion is that “Christ’s sacrificial death is the only way to a true and effective clean-

¹ Pink, 295-96, 609-11, 1017; Bengel, 617-19, 651, 672-73; Westcott, 147-51, 326-28, 407-9.

²Lane, 142. So also George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan, 1998), 217.

sing of conscience and remission of sin. It is the bedrock on which the 'foundation' (6:1) of repentance is built. Those who reject this necessary presupposition of repentance simply, and virtually by definition, cannot repent." In other words, impossibility of repentance is relative

The thesis of the four school of thought is insightful. However, can this understanding, which is based on Heb 6:4-6, be extended to 10:26; 12:17?¹

The fifth interpretation is close to the fourth.

The main thrust of the fifth is that the impossibility of repentance after apostasy can be conceived as the *unpardonable sin*.² The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary understands that the apostasy depicted in Hebrews comes as a result of a deliberate, persistent revolt against God (Matt 12:31-32).³ F. F. Bruce notes that believers can be "immunized' against Christianity" by being inoculated with something which, for the time being, looks so like the real thing that it is generally mistaken for it,"⁴ and as a result coming to their

¹Several scholars are inconsistent in how their translations and interpretation are related. See Lane, 143; Attridge, 166; Westcott, 148; Hobbs, 61.

²"If they shall fall away" (Hebrews 6:5) *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 7:434-35; Moffatt, 79; Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 145. Cf. Bruce, 144 and Raymond Brown, *The Message Of Hebrews: Christ Above All* (England: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 110, do not use the term 'unpardonable, yet they posit that the situation of apostates can be considered as beyond recovery due to their present state of heart and life.

³"If they shall fall away," "Sin Willfully," and "No Place of Repentance," SDABC, 7:434, 464, 486.

⁴Bruce, 144.

senses will be impossible.¹ Central to the time element of this ‘unpardonable sin’ is the tense of the verbs used. Like James Moffatt,² the SDABC emphasizes the point that the present participle expresses continuous act of a willful sin (6:6; cf. 10:26).³ Bruce’s comment is apt to encapsulate the thesis of this school of thought: “God has pledged himself to pardon all who truly repent, but Scripture and experience alike suggest that it is impossible for human beings to arrive at a state of heart and life where they can no longer repent” (6:4-6; 10:26; 12:16-17).⁴ This view implies that the impossibility of repentance is absolute.

This interpretation calls for some comments. Proponents of the fifth view consider the two present participles ἀνασταυρουντας and παραδειγματίζοντας in 6:6 as causal, giving the reason why repentance is impossible.⁵ Bruce argues against the temporal interpretation of these participles. ⁶He perceptively observes that if the participles are translated as “while they crucify, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance,” then when they cease repudiating Christ, repentance becomes possible again.

¹Attridge, 169, 172, 293; Saphir, 315; Moffatt, 79.

²Moffatt, 149.

³“Sin Willfully,” SDABC, 7:464. Cf. Bruce, 144 and Brown, 110, do not refer to the tense but their insistence that ‘persistent hostility to God’ indicates how the tense has influenced their interpretation.

⁴Bruce, 149. So also “If they shall fall away,” “Sin Willfully,” and “No Place of Repentance,” SDABC, 7:434, 464, 486; Moffatt, 79, 149, 212.

⁵Bruce, 149; Moffat, 79; “If they shall fall away,” SDABC, 7:434; Brown, 108.

⁶Bruce, 149.

This an insightful observation.

However, Bruce's causal rendering of the participle, though contextually probable, leaves out some concerns to deal with. The insistence that the tense of the participle indicates a continuous action raises some questions. When does this continuous act of 'crucifying and exposing Christ to open shame' cease so that the impossibility of repentance takes effect?¹ On what grounds, are these participles construed as continuous actions? With these diverging views, it is appropriate to study the motif of repentance in Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30; 12:7.

¹See also G. H. Guthrie, 220, n. 12. He thinks that both causal and temporal rendering of the two participles still opens the door for a possibility of repentance in the future, that is, if apostates cease their repudiation, then repentance is possible.

