**Views on the Warning Passages**

Hebrews warns those who “fall away” five times (2:1-4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:19-39; 12:18-29). Each warning cautions readers not to reject Christianity for Judaism. These passages are perhaps the most controversial in the NT. But *what* penalty do these verses warn against—and to *whom* are they addressed? The fundamental issues can be contrasted in the following chart:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Views*** | **False Believer** | **Former Believer** | **Carnal Believer** |
| ***What group of Jews***  ***is being addressed?*** | **Unbelievers:**  Professing “Christians” in the assembly who are not really believers after all | **Believers:**  Christians who sin because they do not see the superiority of Christ | **Believers:**  Christians who sin because they do not see the superiority of Christ |
| ***What is the nature of their punishment?*** | Never had salvation | Loss of salvation | Loss of reward |
| ***What is the result?*** | Hell | Hell | Divine discipline  (even by death) |
| ***Which theological perspective holds to this view?*** | Reformed  (Presbyterian, BP, etc.)  Some Arminians too | Arminian  (Methodist, AOG, Nazarene, etc.) | Partakers  (Baptist, Bible  Church, etc.) |
| ***Strengths*** | It takes the seriousness of the warnings as signifying hell | It takes the seriousness of the warnings as signifying hell | Loss of rewards as a judgment for true believers is more biblically consistent than loss of salvation |
| ***Weaknesses*** | Hebrews consistently speaks of the readers as genuine Christians  (3:1; 4:14; 10:23, 39) | “Temporal security” goes against the NT doctrine of justification by grace (John 3:16; Rom. 8:28-39) | Texts refer to judging *persons*, not *deeds* (“fire that will consume the enemies of God,” 10:27; cf. 6:8) though these may denote the *temporal* (not eternal) fire of AD 70 Jerusalem |
| ***Adherents*** | Hughes, *Hebrews*, 420;  McKnight (below), 34; Toussaint, *GTJ* (1982): 67, 78-79 | Attridge, *Hebrews*, 293-96;  Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 295-96 | Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 532; Pentecost, in *Integrity of Heart…*,140; Oberholtzer, *BibSac* (1988): 412-25; Gleason, *BibSac* (2000) |

For two other views not noted above see Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* 13 (Spring 1992): 23-25. He says that scholars also hold to the hypothetical view (that does not see apostasy as possible) and the community view (that applies the text only to groups rather than individuals). However, neither of these views has received much of a following and thus is not treated above.

**Views on Eternal Security and Perseverance**

Can a Christian lose his salvation? This question is often answered from either the Calvinistic or Arminian view. However, a third meditating view draws from both of these views. This Partakers (Inheritance) view is taught by Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th ed. (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2012). This monumental work of 1093 pages is very scholarly yet highly readable, comforting, and convincing. Note the distinctions between these three views:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Issues*** | **Reformed** | **Arminian** | **Partakers** |
| *How does each system define election and perseverance?* | God sovereignly *elects* to salvation and helps believers persevere in faith until death | God elects those whose *free will* accepts Christ and preserves them unless they lose faith | God *elects* to salvation; some do not persevere, but the faithful will partake of rewards |
| *What specific elements of salvation make up this system of belief?* | **T**otal depravity  **U**nconditional election  **L**imited atonement  **I**rresistible grace  **P**erseverance | Natural inability  Enns,495  Conditional election  Unlimited atonement  Prevenient grace\*  Conditional perseverance | Total depravity  Unconditional election  Unlimited atonement  Irresistible grace  Conditional perseverance |
| *How does this view see carnal Christians*  *(e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1-5)?* | They aren’t Christians or have little commitment in a particular area | They spurn Christ to the point of almost losing their salvation | These believers lack blessings now and later  (but are still saved) |
| *Do all believers persevere until death?* | Yes  1 Cor. 15:2; Phil. 1:6 | No  Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:21; 6:8 | No  1 Cor. 3:15; Rev. 3:26 |
| *Can a true Christian lose his salvation?* | No,  it is eternally secure | Yes,  it is not eternally secure | No,  it is eternally secure |
| *Is 100% assurance of salvation possible?* | Yes, if one knows Christ as Saviour | No, since no one knows if  he will persevere | Yes, if one knows  Christ as Saviour |
| *How does this system counsel believers in habitual sin?* | “You better re-examine whether you genuinely trusted Christ” | “You either lost your salvation or never were really saved” | “You must turn from your sin to be fully rewarded (Heb. 3:14)” |
| *How do those who struggle with sin gain motivation?* | From fear that they may not actually be saved after all | From fear that they may not have sufficiently maintained their salvation | From fear of missing rewards (their inheritance can be lost but not their salvation) |
| *What actually results in the listeners from this teaching?* | They may become carnal Christians by doubting their salvation | They believe God must always be appeased  (low view of grace) | They will more likely appreciate God’s faithfulness to them |
| *Who holds this view?* | John Calvin (d. 1564),  Reformed churches,  Bible-Presbyterians & Presbyterians,  Charles Hodge,  Arthur Pink | Jacob Arminius (d. 1609),  John Wesley, Methodists,  Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Holiness churches,  Pentecostals/Charismatics | Baptists, Bible churches,  Joseph Dillow,  Zane Hodges,  Earl Radmacher,  Charles Ryrie,  Rick Griffith |

\* Prevenient grace means God’s grace comes to all to enable them to believe, but it is not always successful and can be resisted.