

Apostasy
&

Hebrews 6:4-6

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Agape Chapel Ministries
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Norwalk, CA 90652 USA
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Taking the passage as a whole, it needs to be remembered that all who had professed to receive the Gospel were not born of God: the parable of the Sower shows that. Intelligence might be informed, conscience searched, natural affections stirred, and yet there be "no root" in them. All is not gold that glitters. There has always been a "mixt multitude" (Ex. 12:38) who accompany the people of God. Moreover, there is in the real Christian the old heart, which is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked", and therefore is he in constant need of faithful *warning*. Such, God has given in every dispensation: Genesis 2:17; Leviticus 26:15, 16; Matthew 3:8; Romans 11:21; 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Finally, let it be said that while Scripture speaks plainly and positively of the perseverance of the saints, yet it is a perseverance of *saints*, not unregenerate professors. Divine preservation is not only in a safe state, but also in a *holy* course of disposition and conduct. We are "kept by the power of God *through faith*". We are kept by the Spirit working in us a spirit of entire dependency, renouncing our own wisdom and strength. The only place from which we cannot fall is one down in the dust. It is there the Lord brings His own people, weaning them from all confidence in the flesh, and giving them to experience that it is when they are weak they are strong. Such, and such only, are saved and safe forever.

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Apostasy & Hebrews 6:4-6

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The passage, which is now to occupy our attention, is one of the most solemn in the Hebrews' epistle, yea, to be met with anywhere in the New Testament. Probably few regenerate souls have read it thoughtfully without being moved to fear and trembling. Careless professors have frequently been rendered uneasy in conscience as they have heard its awe-inspiring language. It speaks of a class of persons who had been highly privileged, who had been singularly favored, but who, so far from having improved their opportunities, had wretchedly perverted them; who had brought shame and reproach on the cause of Christ; and who were in such a hopeless condition that it was "impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Well does it become each one of us to earnestly lift up his heart to God, beseeching Him to prevent us making such a shipwreck of the faith.

As perhaps the majority of our readers are aware, the verses before us have proved one of the fiercest theological battlegrounds of the centuries. It is at this point that the hottest fights between Calvinists and Arminians have been waged. Those who believe that it is possible for a real Christian to so sin and backslide as to fall from grace and be lost eternally, have confidently appealed to these verses for proof of their theory. It is much to be feared their theory prejudiced them so much, that they were incapable of examining impartially and weighing carefully its varied terms. With their minds so biased by their views of apostasy, they have rather taken it for granted that this passage describes a true child of God, who, through turning his back upon Christ, ultimately perishes. But Scripture bids us "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21), and this calls for something more

than a superficial and hurried investigation of what is, admittedly, a difficult passage.

If on the one hand, Arminians have been too ready to read into this passage their unscriptural dogma of the apostasy of a Christian, it must be confessed that many Calvinists have failed to grapple successfully with and interpret satisfactorily the most knotty points in these verses. They are right in affirming that Scripture teaches, most emphatically and unequivocally the Divine preservation and the human perseverance of the saints, as they have also wisely pointed out that the Word of God does not and cannot contradict itself. If our Lord asserted that His sheep should "never perish" (John 10:28), then certainly Hebrews 6 will not teach that some of them do. If through the apostle Paul the Holy Spirit assures us that nothing can separate the children from the love of their Father (Rom. 8:35-39), then, without doubt, the portion now before us does not declare that something will. It may not always be easy to discover the perfect consistency of one scripture with another, yet we must hold fast to the unerring harmony and integrity of God's Truth.

The chief difficulty connected with our passage is to make sure of the class of persons who are there in view. Is the Holy Spirit here describing regenerated or unregenerated souls? The next thing is to ascertain what is meant by, "If they shall fall away." The last, what is denoted by "It is *impossible* to renew them again unto repentance." Anticipating our exposition, we are fully assured that the "falling away" which is here spoken of signifies a deliberate, complete and final repudiation of Christ—a sin for which there is no forgiveness. So too we understand the "impossible" to renew them again to repentance, announces that their condition and case is beyond hope of recovery. Because of this, Calvinists have, generally, affirmed that this passage is treating of mere professors. But over against this there are two insuperable objections: first, mere professors have nothing from which to "fall away"; second, mere professors have *never* been "renewed" unto repentance.