Historical and Literary Contexts

In spite of the contention among scholars regarding the authorship of Hebrews, the book's geographical provenance,¹ a number of scholars fairly agree on the date of writing as before A.D. 70.² With reference to the identity of the addressees, several scholars agree that the author's readers had Jewish background.³ Hebrews seems to hint at the readers' weariness which could possibly lead to the gradual falling away from the community (2:1; 3:8,12-4:6,11; 10:25; 12:11-17; 13:9).⁴ Fear might have contributed to the weariness. D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris observe that "the religion of the Jews was recognized by the Romans; Chris-

¹For a discussion on the unending debate on the authorship of Hebrews, see D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, 1992), 394-97; Koester, 48-9; Lane, 1viii-1x; Attridge, 1-6; Hughes, 18-19; Hobbs, 5-6; Bruce, 10-14; Montefiore, 1-32; Over the centuries, several people have been proposed as possible authors of the book of Hebrews, namely, Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, Luke, Silas, Timothy, Epiphra, the deacon Philip, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Clement of Romans. On the issue of geographical provenance, the following destinations have been proposed: Jerusalem, Samaria, Ephesus, Corinth, Cyrus, Bithany, Pontus, and Colossae.

²Koester, Ellingworth, Bruce, 22-22; Hagner, xviii-xix, Hughes, 30-32.

³Bruce, 9; "Introduction," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. Francis D. Nichole (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 7:387; Koester, 48; Attridge, 10-11; Leon Morris, "Hebrews," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:4-5; Hughes, 18-19; Moffatt, xxiii-xxvii; J. V. Dalms, "The First Readers of Hebrews," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 20 (1977): 368-75.

⁴Johnsson, 21; Lane, 1xi; Carson, Moo, and Morris, 403-4.

tianity was not. To be seen to return to the fold of Judaism might alleviate the threat of fear by the state authorities."¹ The readers are consistently admonished not to drift from the faith (2:1; 3:8,12-4:6,11; 12:11-17; 13:9). The reason is that, as the author highlights, repentance after apostasy is impossible. Looking at the thrust of the book, it appears that Hebrews highlights the unqualified supremacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin. Christ inaugurated a new covenant which surpasses any other covenant which precedes it.

Among other things, comparatively, Christ's sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices offered under the Mosaic law. As a theme, the supremacy of Christ's sacrifice becomes the bedrock upon which the believer's salvation rests. In view of this theme, the author warns readers not to turn back, but rather persevere in the faith in Christ (2:1; 3:7-4:11; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:1-17). What seems certain is that the author addressed a situation that threatened believers' loyalty to Christ.

Analysis of the Motif of Repentance in Hebrews

In attempt to warn readers to stay in the faith, the author indicates that repentance after apostasy is impossible (6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:17). Koester is right when he says that "many of the controversies surrounding Hebrews have centered on these passages." Each of these passages is analysed below.

¹Carson, Moo, and Morris, 404.

Repentance in Heb

Heb 6:4-6 indicate that the addressees seem to be matured in the faith and have experienced the gift of salvation to the extent that they had no excuse to apostatize. Lane, like Ellingworth,¹ observes that the danger of apostasy was feasible and therefore, the author's admonition was not hypothetical.

In Heb 5:1-10, Christ, the Son of God, became the author of eternal salvation unto them who obey Him after He had learnt obedience by the things He suffered. God made Him a high priest after the order of Melchisedek. The author of Hebrews points out that he has much to say about Christ, the high priest, but because the readers are dull in understanding, it is hard to explain to them (v. 11). The author expresses his displeasure at their infantile attitude in their spiritual growth (vv. 12-14). He has high expectation of their growth; however, the readers are not showing any signs of growth. This is what he seeks to address in the following verses.

He uses the strongest inferential conjunction *dio*, "therefore"² to introduce the rest of the discussion (6:1-12) which is logically linked to the preceding statements about believers' laxity (5:11-14). He says, therefore, let us leave behind the basic teachings about Christ and move forward into perfection while "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits" (6:1-3).

¹Ellingworth, 325. So also Johnsson, 116; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 148.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 245.

