

# Salvation: Here A Little; There A Little

## The Difference Between Falling and Falling Away

### Introduction

This lesson is in many ways a continuation of the lesson “When a Spirit Filled Believer Sins.” In that lesson, we discussed the necessity of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and how that two simultaneous events take place when a person does receive the Holy Spirit: The Spirit of God moves in to dwell within the temple of our bodies, and the dormant spirit of man is restored to a close relationship with God. We learned that the Bible teaches that when a person sins that they must repent and “do the first works,” that is go back to seeking God as passionately and as sincerely as they did at first. They must also turn from their sinful actions and remove the very things that led to that sin. We also discussed a “hard scripture” in Hebrews 10:26 and learned that it showed that there is no other sacrifice that we can do to cover our sins that takes the place of Jesus Christ on Calvary.

In this lesson, we will continue studying some areas that are closely related to all of this and will look at what to many is another “hard scripture.” Along the way, we will try to answer the questions of “Can a Spirit-filled believer lose the Holy Spirit?” and “What happens if a person does lose the Holy Spirit?”

### What the Holy Spirit Comes to Do

The Holy Spirit comes so that God can dwell within us and so that our spirit can be restored to close fellowship with Him. But the Holy Spirit does not stop at that initial experience. It continues to try to work in our lives to make us what we should be and to help us in “enduring to the end” in living for God. In His final teachings, Jesus gave at least four further purposes that the Holy Spirit tries to achieve in our life:

1. *To guide us into all truth*

**John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.**

The Apostle Paul taught us that some things of God are only understood by being spiritually discerned and seem as foolishness to man’s natural way of thinking<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the truths of God’s word begin to seem clearer when a person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is, if the person will allow the Holy Spirit to operate in their life.

**God tends to work biggest to smallest in a new believer’s life.**

And so in every new born believer’s life, there are some things that are still contrary to God’s laws and principles and some areas that need a further commitment and even change. The person has repented of their sins, but needed are some further clarification and instruction in righteousness as to their lifestyle. God works biggest to smallest in our lives, and so He will often convict us and bring about the awareness of the need to change, what is to us the biggest problems and then when those things are taken care of, He will begin to work on the smaller things. Furthermore, what is “big and small” will differ in every person’s life. This explains why, say, God convicts some people about drinking alcohol before they receive the Spirit of God and others after. In those who God later convicted, there were obviously some larger issues that God was first working upon. I say “small “ and “big” in reference to the person’s issues and not toward God’s law because to God all sins – whether a big deal to us or a small thing – are serious and a “big deal.” But it is true that God usually begins working on what is the biggest issues to the person first.

2. *To speak through us*

**Luke 12:11-12 And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”**

When in tough circumstances and when we are put “on trial” for standing for righteousness, the Holy Spirit will quicken to our minds what to say and how to answer. You do not have to be arrested and in court to have your

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See 1 Corinthians 2:10-15.

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“faith on trial,” but rather this applies even when people criticize and inquire about the truth of God in your lives – if we will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will always know how to answer!<sup>2</sup>

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This does not apply to preaching and preparation thereof, but rather when in a difficult situation unexpectedly. I’ve heard preachers just say “I’m going to get up and let God fill my mouth.” To such people, I would refer to the next point in our lesson and the command to “study to show thyself approved!”

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3. *To remind us of the Word of God that we have already learned*

**John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.**

Jesus said this to a bunch of disciples who were a bit overwhelmed that Jesus was about to leave them in bodily form and that they would have to remember exactly the myriad of teachings that Jesus had given them in the last three years. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that He had said to them and do so when they needed it!

This teaching underscores the importance of a Spirit-filled believer making a concerted and disciplined effort to learn scripture after their experience. Because the Holy Spirit can only bring back to your remembrance what you have already put within your mind and heart. This is why church attendance is so important and Bible studies and reading the scriptures: you may not think that you are accomplishing very much, but actually you are placing things within you that the Holy Spirit will one day be able to bring back when the time is right.

Every once in a while I run into a Spirit-filled believer that takes the first principle of this section and says, “the Holy Spirit will lead and guide me into all truth, therefore I do not need to come to church and I do not need a pastor and I do not need to read the Bible or learn more.” In my experience, such people never do anything great for God or become great in God’s kingdom and usually go off the deep end in weirdness because they ignore the clear teaching of John 14:26. We need the Word of God taught to us and to regularly take it up in study because then the Holy Spirit can come in and help us understand it and bring it back to the forefront of our minds when the time is right<sup>3</sup>.

