

Fact Sheet for **“One Door and Only One”**  
**Hebrews 6:1-12**  
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This is probably the most difficult passage in the book of Hebrews to interpret. Let's begin with three ways to interpret it, all of which have major problems.

**1. These verses teach that you can lose your salvation.**

Calvinists hold that a true Christian cannot lose his or her salvation. Arminians believe that you can. But his passage causes problems for both. It seems to say that you can. But it also seems to say that once you do you can never come back!

**2. Verses 4-6 are about people who were around Christians, but were never really Christians themselves.**

The author of Hebrews himself makes short work of this view. The words used to describe these individuals are also used elsewhere in Hebrews with meaning that *strongly* argues against the idea that these individuals were enlightened, had tasted, and had shared, but not really.

**3. The falling away is not a loss of salvation but a disqualification from effectiveness and blessing.**

The problem with this view is that it is complicated, strained, and built on thoughts not in this passage.

There is a fourth view that is simple, consistent with the words the author uses, and ties in beautifully with his flow of thought.

**US**

ESV <sup>1</sup> ¶ **Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.**

**“let us leave”**

More literally **“leaving** the elementary doctrine of Christ”

**“the elementary doctrine of Christ”**

This elementary doctrine of Christ is the beginning, not the stopping point of our faith.

**“let us... go on”**

The thought behind the original wording is **“let us be carried along” by God.**

**“to maturity”** (τελειότης, noun)

[5:9 (perfect” τελειώω, participle); 5:14 (τέλειος, adjective)]

**“not laying again a foundation”**

This is not just going over the basics a second time. This is building that foundation all over **again** from scratch. That foundation had covered several items such as these six:

**1. “repentance from dead works”**

The Levitical rituals and the rigid obedience to the Mosaic Law that the readers had left behind were incapable of imparting the true spiritual life they had found in Christ (9:14). They had repented of these dead works already.

**2. “faith toward God”**

This is how true spiritual life is found and how it flourishes (see Hebrews 11).

### 3. “instruction about washings”

The word for “washings” is literally “baptisms”, a transliteration instead of a translation. It would be odd to refer only to the baptism of John the Baptist and to Christian baptism this way. It is actually better understood to include *also* the ceremonial washings of the Mosaic Law.

### 4. “the laying on of hands”

This was not just a practice in the NT, it also appears several times in the Mosaic Law. One of those times was on the Day of Atonement with the high priest (Leviticus 16:21).

### 5. “the resurrection of the dead”

This certainly appears multiple times in both OT and NT.

### 6. “and eternal judgment”

Again this appears multiple times in the both OT and NT.

### <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.

What is “this”? It is letting God carry them on from an elementary faith in Christ to maturity.

## THEM

Now the author of Hebrews changes from “us” to “them”.

**<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and *then* have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and *(are)* holding him up to contempt.**

Verses 4-6 are one sentence in the original Greek. The KJV has a better translation of the initial words of verse 4 (“For *it is* impossible for those”). The words “in the case of” are not in the original Greek and convey the subtle meaning that the author knew of some who were actually in this boat. The stricter KJV rendering could easily convey that the author was speaking of a hypothetical situation.

### “impossible”

“Impossible” means just that, “impossible” (6:18; 10:4; 11:6).

### “enlightened” (10:32)

### “tasted” (2:9)

“shared” (1:9 “companions”; 3:1, 14; 12:8 “participated”)

### “fallen away”

This means exactly what it says and what it means in context... fallen away from Christ.

### “to restore them again”

First off, to be restored again to life requires that there had been life.

Secondly, is there a crack in the door here? Is it *impossible* for someone here to restore them but *possible* for them to be restored by God? The author’s words *might possibly* leave room for this. In speaking about how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven Jesus said all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). This is a strained interpretation at best. First, there is no suggestion in Hebrews that the author had this in mind. Second, this view is totally dependent on Christ’s words from a different context.

### “repentance”

The word “repentance” in verse 6 is the same word used in verse 1. It is likely referring to the same thing, repentance from dead works.

### “are crucifying” *and* “are holding him up to contempt”

Both of these are in the present tense! The people described in these verses are continuing to do this.

**<sup>7</sup> For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.**

Hebrews 6:7-8 contrasts God’s blessing on a good response to Christ but His cursing on a bad response to Christ.

### YOU

Now the author of Hebrews switches again from “them” to “you”.

**<sup>9</sup> ¶ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things-- things that belong to salvation.**

Again, the KJV has a stricter translation (But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you).

**<sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

The author of Hebrews was after their full assurance of hope. He was after their patience, and their faith as they learned to imitate those saints who had gone before..

So what is the fourth view?

### **4. Verses 4-6 are an impossible hypothetical situation and point to Christ as the only way to salvation.**

It is like the old question, “Can God create a rock He can’t move?” This question is impossible because it assumes two completely contradictory things to be true at the same time... an all-powerful God *and* a rock that would mean God was not all-powerful. In the same way Hebrews 6:4-6 are impossible.

It is absolutely impossible for someone to be a Christian who then chooses to reject Christ, and continues to reject Christ, and still can be restored to salvation. No one can do this. It is an impossible hypothetical situation. Hebrews 6:4-6 is true of no one. In one sense it is like 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. These three verses from 1 Corinthians 13 present impossible situations, but they teach that we must have love. Hebrews 6:4-6 presents an impossible situation but teaches that we should have absolute confidence in Christ.

Here’s the author’s flow of thought put simply...

6:1-3 Leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ let God carry us on to maturity.

6:4-8 Strengthen your absolute confidence in Christ.

6:9-12 Have the full assurance of hope, and be imitators of those saints who have gone before.

I want to end with the word from a CEF song I learned as a boy...

“One door and only one  
And yet its sides are two.  
I’m on the inside  
On which side are you?”