In Heb 6:4-6, the author gives a severe warning against apostasy. He uses an emphatic γάρ "certainly" to authenticate the statement it introduces.¹ According to the passage, "certainly," it is impossible to again renew to repentance those who once experienced the gifts of salvation and then apostatized. The Greek ἀδύνατον "impossible," adjective nominative neuter singular, is used as an impersonal expression. ²Αδύνατος occurs nine times in the NT (Matt 19:26; Mark 10:27; Acts 14:8; Rom 8:3; 15:1; Heb 6:4,18;10:4; 11:6). In all of its occurrences, it denotes what is impossible not difficult. ³ For example, in Heb 6:18 it is stated that it is impossible for God to lie. This statement is suggestive of what is unnatural to happen.

According to the syntax, ἀδύνατον in v. 4 governs the infinitive ἀνακαίλειν in v. 6 which is employed transitively; thus, the subject of ἀνακαίλειν is unexpressed.⁴ Ἀνακαίλειν "to renew," infinitive present active, is a hapax legomenon in the NT. A similar term (ἀνακαινῶω) is used in 2 Cor 4:16 and Col 3:10, but in both instances the voice is passive, "to be renewed." In this usage, the passive voice suggests outside agency who effects a change in an individual. In Heb 6:6 the active voice is used, which suggests that "no outside agency

¹Dana and Mantey, 243.

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), s.v. "μετάνοια"; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Grimm's Wilke's Clovis Novi Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), s.v. "ἀδύνατον."

³See also Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 444.

⁴See Attridge, 167.

can restore a person who refuses dialogue of salvation". In this case, neither God nor the author is referred to as the one who is behind the impossibility.

Heb 6:4-6 has seven participles which delineate conditions of those who are likely to apostatize. In vv. 4-5, there are four aorist participles which present a momentary positive Christian experience: (1) τοὺς φωτισθέντας (those who once were enlightened), (2) γευσάμενους ("who tasted" the heavenly gift), (3) γεννηθέντας ("who were partakers" of holy spirit), and (4) γευσάμενους ("who tasted" the good word of God and the powers of the age to come). These participles are aritucular, signifying a substantival use.¹ They are juxtaposed with an aorist participle παραπεσόντας ("fell away"),² which indicates their apostasy (v.6). By the use of καί, παραπεσόντας is connected to the four participles in terms of syntax, hence substantive.

παραπίπτω "fall beside" is a harpax legomenon in NT. In the LXX, παραπίπτω denotes a deliberate renunciation of God (cf. Ezek 20:27; 22:4; Wis 6:6; 12:2). In Hebrews,

¹Wallace, 619, 633.

²Some commentators consider παραπεσόντας as adverbial, thus, render it as conditional (if they have fallen). The problem with this rendering is that it presents the issue the author addresses as merely hypothetical. See K. S. Wuest, "Hebrews Six in the Greek New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (1962): 45 -53; Pink, 286; Saphir, 313; Hughes, 206; Owen, 98; D. Guthrie, 143. However, since the first four participles are used as substantives, παραπεσόντας may be adjectival in that it further qualifies the same group described by the preceding participles. Therefore, καί, παραπεσόντας should be rendered as "and they fell away". This rendering suggests that the warning was a real one against real threat. See also Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 633;

parapi,ptw corresponds to the expression ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος, “to fall away from the living God” (3:12), parapi,krainein, “to rebel” (3:16), παραπικρασμός, “rebellion” (3:8,15), and παραρρεῖν, “to drift away” (2:1). The idea of hardening one's heart towards God's grace and providence is usually associated with rebellion against God. Therefore, in 6:6, it may be deduced that “falling away” means to deliberately renounce God's grace and providence.

heart towards God's grace and providence is usually associated with rebellion against God. Therefore, in 6:6, it may be deduced that “falling away” means to deliberately renounce God's grace and providence.

