

Reflections On The Warning Passages In Hebrews

**A Paper
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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Hebrews**

**by
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Though a great number of contemporary Evangelicals hold to the doctrine of Eternal Security, as one casually reads much of Hebrews, they are faced with what seems to introduce difficulty with those who hold such doctrine as an important cornerstone to their theological system. The Book of Hebrews has a dominant theme to spur its readers on to actively live the Christian life. In quite a few places, warnings are utilized to achieve this purpose, and the penalty introduced seems quite severe. Our key passages will be 5:11-6:20; 10:19-29; 2:1-4; 3:1-4:16; 12:12-29. Christians are divided about how to understand these warning Passages. There are 3 dominant views which we will evaluate in this paper, and lightly touch on a few others. Many of these arguments hinge the interpretation of 2 points in these passages: To whom are these warnings addressed, and exactly what are the consequence that are presented. Many that hold to a Calvinist theological system will conclude that these passages are addressed to individuals fellowshipping with Christians, but have not yet made a saving commitment to Christ. They would see the passages warning of eternal damnation unless they accept Christ as their Saviour. Another view would say that these passages are addressed to real Christians, but that the warnings conclude in a great eternal loss, but not loss of eternal destiny in Heaven. The final major view that we will evaluate concludes that the audience is indeed saved Christians, and that the warnings are to keep from eternal damnations. This last group does not hold to the doctrine of Eternal Security, and thus does not have any difficulty in reading these passages as they seem to indicate their meaning from a first read. A chart of these positions in relation to their interpretations of our key points can be seen from the following chart.

	Rewards	Calvanist
Arminian	yes	no
Christian Addressee Consequence: Eternal Damnation	no	yes

The first point we will consider is the audience of the warnings. This is represented by the 'Christian Addressee' item in the chart, above. A fairly explicit description of the target hearing can be found in Chapters 6 and 10. The qualities quoted from these Texts and attributed to these individuals is listed below:

- have once been enlightened
- have tasted of the heavenly gift
- have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come
- For if we (including the author)
- the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified
- remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings

In chapter 6, to restore such a one would require to 'renew them again to repentance', and 'again crucify to themselves the Son of God'. I'm not sure there is much of a debate here. After gathering the data, it seems altogether irrefutable that the ones being addressed are, indeed, saved by any orthodox standard of Christianity. To conclude otherwise would require quite an elaborate discounting of these points expressly used by God in this Address and would awfully ignore the likely reception by the original recipients.

The second point of consideration is the consequences for not heeding these warnings.

This is represented by 'Consequence: Eternal Damnation' in our earlier chart. Let's again look at some of the language quoted from these passages:

- how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation
- whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end
- Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.
- so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin
- we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end
- And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.
- let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it
- For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest
- let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.
- they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame
- if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.
- if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.
- How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?
- For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
- Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God
- See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

The Rewards camp would see these passages as dealing with loss/gain for

Christian in Heaven. This last item in the above list would be good evidence for

this view. However, many would also say that the references to 'fire' and 'burned'

are directly explained by the same terminology in I Corinthians 3. Arguing that

allegories or metaphors speak of the same spiritual truths based on the fact that they use the same earthly atoms in their relation is an irresponsible hermeneutic. I Corinthians 3 does present a trial for Christians of their works, and rewards based on such, and does use as a metaphor the image of fire burning of impurities. This passage does indeed say that even if all a Christian's works are burned up, he himself will still be saved. This is a fine passage for arguing the Rewards view, in itself. But insinuating referral to it based upon the 'fire' and 'burning' terminology discredits the arguer, as Hebrews does not show even a hint of using this terminology in a purifying metaphorical way. Instead it says, "the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries", and metaphorically speaking of thorns and thistles, "it ends up being burned." Neither are purified or tested by these.