4. *To convict us of sin*

**John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:**

Jesus was speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and so we learn that one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to “convict concerning sin.” That is, the Holy Spirit begins to try to tear down all things within the temple of our life and body that does not glorify God. It does this through our conscience and through a witness when we hear the truth of God’s Word preached and taught and through bringing a better understanding of God’s principles and reminding us of things that we have learned previously.

Since this is true, this means that the Holy Spirit does not automatically leave a believer’s life the moment that they sin willfully or accidentally, and understanding that helps explain why there is not one scripture in the Bible that says the Holy Spirit leaves the first committal of sin. Because the Holy Spirit stays and tries to bring that person to place of repentance by convicting us of our sin. That is, to continue in sin with the Spirit God living inside of them, a person has to learn to ignore and shut out the work and operation of the Holy Spirit within their life. And this leads us to our next principle and step in our study:

**For a Spirit-filled believer to continue in sin, they must ignore the operation of the Holy Spirit within their life.**

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## Falling Versus Falling Away

Another scripture that is labeled as “hard to understand” is the following passage, again in Hebrews:

**Heb 6:4-6 For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the**

<sup>3</sup> The story of Phillip and the Eunuch in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts shows that God often uses a man of God to help us understand the Word of God. This does not cheapen the work of the Holy Spirit but notice that it was the Holy Spirit that drew the two men together and occasioned their meeting. Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads and guides us into “all truth” by placing the right person and preacher in our life at the right time.

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**word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.**

As all scripture is given by inspiration of God, we must first admit that before we try to understand what this passage is saying, that there must be a difference between “falling” and “falling away.” That is this scripture says that it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have “fallen away.” Yet this cannot mean that willful sin is not able to be forgiven, because the scripture elsewhere many times teaches us that we can find a place of repentance after sinning. For example:

**Gal 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. NIV**

If it were impossible for someone to be restored after sinning, then why would Paul give this command? If repentance were not possible then why would John teach us that all have sinned since coming to God and that we must confess our sins and that if we did, we would find that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins?<sup>4</sup> Obviously whatever Hebrews 6:4-6 is talking about it does not mean that willful sin cannot be forgiven in a believer’s life.

Careful study of the context of this hard passage reveals that Hebrews 6:4-6 is talking about a believer that has completely fallen away from God and not just of a believer that has fallen in sin momentarily. That is this passage is teaching us that there is a difference between “falling” and sinning and that of “falling away.” As we have already seen, the book of Hebrews assumes that the reader has a great understanding of Old Testament scripture and law and seeming difficulties fade away when we take these passages in context. If we continue reading in the passage we find that the writer continues with an analogy that helps reveal what he means:

**Heb 6:7-8 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.**

The scripture here is similar in meaning to the Parable of the Sower.<sup>5</sup> It speaks of two lands. Each of the two lands receives the same sunshine, the same rain, and the same care and cultivation. Each has the same seed planted within it and yet the process of nature does not work equally in each piece of land because after a period of time, one land has produced fruit while the other has only produced thorns and thistles. The unfruitful ground is rejected and “near to being cursed.”

The symbolism of this passage is to explain to us what happens when the Spirit of God no longer has any effect on our lives. If the moving and influence of God’s Spirit within us changes us like the sunshine and the rain does the freshly planted field, then we will bear fruit and productivity. On the other hand, if the Spirit of God within us cannot change us, then we are very close to becoming accursed by God. These scriptures are addressing a situation in a person’s life where the Spirit of God within a person has done everything it can to change a person’s life, but there has been no change. Therefore the person has caused the Spirit of God in their life to not be able to accomplish the purpose for which He is there.

Let us ponder this a moment: If the Spirit of God in our lives does not have the ability to change us, then what else can be done? Is there any other way to produce the fruit of the Spirit besides the Spirit of God? Is there any other way to produce the fruit of the Spirit besides the Spirit living within our very bodies and minds? Is there any power greater that God could give to help us to overcome sin besides coming to live inside of our lives, Himself? Moreover, what more can God do to keep us from sinning than to come within our lives and speak to our conscience and to bring a greater understanding of the Word of God and to confirm the preached and taught Word in our hearts?