In v. 6, the last two present participles ἀνασταυροῦντας (“they crucify” to themselves the son of God) and παραδειγματίζοντας (and “put him to an open shame”) may first explain the kind of apostasy (παραπεσόντας “having fallen away”). Ἀνασταυροῦντας and παραδειγματίζοντας may be circumstantial in describing the nature of the apostasy and why such apostasy is irremediable.¹ According to the structure of v. 6, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν (to renew again into repentance) is sandwiched between παραπεσόντας ἀνδ ἀνασταυροῦντας. Ἀνασταυροῦντας is not connected to the preceding participles by any conjunction. This means that ἀνασταυροῦντας gives the reason for the impossibility to restore such apostates. The present participles may be considered causal, indicating the reason why repentance after apostasy is impossible.² The word ἀνασταυροῦντας is harpax legomenon in the NT. It indicates the act of crucifying the Son of God again. Crucifixion was one of the forms of

¹Ellingworth, 324; Koester, 315; Moffatt, 79; Hughes, 213. See Waalace, 613.

²Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 149; Wallace,

executing criminals among the Jews and in the Greco-Roman world (cf. Deut 21:18-23). It was a public display and a method of shaming the crucified. As the Jews said, Jesus deserved to die according to their law because He made Himself the Son of God (John 19:7; cf. Deut 21:23; Esth 7:9).

According to their standard, Jesus committed a disgraceful act so He deserved a disgraceful death.¹ This suggests that παραδειγματίζοντας (put him to an open shame) parallels ἀνασταυροῦντας (crucifying again) in meaning. This parallelism indicates that when Jesus is crucified, He is put to shame (cf. Heb 12:2).

The first five participles in Heb 6:4-6b are aorist .

The shift from aorist to present tense (Ἀνασταυροῦντας ἀνδ παραδειγματίζοντας) may be a simple description of an act, with little or no import of duration.² Several clues in the text authenticate this understanding. Lexically, ἀνασταυρω "crucify 'again'," though used metaphor metonymically here, suggests a repetition of action previously done to Jesus (Matt 27:38; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:6).

Again, the impersonal verb ἀδύνατον, "it is impossible," is stative. Since ἀδύνατον is the main verb to which avnastaurow relates, ἀνασταυρω may express simple act. In short, the act of crucifying and putting Christ, the Son of God, to open shame may be a summary statement of rebellion against God's grace and providence.³

They crucify again 'to themselves' (6:6b). Ἐαυτοῖς "to themselves" may be defined as dative of disadvantage, si-

¹See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 63, 69.

²Wallace, 514; Ellingworth, 324; Hobbs, 60.

³See MacArthur, 147.

gnifying an act whose effect is detrimental to one's salvation.¹ As Harold W. Attridge rightly puts it, "apostasy is thus seen as the sort of heinous crime that precludes 'renewal unto repentance,' because it puts apostates in the position of enemies of Christ, and removes them from the sphere where true repentance and reconciliation with God is possible."² To crucify Jesus is an act of unbelief, as the original crucifiers demonstrated (cf. Matt 17:19; Luke 23:1-10; JJohn 18:1-19:42; Heb 3:19; 4:2; 6:1,12).

Heb 6:7,8 reaffirm the effect of apostasy. The author employs an agricultural image to illustrate his point. In v. 7, he indicates that a soil that bears good fruit becomes profitable for those who cultivate the land and it receives blessings from God. On the other hand, the soil which bears thorns and briars is rejected and cursed, with burning as the result (v. 8). The thrust of this illustration is that judgment awaits those who waste God's blessing (cf. vv. 4-5).³ Therefore, in Heb 6:4-6, it appears that the impossibility of repentance does not come from God nor the author, but rather the nature of the offence removes the offenders from the sphere of repentance.

¹See Wallace, 143.

²Attridge, 172. So also Lane, 142; Moffatt, 79-78; Jewett, 103-04; Brown, 111-12; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 149-50; D. Guthrie, 145.

³Attridge, 172-73; Koester, 323; Lane, 143; MacArthur, 147; Jewett, 105; Hobbs, 62.