In addition to the controversy, which these verses have occasioned, not a few have turned them unto an

it. Afterward they sinned "willfully": there was a deliberate and open disavowal of the truth. The nature of their particular sin is termed a "treading under foot the Son of God (something which no real Christian ever does) and counting (esteeming) the blood of the covenant an unholy thing", that is, looking upon the One who hung on the Cross as a *common* malefactor. For such there "remaineth no more sacrifice for sins". Their case is hopeless so far as man is concerned; and the writer believes, such are abandoned by God also.

"Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame". "They thus identify themselves with His crucifiers they entertained and avowed sentiments which were He on earth and in their power, would induce them to crucify Him. They exposed Him to infamy, made a public example of Him. They did more to dishonor Jesus Christ than His murderers did. They never professed to acknowledge His divine mission; but these apostates had made such a profession they had made a kind of trial of Christianity, and, after trial, had rejected it" (Dr. J. Brown).

Such a warning was needed and well calculated to stir up the slothful Hebrews. Under the Old Testament economy, by means of types and prophecies, they had obtained glimmerings of truth as to Christ, called "the word of the beginning of Christ". Under those shadows and glimmerings they had been reared, not knowing their full import till they had been blessed with the full light of the Gospel, here called "perfection". The danger to which they were exposed was that of receding from the ground where Christianity placed them, and relaxing to Judaism. To do so meant to re-enter that House which Christ had left "desolate" (Matthew 23:38), and would be to join forces with His murderers, and thus "crucify to *themselves* the Son of God afresh", and by their apostasy "put Him to an open (public) shame". We may add that the Greek word here for "crucify" is a stronger one than is generally used: it means to "crucify up". Attention is thus directed to the erection of the cross on which the Savior was held up to public scorn.

in it unto any of the holy properties of His nature; only He will not have us to expect any such thing from Him, nor hath He appointed any means for us to endeavor it. What He shall do we ought trustfully to accept; but our own duty toward such persons is absolutely at an end. And indeed, they put themselves wholly out of our reach" (Dr. John Owen).

It needs to be carefully observed that in the whole of this passage from Hebrews 5:11 onwards the apostle is speaking of *his own ministry*. In God's hands, His servants are instruments by which He works and through whom He accomplishes His evangelical purpose. Thus Paul could properly say "I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). And again, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). So the servants of God had, through the preaching of the Gospel, "renewed unto repentance" those spoken of in Hebrews 6:4. But they had apostatized; they had totally repudiated the Gospel. It was therefore "impossible" for the servants of God to "renew them again unto repentance", for the all-sufficient reason that they had no other message to proclaim to them. They had no other Gospel in reserve, no further motives to present. Christ crucified *had been* set before them. Him they now denounced as an Imposter. There was "none other name" whereby they could be saved. Their public renunciation of Christ rendered their case hopeless so far as God's servants were concerned. "Let them alone" (Matthew 15:19) was now their order: compare Jude 22. Whether or not it was possible for God, consistently with His holiness, to shame them, our passage does not decide.

"Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh" (verse 6). This is brought in to show the aggravation of their awful crime and the impossibility of their being renewed again unto repentance. By renouncing their Christian profession they declared Christ to be an Imposter. Thus they were irreclaimable. To attempt any further reasoning with them, would only be casting pearls before swine. With this verse should be carefully compared the parallel passage in Hebrews 10:26-29. These apostates had "received the knowledge of the truth", though *not* a saving knowledge of

unwarrantable use. "Misapprehension of this passage has also, I believe, in many cases occasioned extreme distress of mind to two classes of persons, to nominal professors, who, after falling into gross sin, have been awakened to serious reflection; and to real Christians, on their falling under the power of mental disease, sinking into a state of spiritual languor, or being betrayed into such transgressions of the Divine law as David and Peter were guilty of: and this has thrown all but insurmountable obstacles in the way of both 'fleeing for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them' in the Gospel. All this makes it the more necessary that we should carefully inquire into the meaning of the passage. When rightly understood, it will be found to give no countenance to any of the false conclusions which have been drawn from it, but to be like every other part of inspired Scripture, 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness', well-fitted to produce caution, no way calculated to induce despair" (Dr. J. Brown).

Before attempting an elucidation of the above-mentioned difficulties, and to prepare the way for our exposition of these verses, the contents of which have so sorely puzzled many, let us recall, once more, the condition of soul into which these Hebrew Christians had fallen. They had "become dull of hearing" (Heb. 5:11), "unskillful in the Word of Righteousness" (Heb. 5:13), unable to masticate "strong meat" (Heb. 5:14). This state was fraught with the most dangerous consequences. "The Hebrews had become lukewarm, negligent, and inert; the gospel, once dearly seen and dearly loved by them, had become to them dull and vague; the persecutions and contempt of their countrymen a grievous burden, under which they groaned, and under which they did not enjoy fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Darkness, doubt, gloom, indecision, and consequently a walk, in which the power of Christ's love was not manifest, characterized them. Now, if they continued in this state, what else could be the result but apostasy? Forgetfulness, if continued, must end in rejection, apathy in antipathy, unfaithfulness in infidelity.

"Such was their danger. And if they succumbed to it their state was hopeless. No other gospel remains to be preached, no other power to rescue and raise them. They had heard and known the voice which saith, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest'. They had professed to believe in the Lord, who died for sinners, and to have chosen Him as their Savior and Master. And now they were forgetting and forsaking the Rock of their Salvation. If they deliberately and willfully continued in this state, they were in danger of final impenitence and hardness of heart.

"The exhortation must be viewed in connection with the special circumstances of the Hebrews. After the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, the gospel had been preached unto the Jews by the apostles, and the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit had been manifested among them. The Hebrews had accepted the gospel of the once crucified and now glorified Redeemer, who sent down from heaven the Spirit, a sign of His exaltation, and a pledge of the future inheritance. Having thus entered into the *sphere of new covenant manifestation*, any one who willfully abandoned it could only relapse into that phase of Judaism, which crucified the Lord Jesus. There was no other alternative for them, but either to go on to the full knowledge of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, and to the believer's acceptance and worship through the Mediator in the sanctuary above, or fall back into the attitude, not of the godly Israelites before Pentecost, such as John the Baptist and those who waited for the promised redemption, nor even into the condition of those for whom the Savior prayed, 'for they know not what they do'; but into a state of willful conscious enmity against Christ, and the sin of rejecting Him, and putting Him to an open shame" (Adolph Saphir).

"The danger to which this spiritual inertness exposed the Hebrews was such as to justify the strongest language of expostulation and reproof. Apostasy from Christ was a step more easy and natural to a Jewish than to a Gentile believer, because the way was always open and inviting them, as men, to return to those associations which once carried with them the outward sanctification of Jehovah's name, and which

Testament revelation puts forth; and they had been made to see that that 'good word' was fulfilled, and had been made partakers of the external privileges and been subjected to the peculiar energies of the new order of things. Their view, and feelings, and circumstances, were materially changed. How great the difference between an ignorant, bigoted Jew, and the person described in the preceding passage! He had become as it were a different man. He had not, indeed, become, in the sense of the apostle, a 'new creature', His mind had not been so changed as unfeignedly to believe 'the truth as it is in Jesus'; but still, a great and so far as it went, a thorough change had taken place" (Dr. J. Brown).

