

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 actually warn against—and to *whom* are they addressed? The basic 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 <i>persons</i> , not <i>deeds</i> (“fire that will consume the enemies of God,” 10:27; cf. 6:8) though these may denote the <i>temporal</i> (not eternal) fire of AD 70 Jerusalem
Adherents	Hughes, <i>Hebrews</i> , 420; McKnight (below), 34; Toussaint, <i>GTJ</i> (1982): 67, 78-79	Attridge, <i>Hebrews</i> , 293-96; Lane, <i>Hebrews 9-13</i> , 295-96	Dillow, <i>Final Destiny</i> , 532; Pentecost, in <i>Integrity of Heart...</i> , 140; Oberholtzer, <i>BibSac</i> (1988): 412-25; Gleason, <i>BibSac</i> (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, mediating 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 and yet extremely readable, comforting and convincing to me. Note the distinctions between these three views:

Issues	Reformed	Arminian	Partakers
<i>How does each system define election and perseverance?</i>	God sovereignly <i>elects</i> to salvation and helps believers persevere in faith until death	God elects those whose <i>free will</i> accepts Christ and preserves them unless they lose faith	God <i>elects</i> to salvation; some do not persevere, but the faithful will partake of rewards
<i>What specific elements of salvation make up this system of belief?</i>	Total depravity Unconditional election Limited atonement Irresistible grace Perseverance	Natural inability Conditional election Unlimited atonement Prevenient grace* Conditional perseverance	Total depravity Unconditional election Unlimited atonement Irresistible grace Conditional perseverance
<i>How does this view see carnal Christians (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1-5)?</i>	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)
<i>Do all believers persevere until death?</i>	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
<i>Can a true Christian lose his salvation?</i>	No, it is eternally secure	Yes, it is not eternally secure	No, it is eternally secure
<i>Is 100% assurance of salvation possible?</i>	Yes, if one knows Christ as Saviour	No, since no one knows if he will persevere	Yes, if one knows Christ as Saviour
<i>How does this system counsel believers in habitual sin?</i>	"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)"
<i>How do those struggling with sin gain motivation?</i>	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)
<i>What actually results in the listeners from this teaching?</i>	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
<i>Who holds this view?</i>	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.