Repentance in Heb 10:26-31

Heb 10:26-31 reenforces the idea that repentance after apostasy is impossible. Verses 1-14 indicate that the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice far surpasses the sacrifice of bulls and goats. Believers are reminded that they are sanctified once and for all by Christ's sacrifice. The author seems to establish that no other sacrifice is acceptable to God except Christ's. Verses 15-23 present a new era of living. Because of Christ's superior sacrifice for sin, believers can boldly approach the throne of mercy where Christ, the high priest, is. In v. 23, the author urges believers, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (NKJ)". In vv. 24-25, the author exhorts them to encourage one another to grow both in love and towards good works. He also emphasizes the need to meet together as believers to encourage one another since 'the day' is approaching. It is interesting to note that while emphasizing the need for meeting together, he shows the awareness that some have abandoned the assembling of believers. He seems to encourage believers to meet together in the light of the day which is approaching, probably the judgment day (cf. vv. 27,29-31).

A fierce warning is given in v. 26: "for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The use of γάρ "for" is explanatory in that it sustains the train of thought in v. 25, where the author makes mention of those who have deserted the assembly of believers.¹ He writes ἑκουσιῶς . . . ἀμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν "if we deliberately sin." ἑκουσιῶς "willingly" or "deliberately," an adverb, is placed in an emphatic position in the sentence structure. In the LXX, evkousiōj and its cognates are mostly used with reference to freewill of-

¹See Lane, 291; Montefiore, 177-78; Pink, 609.

ferings which are not required by the law, or voluntary service (Exod 36:2; Lev 7:16; 23:38; Num 15:3; 29:38; Deut 12:6; Ezra 7:16; Judge 5:2, 9). Although ἐκουσιως is not explicitly mentioned in Num 15:29-31, the idea of 'deliberate sin' is depicted, which stands in contrast to ἄκουσιως "unintentional sin" (cf. Lev 4:1-2,13,22,27; 5:14-15,18; Num 15:22-30; Deut 19:4-13).

2 Mecc 14:3 reads, "Now a certain Alcimus, who had formerly been high priest but had willfully defiled himself in the times of separation, realized that there was no way for him to be safe or to have access again to the holy altar (NAS)."¹ Unlike an unintentional sin, anyone who commits a 'deliberate sin' is extirpated or incapacitated to assume his former office. In the NT, ἐκουσιως and its cognates are used to denote a 'deliberate act' (Rom 8:20; Phim 14; Heb 10:26; 1 Pet 5:2). For example, 1 Pet 5:2 reads, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly" (NKJ)² It seems appropriate to assert that in Heb 10:26 the act which evkousiwj modifies is not only deliberate but calculated.³

According to the sentence structure, ἐκουσιως modifies ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν literally "we sin." As a genitive absolute, ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν may be translated as conditional(protasis ['if we deliberately sin' after we have received the knowledge of the truth]) while the main clause may be considered as an apodosis (οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία "a sacrifice no longer remains for sins)."

¹Italics supplied.

²Italics mine.

³Cf. Ellingworth, 531-32; Lane, 292; Koester, 451, 456; Pink, 610.

The context makes it clear that by the sacrifice of Jesus, believers have been made perfect 'once for all' in contrast to daily sacrifices which had no efficacy to take away sins and are reminder of sin (vv. 3,10-14). Based on the efficacy of Jesus's once for all offering for sin and promise of forgiveness (vv. 15-18), believers should have a true heart, assured faith, guilty-free conscience as they approach the sanctuary for forgiveness (vv. 19-23), and love one another and good deeds and not neglecting assembly (vv. 24-25). This is a new living inaugurated through Jesus' body (v. 20). The superiority of Jesus's sacrifice with reference to its efficacy is the main theme of chap. 10.

The author seems to indicate that after knowing the truth about the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice, through which believers have been made perfect and they deliberately sin, there is no longer sacrifice for their sins. The expression "the knowledge of the truth" in v.10a finds its closest parallel in 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1. It suggests an "intellectual element of faith."¹ Heb 10:1-4 state that same sacrifices offered yearly could not make the sinners perfect. On the contrary, Jesus's sacrifice has made believers perfect (v. 10). It appears that if believers willfully sin after knowing this truth of the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice in making perfect, they treat this sacrifice with impudence. With this treatment, the Son of God is trampled upon (v. 29). The author expects believers to live as sanctified not to entertain wilful sins. By using ἡμῶν (literally "our"), 1st plural, the author seems to suggest that nobody, including himself, is beyond any wilful sin.²

¹Attridge, 293; Bauer, s.v. "ἐπίγνωσις"; R. Bultmann "γινώσκω," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 1:707.