Now it is impossible to "renew again unto repentance" those who have totally abandoned the Christian revelation. Some things are "impossible" with respect unto the *nature* of God, as that He cannot lie, or pardon sin without satisfaction to His justice. Other things which are possible to God's nature are rendered "impossible" by His *decrees* or purpose: see 1 Samuel 15:28, 29. Still other things are "possible" or "impossible" with respect to the rule or order of all things God has appointed. For example, there cannot be faith apart from hearing the Word (Rom. 10:13-17). "When in things of duty God hath neither expressed command thereon, nor appointed means for the performance of them, they are to be looked upon then as impossible [as, for instance, there is no salvation apart from repentance, Luke 13:3. (A.W.P.)]; and then, with respect unto *us*, they are so absolutely, and so to be esteemed. And this is the 'impossibility' here principally intended. It is a thing that God hath neither commanded us to endeavor, nor appointed means to attain it, nor promise to assist us in it. It is therefore that which we have no reason to look after, attempt, or expect, as being not possible by any law, rule, or constitution of God.

"The apostle instructs us no further in the nature of future events but as our own duty is concerned in them. It is not for us either to look or hope, or pray for, or endeavor for the restoration of such persons unto repentance. God gives a law unto us in these things, not unto Himself. It may be possible with God, for ought we know, if there be not a contradiction

importance; but in an open, total, determined renunciation of all the constituent principles of Christianity, and a return to a false religion, such as that of unbelieving Jews or heathens, or to open infidelity and open godlessness" (Dr. J. Brown). "It is impossible . . . if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance". Four questions here call for answer. What is meant by "renewed unto repentance"? What is signified by "renewed again unto repentance"? Why is such an experience "impossible"? To whom is this "impossible"? Repentance signifies a change of mind: Matthew 21:29, Romans 11:29 establish this. It is more than a mental act, the conscience also being active, leading to contrition and self-condemnation (Job 42:6). In the unregenerate, it is simply the workings of nature; in the children of God it is wrought by the Holy Spirit. The latter is evangelical, being one of the things which "accompany salvation". The former is not so, being the "sorrow of the world", which "worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). This kind of "repentance" or remorse receives most solemn exemplification in the case of Judas: Matthew 27:3, 5. Such was the repentance of these apostates. The Greek verb for "renew" here occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Probably "restore" had been better, for the same word is used in the Sept., for a Hebrews verb meaning to renew in the sense of restore: Psalm 103:5; 104:30; Lamentations 5:21. Josephus applies it to the renovation of the Temple!

But what is meant by "renewing unto repentance"? "To be 'renewed' is a figurative expression for denoting a change, a great change, and a change for the better. To be 'renewed' so as to change a person's mind is expressive of an important and advantageous alteration of opinion, and character and service. And such an alteration the persons referred to had undergone at a former period. They were once in a state of ignorance respecting the doctrines and evidences of Christianity, and they had been 'enlightened'. They had once known not of the Excellency and beauty of Christian truth, and they had been made to 'taste of the heavenly gift'. They once misunderstood the prophecies respecting the Messiah, and were unaware of their fulfillment, and, of course, were strangers to that energetic influence which the New

only the power of grace had enabled them to renounce. When heavenly realities became inoperative in their souls, the visible image was before them still, and here was the danger of their giving it the homage of their souls. If there were not an habitual exercise of their spiritual senses, the power of discernment could not remain: they would call evil good, and good evil. The ignorance, which springs from spiritual neglect, begins its own punishment of apathetic dullness on the once clear mind, and robs the spirit of its power to detect the wily methods of the Devil. It is in the presence of God alone that the Christian can exert his spiritual energies with effect. Abiding in Christ, maintains us in that presence. A more unhappy error cannot befall a believer than to separate, in the habit of his mind, acquired knowledge from the living Christ. Faith dies at once when separated from its object. Knowledge indeed is precious, but the knowledge of God is a progressive thing (Col. 1:10), whose end is not obtained this side of the glory (1 Cor. 8:2). The extreme experience of an advancing Christian is that of continual initiation. With a prospect ever-widening he has a daily deepening apprehension of the grace wherein he stands, and in which he is more and more established, by the word of righteousness....