There is another similar passage of scripture to this found in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Isaiah. Again, God uses the crop analogy to represent His Spirit working among men. This time God likens the humans to a vineyard that is well kept, watered, and stocked. Yet when God expected good fruit, He received “wild grapes.” This symbolized

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<sup>4</sup> See 1 John 1:7-10 and the comments of the lesson, “When a Spirit-filled Believer Sins.”

<sup>5</sup> See the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew.

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that God has send anointed men of God to Israel to teach them and guide them in His ways. He had even caused His Spirit to inspire men to write the very Word of God so that men could read and understand it. God had used His power to perform great miracles and give Israel great victories over their enemies, and had even come to dwell among them in the temple, yet Israel had worshipped idols and sinned against Him, so God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and asked the question:

**Isa 5:4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?**

We would be wise to ask ourselves this same question: “what more could God do for us that He has not already done? Like Israel, God has done so much for the church. We have been given the Word of God and had truth readily available to us. God has not only given us His Word, but a church family with which we can fellowship and turn to for encouragement and support. He has provided us the ministry and a pastor by which we can grow in grace and knowledge and to watch us as we move forward in God<sup>6</sup>. God has purged us of our past sin, lifestyles, corrupt minds, and desecrated histories and has given us a desire to come to know Him in such a way that our very lives would show His power. In other words, what more can God do? A man or woman has plenty hope of being saved when they can pray, fast, study God’s Word, have faith, and live by the grace and mercy of God all the while being influence by a man of God and apostolic church.

On the other side of this passage in Hebrews, the writer reveals to us that he is writing to people who have been taught the basics of Christianity and have experienced the infilling of the Spirit of God for themselves and know the precepts of God well<sup>7</sup>. And so our “hard passage” of Hebrews 6:4-6 is an effort from the writer to move on to “deeper things” beyond the basics. And one of the basics is listed as “repentance from dead works.”

What it means is that when the writer speaks of the impossibility to restore someone who has “fallen away,” he cannot be talking only about a Spirit-filled believer temporarily yielding to temptation. Because, as we read, Paul told the church in Galatia that a sign of their spiritual maturity was their ability to restore a brother who had sinned. The Apostle James gave a similar command in James 5:19-20. The book of Proverbs says:

**Prov 24:16 for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity. NIV**

One difference, then, between the righteous and the wicked is not that the righteous does not fall or make mistakes, but that when they do fall – even several times in a row – they always get back up and keep trying! The difference between the righteous and the wicked is in their response to a mistake or sin. As long as the believer gets back up, and returns to God and keeps striving to move forward, they are righteous and can find a place of forgiveness. They become as the “wicked” when they fall and give up and do not bother to try again to live righteously! Compare this scripture with our “hard scripture” in the book of Hebrews:

**Heb 6:4-6 For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.**

It is impossible to restore someone who has “fallen away.” There must be a difference between someone who has fallen and someone who has fallen away from their experience. A similar Old Testament passage helps us tie all of this together:

**Jer 6:28-30 They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders; they are bronze and iron; all of them act corruptly. 29 The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed. 30 Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them."**

Although this is a different analogy, it teaches the same principle as the two lands in Hebrews. Here, everything that could be done to purify the silver had been done. The ore had been placed in the melting pot and the fire was

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<sup>6</sup> See Ephesians 4:11-15.

<sup>7</sup> See Hebrews 6:1-3.

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stoked by the bellows blowing on it into a fiercely hot flame. Yet with everything done just right, the impurities could not be removed from the silver. And the analogy was again that despite everything that God had done to try to separate the children of Israel from their sins, nothing worked. They still chose to live in sin and live corrupt lives.

What more could God do? Nothing, so He cast them away as “rejected silver.” If the fire and everything that God had done could not affect them, then there was nothing else that would change them. This is why the Holy Spirit is many times referred to as “fire” in the New Testament<sup>8</sup>: because if the fire of the Holy Spirit living within a person has no ability to separate the person from the influences and sins of this world, what else can God do? If the Holy Spirit ever loses its ability to influence a person’s life, then that person is lost because there is no other way for God to move in that person’s life.