²Cf. Lana, 292-93; Attridge, 293; Koester, 533; G. H. Guthrie, 217-104

A fearful judgment awaits those who commit wilful sin (vv. 27-29). Those who stand opposed to the 'saving truth' are the object of God's judgment. In v. 28, the author affirms the warning by alluding to Deut 17:2-7 which state that when two or three witnesses charge someone of idolatry that person is to die without mercy.

In comparison to v. 28, the author of Hebrews uses the interrogative pronoun *πόσος* "how much"¹ to heighten the due punishment of those who have trampled the 'Son of God' and have regarded the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified unholy, and have despised the spirit of grace (v. 29). To be guilty of this offence is to repudiate efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice (cf. vv. 1-18, 26). It seems fair at this point to state that those whose hearts are hardened towards God's grace repudiates His once for all sacrifice by committing deliberate sin. Any heart hardened towards God nullifies the seal of the new covenant, which is Christ's blood. In a word, if believers deliberately sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth about the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice, there remains no longer sacrifice/forgiveness of sin but rather judgment of God.

Repentance in Heb 12:17

The literary character of Heb 12 is exhortation. In this chapter, the author exhorts believers to persevere in their faith. In v. 1, they are admonished to put all obstacles that may beset them as they run the race set before them. He refers to Christ, the author and finisher of their faith, as the

18; Westcott, 328.

¹Bauer, s.v. "*πόσος*"; Wallace, 346.

perfect example. Knowing the joy set before Him, Christ endured the cross and despised shame. He sits at the right hand of the throne of God (v. 2). In this regard, believers are encouraged to emulate Christ (v. 3). Verses 4-14 indicate that believers should see God's rebuke of them as a corrective measure. The author enjoins them to look diligently "lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (v. 15)(NJK). The author plunges into the subject of repentance in vv. 16-17.

Looking diligently will save believers from becoming like Esau, "... who for one morsel of food "gave up" his birthright" (v. 16). It appears that the author's interest is in Esau's giving up his birthright because of one morsel.¹ Verse 17 augments this observation: "for you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." Esau found no place for repentance. Μετάνοια "repentance" simply means "a change of mind."² It appears that the statement that 'Esau found no place for repentance' may mean that he did not get the opportunity to reinstate his birthright.³ In other words, it was too late for Esau to change his circumstance.

¹So also Koester, 541.

²Bauer, s.v. "μετάνοια"; Thayer, s.v. "μετάνοια"; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Society, 1988), s.v. μετάνοια.

³So also G. H. Guthrie, 258; Moffatt, 212; Barclay, 184; Westcott, 409. Vincent, 549-50; Robertson, 439. Cf. Attridge, 370; Brown, 237; have argued that 'place of repentance' refers to a change of Isaac's mind because Isaac had given the blessing to Jacob.

The passage further indicates that Esau sought "it." In the Greek, αὐτήν "it," personal pronoun feminine accusative singular, may either refer to εὐλογίαν (blessing) or μετάνοίας (repentance), which are feminine nouns. While εὐλογίαν is accusative, μετάνοίας is genitive modifying the noun τόπον, masculine noun. It may be grammatically appropriate to use αὐτόν, masculine pronoun for τόπον (masculine noun), instead of the feminine αὐτήν. Since Esau sold his birth-right, he could not inherit the blessing. It appears that his cry was directed to the blessing which he had lost. Therefore, eulogi,an may be the antecedent of αὐτήν, that is, Esau sought the blessing with tears, yet he was rejected.

By the analogy of Esau, the author seeks to sensitize the believers of the danger in forfeiting the grace of God while it is within their reach.¹ Being the Son of God, Christ is appointed heir of all things (1:2,4). According to Hebrews, it is only believers who share in the status of the 'sonship' through Christ (2:10). In this way, believers "inherit the divine promises" (1:4,6; 6:12,17-18; 9:15; 12:23).² Therefore, giving up their 'sonship' for any temporal thing is to reject the divine promises. Lane perceptively observes that "a reckless disregard for God and his gifts is reprehensible because it entails a wilful rejection of a divine vocation. This is the essence of apostasy."³ Divine judgment awaits those who fall short of the grace of God and give up their inheritance (vv. 15,16,17,25-29).⁴ It is the concern of the author that believers persevere in the faith till the end. Therefore, in Heb

¹Pink, 1018.