"A clear and growing faith, in heavenly things was needed to preserve Jewish Christians from relapse. To return to Judaism was to give up Christ, who had left their house 'desolate' (Matthew 23:38). It was to fall from grace, and place themselves not only under the general curse of the law, but that particular imprecation which had brought the guilt of Jesus' blood on the reprobate and blinded nation of His murderers" (A. Pridham). It should be pointed out, however, that it is just as easy, and the attraction is just as real, for a Gentile Christian to return to that world out of which the Lord has called him, as it was for a Jewish Christian to go back again to Judaism. And just in proportion as the Christian fails to walk with God daily, so does the world obtain power over his heart, mind and life; and a continuance in worldliness is fraught with the most direful and fatal consequences.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened" etc. (verse 4). Here the apostle continues the digression which he began at Hebrews 5:11. The parenthesis has two divisions: the first, Hebrews 5:11-14 is reprehensible; the second, Hebrews 6:1-20 is hortatory. In chapter 6 he exhorts the Hebrews unto two duties: to *progress* in the Christian course (verses 1-11); to *persevere* therein (verses 12-20). The first exhortation is proposed in verses 1,2 and qualified in verse 3. The *motive* to obedience is drawn from the danger of apostasy (verses 4-6). The opening "For" of verse 4 intimates the close connection of our present passage with that which immediately precedes. It draws a conclusion from what the apostle had been saying in Hebrews 5:11-14. It amplifies the "if" in verse 3. It points a most solemn warning against their continuance in their present sloth. It draws a terrible contrast from the possibility of verse 3. "The apostle regards the retrogression of the Hebrews with dismay. He sees in it the danger of an entire, confirmed, willful, and irrecoverable apostasy from the truth. He beholds them on the brink of a precipice, and he therefore lifts up his voice, and with vehement yet loving earnestness he warns them against so fearful an evil" (Adolph Saphir).

Three things claim our careful attention in coming closer to our passage: the persons here spoken of, the sin they commit, the doom pronounced upon them. In considering the persons spoken of it is of first importance to note that the apostle does *not* say, "us who were once enlightened", nor even "you", instead, he says "those". In sharp contrast from them, he says to the Hebrews, "Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you".

"Afterwards, when the apostle comes to declare his hope and persuasion concerning these Hebrews that they were not such as those whom he had before described, nor such as would fall away unto perdition, *he doth* it upon three grounds whereon they were differenced from them as: 1. That they had such things as did 'accompany salvation'; that is, such as salvation is inseparable from. None of these things therefore had he ascribed unto those whom he describeth in this place (verses 4-6); for if he had so done, they would not

miracles of Christ, and also of the wonders that followed His ascension, when such glorious manifestations of the Spirit were given. Thus they were "without excuse". Convincing and conclusive evidence had been set before them, but there had been no answering faith in their hearts. A solemn example of this is found in John 11:47, 48.

"If they shall fall away". The Greek word here is very strong and emphatic, even stronger than the one used in Matthew 7:27, where it is said of the house built on the sand, "and great was the fall thereof". It is a complete falling away, a total abandonment of Christianity which is here in view. It is a willful turning of the back on God's revealed truth, an utter repudiation of the Gospel. It is making "shipwreck of the faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). This terrible sin is not committed by a mere nominal professor, for he has nothing really to fall away from, save an empty name. The class here described are such as had had their minds enlightened, their consciences stirred, their affections moved to a considerable degree, and yet who were never brought from death unto life. Nor is it backsliding Christians who are in view. It is not simply "fall into sin", this or that sin. The greatest "sin" which a regenerated man can possibly commit is the personal denial of Christ: Peter was guilty of this, yet was he "renewed again unto repentance". It is the total renunciation of all the distinguishing truths and principles of Christianity, and this not secretly, but openly, which constitutes apostasy.