The Apostle Paul spoke that a sign of the last days would be people insensitive to the Spirit of God and would have their “consciences seared as with a hot iron.”<sup>9</sup> Many backsliders have reached a place where they have fallen and yet have not completely fallen away because the Holy Spirit is still trying to convict them of their sin and remind them of the Word of God that they have known. There is still hope for such people, but only if they come back to God and repent and “do the first works.” If they continue to ignore the Holy Spirit and harden their consciences against the voice of God speaking to them, then they are in grave danger of crossing a line where they are successful in completely shutting out the voice of the Spirit of God in their lives and becoming so callused that they can no longer feel the pull of God’s voice and Spirit. If a person ever reaches such a state, then they have not just “fallen” but have “fallen away” and Hebrews 6:4-6 teaches us that if this place is ever reached then it is impossible to restore a person to repentance because if they cannot hear the Spirit of God drawing them, they will never be able to get things right with God. And if a person reaches a place where the Spirit and Word of God can no longer move them and that it has no effect in their life, then what more can God do?

## How the Spirit Loses Its Influence in a Life

Since we never want to get to such a place where we have “fallen away “ and cannot be restored unto repentance, it would be beneficial to learn the ways that a person can cause the Spirit of God to lose influence in their life. Scripture teaches that there are essentially three ways that a person can not let the Spirit of God influence them and all three have to do with fire:

### 1. *Resisting the Spirit*

This is what a person does that never allows the Spirit of God to come into their life and change them and who refuses to yield to God’s Spirit in the first place. Stephen told the Jewish religious leaders:

**Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.**

These people had never received the Holy Spirit and had repeatedly resisted the Spirit’s efforts to convict their heart. When a person who has never received the gift of the Holy Spirit hears an anointed testimony, sermon, or Bible Study, the Spirit of God tries to draw them to a place of repentance and yielding. When they resist the drawing, they resist the ability of God to do all that He wanted to do. Just as fire will not consume granite rock, so does the hardening and resisting of the Holy Spirit cause the Spirit of God to have no or very little influence in a life.

### 2. *Grieving the Spirit*

Whereas resisting the Holy Spirit is something that a person who has never received the Spirit does, the scripture for grieving the Holy Spirit was written to the church of Ephesus who had received the Spirit:

**Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

This is another operation akin to fire: a fire is grieved when it has a lack of fuel to consume. In other words, a fire is grieved by not continually adding fire or fuel and when it finally runs out, the fire eventually dies and goes out.

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 3:16, Acts 2:3, and Hebrews 12:29.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Timothy 4:1-2.

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This is true for the first of the Holy Spirit – if we do not continually give God more and more of us and do not continually allow the Spirit of God to work on more and more of our life, then we grieve the Spirit of God and eventually the fire will go out.

Fire is God's method of changing something to another, purer form. People most often grieve the Holy Spirit by receiving the Holy Spirit and making some changes and then reaching a place or an area where they say "I'm not changing that" or "I know the Bible may address this area, but I'm not going to obey." The Holy Spirit still burns in other areas of their life but if the person continues to grieve the fire, eventually it will go out. We must be willing to let the fire of God consume all of us!

### 3. *Quenching the Spirit*

This scripture was also written to Spirit-filled believers, this time the church of Thessalonica:

#### **1 Thess 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.**

Again this is a fire analogy being used. A fire is quenched by putting adverse material upon it. If you pour sand or water on a fire long enough, the fire will go out. In similar fashion, if we put enough worldliness and sin on this experience of the Holy Spirit, it will eventually die out and lose its influence. When a person dumps hatred, lying, lust, fornication, gossip, disobedience, etcetera, upon the fire of the Holy Spirit in their life, they begin the process of quenching the Spirit. If they do not remove such things and allow the fire to burn as brightly as it once did and instead choose to keep adding such things, then eventually the fire will go out!

Notice that both grieving the Spirit and quenching the Spirit are processes. That is, the fire only goes out over a period of time of continual action. If these actions are kept up, the fire will go out, but it takes a while. And so in this we find the answer to the question "can a person lose the Holy Spirit?" They can and they do so by having the fire and influence of the Holy Spirit to go out in their life. This does not happen the moment a person first sins, but rather happens when a person refuses over a period of time to do something about that sin. Like the red heifer analogy of the previous lesson, if they refuse the sacrifice, there remains no more sacrifice for their sins and they are cut off.

