

Doctrinal Summary of
Repentance: Required for Fellowship with God

In Hebrews 6:4-6, the writer of Hebrews identifies a logical reality about repentance: it is impossible to be renewed into repentance without changing the heart.

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened...and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame.”

The word “enlightened” is translated from the Koine Greek word φωτισθέντας (“phoh-tis-then-tas”) which literally means, “having been acted upon in a point in time as a matter of principle to be illuminated by shining light onto a specific object of focus based on their own initiation.” It describes believers as having been acted upon to be illuminated regarding Christ as the Messiah by the Holy Spirit. Their desire to know God initiated the Holy Spirit’s illumination of Christ to them so that they may see Christ and decide whether to trust Him to be their Savior or reject Him as their Savior. These individuals decided to trust Christ as Savior (cf. Heb. 6:5). Their faith was upon Him and not upon works, merit, or anything else for their salvation. Yet, they are described as also having “fallen away.”

The words “fallen away” are translated from the Koine Greek word παραπεσόντας (“par-ah-pe-son-tas”) which literally means, “performing the action in a point in time as a matter of principle to fall to the side of something based on their own initiation.” At some point in time after their faith in Christ’s work on the cross these individuals shifted their faith to the sacrifices of the Law for the source of their salvation (cf. Heb. 6:6; 10:29). Their reliance upon the Law’s sacrificial system resulted in them not being able to be renewed again to repentance.

The word “renew” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἀνακαινίζειν (“ah-nah-kai-nidz-ein”) which literally means “to perform the continuous type of action as a matter of purpose to make something new again in its qualities or characteristics.” Those who fell away from the gospel to the sacrificial system of the Law could not be renewed again as a matter of purpose into repentance since they continuously crucify Christ afresh by relying upon the sacrifices of the Law for their salvation and spiritual life.

The words “since they again crucify” are translated from the Koine Greek word ἀνασταυροῦντας (“ah-na-staur-oun-tas”) which literally means, “performing the continuous type of action as a matter of principle to crucify based on their own initiation.” As a present participle it identifies action which occurs simultaneous to the action of not being able to renew these fallen believers again to repentance. In other words, while these fallen believers continue to rely upon the Law’s sacrificial system for their spiritual life, it remains impossible to renew them into repentance.

In order to renew them again into repentance, one would have to persuade them that their reliance upon the sacrificial works of the Law for salvation and the spiritual life was worthless. Pointing to the reality that the Law’s sacrificial system illustrated and foretold what God would do through the Messiah would provide them with new information to evaluate which could persuade them to stop relying on the sacrificial system of the Law for their spiritual life and return to reliance upon Christ. Until they returned to reliance upon Christ there would be no ability for them to be restored to fellowship with God. Thus, it is impossible for man to be renewed into repentance while he continues to operate from faulty beliefs.