²Lane, 456.

³Ibid., 458-59.

⁴Attridge, 270-02; Lane, 458-59; Koester, 532, 541-42.

12:17, to fall away from God's grace is to embrace a hopeless situation not impossibility of repentance.

Synthesis of the Analysis

The motif of repentance, as demonstrated in Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:17, has different meanings. The author's argument in each passage is generally situated in the purpose of writing, that is, perseverance in the faith (3:6,14; 4:14; 6:15; 10:23,36; 12:1 *pasim*).¹ He also backs up his argument that perseverance is necessary because the judgment day is approaching (6:7-12; 10:27-31,35-37; 12:1-16,18-29). As he develops the motif of impossibility of repentance in view of his purpose and imminence of Jesus' coming, each passage is presented to have a particular effect on the 1st century readers. That repentance is impossible after apostasy or deliberate sin should be understood from the perspective of the 1st century author.

In Heb 6:4-6, the author argues that it is impossible to renew again those who have experienced all the heavenly gifts of salvation and fell away to repentance because they have crucified Jesus again. To crucify Jesus again is to simply demonstrate unbelief in the salvation attained through Him. In other words, repentance is attainable only in the salvation provided in Jesus. Such apostates will be judged by God. The author does not give any lapse of time between apostasy and judgment. From the perspective of the author, such people will suffer fearful judgment. Understood this way, the situation of these apostates is descriptive.

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¹See Carson, Moo, and Morris, 402.

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The author says in 10:26-31 that no sacrifice remains for deliberate sin but a fearful judgment. It is argued there is no sacrifice/forgiveness of sin if believers commit deliberate sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth that the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice cannot be contested in that it was offered once for all to make perfect. A deliberate sin will render this sacrifice as the yearly sacrifices offered but with no efficacy to make perfect. The emphasis here is deliberate (ἐκούσιως). In the author's understanding, once believers have experienced Jesus' sacrifice, deliberate sin should not be entertained, as also in the OT (cf. v. 27-28). The situation of those who deliberately sin is deterministic in view of sin committed.

Chap. 12:17 exhorts believers not to fall away from God's grace and give up their inheritance. This exhortation is given so that believers will persevere in the faith till the end. If they give up their inheritance for anything worldly as Esau did, it will be late to reclaim it at the judgment day. Jesus' determination to reach His goal made Him sit at the right hand of God (v. 2). The finishing of the race of believers in the faith is the emphasis of the author. The fate of those who fall short of God's grace is descriptive.

It seems fair to reiterate the point that considering the situation of believers, as some attempted to withdraw from regular meetings (10:25) or contemplating drifting from the faith (3:8, 12-4:6, 11; 12:11-17; 13:9), the author needed to warn them with 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:17. It is against this

¹Descriptive means that the path of the apostate leads to destruction while deterministic points to the unchangeableness of their situation/fate.

background that all these warnings are given primarily to encourage them to persevere in the faith as the day approaches.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from this study is three-fold. First, in Heb 6:4-6, it is impossible to renew again those who experienced the heavenly gifts of salvation in Christ and fell away by showing distrust in this salvation. It is impossible because to crucify Jesus is to show unbelief. It is those who accept this salvation in faith can experience repentance. Without faith, it is impossible for them to come to repentance. Second, when believers experience the efficacy of Jesus' once for all sacrifice and willfully commit sin, there remains no longer sacrifice (10:26). This is so because the efficacy of His sacrifice is treated with impudence. Finally, if believers give up their inheritance, promised by God, before the end comes, they cannot reclaim it at His judgment (12:17). Repentance is a dominant theme in Hebrews. Contrary to the popular understanding, this study arrives at different meanings with reference to why and when repentance becomes impossible as demonstrated above. These three cardinal passages in Hebrews may not delineate the same understanding of why and when repentance becomes impossible.