"If they shall fall away". This is scarcely a fair translation. It has been said that the apostle did not here assert that such persons *did* or *do* 'fall away'; but that if they did—a supposition which, however, could never be realized—then the consequence would be they could not be 'renewed again unto repentance'. The words literally rendered are, 'And have fallen away', or, 'yet have fallen'. The apostle obviously intimates that such persons might, and that such persons did, 'fall away'. By 'falling away', we are plainly to understand what is commonly called apostasy. This does not consist in an occasional falling into actual sin, however gross and aggravated; nor in the renunciation of some of the principles of Christianity, even though those should be of considerable

Fourth, "And have tasted the good Word of God". "I understand by this expression the promise of God respecting the Messiah, the sum and substance of all. It deserves notice that this promise is by way of eminence termed by Jeremiah 'that good word' (Jer. 33:14). To 'taste', then, this 'good Word of God', is to experience that God has been faithful to His promise—to enjoy, so far as an unconverted man can enjoy the blessings and advantages which flow from that promise being fulfilled. To 'taste the good Word of God', seems, just to enjoy the advantages of the new dispensation" (Dr. J. Brown). Further confirmation that the apostle is here referring to that which these apostates had witnessed of the fulfillment of God's *promise* is obtained by comparing Jeremiah 29:10, "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My *good word* toward you, in causing you to return to this place".

Observe how studiously the apostle still keeps to the word "taste", the better to enable us to identify them. They could not say with Jeremiah, "Thy words were found and I did eat them" (Jer. 15:16). "It is as though he said, I speak not of those who have received nourishment; but of such as have so far tasted it, as that they ought to have desired it as 'sincere milk' and grown thereby" (Dr. John Owen). A solemn example of one who merely "tasted" the good Word of God is found in Mark 6:20: "for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly".

Fifth, "And the powers of the world to come," or "age to come." The reference here is to the new dispensation, which was to be ushered in by Israel's Messiah according to Old Testament predictions. It corresponds with "these last days" of Hebrews 1:2, and is in contrast from the "time past" or Mosaic economy. Their Messiah was none other than the "mighty God" (Isa. 9), and wondrous and glorious, stupendous and unique, were His miraculous works. These "powers" of the new Age are mentioned in Hebrews 2:4, to our comments on which we would refer the reader. Of these mighty "powers" these apostates had "tasted", or had an experience of. They had been personal witnesses of the

have been unto him an argument and evidence of a contrary end, that these should not fall away and perish as well as those. Wherefore he ascribes nothing to these here in the text that *doth* peculiarly 'accompany salvation'. 2. He describes them by their *duties of obedience* and fruits of faith. This was their 'work and labor of love' towards the name of God, verse 10. And hereby, also, doth he differentiate them from those in the text, concerning whom he supposeth that they may perish eternally, which these fruits of saving faith and sincere love cannot do. 3. He adds, that, in the preservation of those there mentioned, the *faithfulness of God* was concerned: 'God is not unrighteous to forget'. For they were such he intended as were interested in the covenant of grace, with respect whereunto alone there is any engagement on the faithfulness or righteousness of God to preserve men from apostasy and ruin; and there is so with an equal respect unto all who are so taken into the covenant. But of those in the text he supposeth no such thing; and thereupon doth not intimate that either the righteousness or faithfulness of God was anyway engaged for their preservation, but rather the contrary" (Dr. John Owen).