Understanding that the Holy Spirit being grieved or quenched is a process helps us understand how that people can have the Holy Spirit do great things through them in one area and yet be full of sinfulness and die not right with God. The scripture is replete with examples of men who had the Spirit of God working through them while living a sinful lifestyle. For example, the Spirit of God remained upon Saul's kingship some time even after God had rejected him as king. The false prophet Balaam was used to speak truth to the king of Moab and to prophesy about the Messiah, even though he had wicked heart and died not right with God. Judas Iscariot, as one of the twelve, did many miracles and baptized people and preached mightily all the while stealing from the treasury. Examples under Grace include the fact that the Holy Spirit remained within Simon Peter even when he had to be rebuked by Paul for prejudice. When John Mark abandoned the missionary journey which he had committed to, the Holy Spirit stayed with him. When Paul and Barnabas had a falling out and were contentious about John Mark's leaving, the Holy Spirit still used them to reach their world.

Paul also had to address the situation in the Corinth church where a man living in an incestuous relationship was still being used in leadership in the church despite his open sin. Part of the problem with this man – known only to us as the man of 1 Corinthians 5 – was that the man appeared to have justified his sin and thought that he was okay in his lifestyle because the Spirit of God was still moving through him in certain ways and he was being used in the gifts of the Spirit. In the same way, there have been people who did great things for God and performed miracles and preached anointed sermons and sang powerful songs who it was later revealed were living in sin the entire time they were doing such things. Because the Holy Spirit does not leave automatically when a person sins and tries to still work through a person to bring them to repentance, some people make the mistake of using the operation of the Holy Spirit to mean that their sin is not big deal. That is not true! They are being used of God because God is merciful and "His gifts and calling are without repentance."<sup>10</sup> In other words, things given to us by grace do not leave simply because we become unworthy to have them because we never were good enough to have them in the first place. But we must take care that we do not justify our sin simply because we speak in

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<sup>10</sup> See Romans 11:29.

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tongues or are used by God mightily. It may be a process but, if we do not repent and turn from such sins, eventually the fire of the Holy Spirit will go out and when it goes out, there is no evidence for it ever returning. That is, once a person does reach the stage where the Holy Spirit has completely lost its influence to convict of sin, it will leave and when it does, there is no scripture giving us hope of ever receiving it again. You cannot be born again, again. If God's Spirit and Word cannot change you, then what more can God do?

### Conclusion

Some Spirit-filled believers, upon learning that repentance can bring forgiveness, decide to keep doing what they want to do and constantly repent over and over of the same thing. There is a great danger to this, which by the way is not a new idea, because the Apostle Paul wrote:

**Rom 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?**

The truth is that sin is a process and that each time we ignore the Holy Spirit's unction to avoid doing a certain action, we gradually lessen its influence and voice in our life and it becomes easier and easier to ignore. When a person first does something wrong after receiving the Spirit of God, the conviction to repent is instant and strong. But if the person returns to do that same thing again, the conviction is there but it is not quite as strong. And if the person repeats over and over, then eventually it becomes easy to cross that line with little or no remorse. And the danger is that conviction is God giving us permission to repent. We cannot approach Him unless He first draws us by His Spirit. And when a person becomes so callused to the voice of the Spirit of God convicting them of a sin because they have crossed the line so many times, eventually they will not hear it at all and they will just continue in the sin without even giving true repentance a passing thought. When they have done this, they are close to becoming as the writer of Hebrews said, "accursed." Each repetition of sin quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit a little bit more and draws us closer and closer to that line of having "fallen away." The sobering thought is that once a person crosses that line and the Holy Spirit leaves, there is no scripture that gives that person hope. Rather Peter told us:

**Conviction  
is  
permission  
to repent!**

**2 Peter 2:20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.**

If they are again entangled in sin and "overcome," then the last state is worse than it would have been if they had never known God! Just because a person backslides and becomes entangled again in their sin does not mean that there is no hope. But it does mean that they are just one step away from having become "overcome" and if they do that and reach a place where the Holy Spirit has no influence in their life any more, it will leave, and when it leaves, they have reached a place of no return. They have reached the place that our "hard passage" in Hebrews 6 spoke about and God has done all that He could do and therefore they have "fallen away" and it is impossible to restore such a person to repentance because they have killed the voice of God speaking in their life.

Such is an extreme case and the result of a long process, but we must never forget that falling and staying down is the first step to "falling away." Justifying our sin and swiping the "Grace credit card" over and over are the steps leading to such a horrible place in God. Therefore let us turn from our sins and strive to move forward in God lest we ever come close to crossing that horrible line where there is no hope. Let us take care not to resist, grieve, or quench the work of the Holy Spirit. If we fall, lest us quickly get up and continue in living for God. The just man will fall, occasionally but we never want it said that we "fell away!" Let the Holy Spirit do what it has come to do in your life!