It is scarcely accurate to designate as "mere professors" those described in verses 4,5. They were a class who had enjoyed great privileges, beyond any such as now accompany the preaching of the Gospel. Those here portrayed are said to have had *five* advantages, which is in contrast from the six things enumerated in verses 1, 2, which things belong to man in the flesh, under Judaism. Five is the number of *grace*, and the blessings here mentioned pertain to the Christian dispensation. Yet were they not true Christians. This is evident from what is *not* said. Observe, they were not spoken of as God's elect, as those for whom Christ died, as those who were born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved. Nor is anything said of their faith, love, or obedience. Yet *these* are the very things which distinguish a real child of God. First, they had been "enlightened". The Sun of righteousness had shone with healing in His wings, and, as Matthew 4:16 says, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to

them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up". Unlike the heathen, whom Christ, in the days of His flesh, visited not, those who came under the sound of His voice were wondrously and gloriously illumined.

The Greek word for "enlightened" here signifies "to give light or knowledge by teaching". It is so rendered by the Septuagint in Judges 13:8, 2 Kings 12:2, 17:27. The apostle Paul uses it for "to make manifest", or "bring to light" in 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Timothy 1:10. Satan blinds the minds of those who believe not, lest "the light of the gospel should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4), that is, give the knowledge of it. Thus, "enlightened" here means to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a clear apprehension of it. In the parallel passage in Hebrews 10:26 the same people are said to have "received the knowledge of the truth", cf. also 2 Peter 2:20, 21. It is, however, only a *natural* knowledge of spiritual things, such as is acquired by outward hearing or reading; just as one may be enlightened by taking up the special study of one of the sciences. It falls far short of that spiritual enlightenment which *transforms* (2 Cor. 3:18). An illustration of a unregenerate person being "enlightened", as here, is found in the case of Balaam; Numbers 24:4.

Second, they had "tasted" of the heavenly gift. To "taste" is to have a personal experience of, in contrast from mere report. "Tasting does not include eating, much less digesting and turning into nourishment what is so tasted; for its nature being only thereby discerned it may be refused, yea, though we like its relish and savor, on some other consideration. The persons here described, then, are those who have to a certain degree understood and relished the revelation of mercy; like the stony-ground hearers they have received the Word with a transient joy" (John Owen). The "tasting" is in contrast from the "eating" of John 6:50-56.

Opinion is divided as to whether the "heavenly gift" refers to the Lord Jesus or the person of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is not possible for us to be dogmatic on the point. Really, the difference is without a distinction, for the Spirit is here to glorify Christ, as He came from the Father by Christ as His ascension "Gift" to His people. If the reference be to the Lord

Jesus, John 3:16, 4:10, etc., would be pertinent references: if to the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17. Personally, we rather incline to the latter. This Divine Gift is here said to be "heavenly" because from Heaven, and leading to Heaven, in contrast from Judaism—cf. Acts 2:2, 1 Peter 1:12. Of this "Gift" these apostates had "tasted", or had an experience of: compare Matthew 27:34 where "tasting" is opposed to actual drinking. Those here in view had had an acquaintance with the Gospel, as to gain such a measure of its blessedness as to greatly aggravate their sin and doom. An illustration of this is found in Matthew 13:20, 21.

Third, they were "made partakers of the Holy Spirit". First, it should be pointed out that the Greek word for "partakers" here is a different one from that used in Colossians 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here simply means "companions", referring to what is external rather than internal. It is to be observed that this item is placed in the center of the five, and this because it describes the animating principle of the other four, which are all effects. These apostates had never been "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6), still less were their bodies His "temples" (1 Cor. 6:19). Nor do we believe this verse teaches that the Holy Spirit had, at any time, wrought *within* them, otherwise Philippians 1:6 would be contravened. It means that they had shared in the benefit of His supernatural operations and manifestations: "The place was shaken" (Acts 4:31) illustrates. We quote below from Dr. J. Brown:

"It is highly probable that the inspired writer refers primarily to the miraculous gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit by which the primitive dispensation of Christianity was administered. These gifts were by no means confined to those who were 'transformed by the renewing of their minds'. The words of our Lord in Matthew 7:22, 23 and of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1, 2 seem to intimate, that the possession of these unrenewed men was not very uncommon in that age; at any rate they plainly show that their possession and an unregenerate state were by no means incompatible".