

**“If we sin willfully after... receiving knowledge ...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”**

**Hebrews 10:26-31**

Compiled By Gary M. Gulan, ©1992 (Rev. 2010)

Hebrews 10:26-31 states, “26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

**Views on this passage: (\* indicates the view of the author of this article)**

1. The believer who willfully sins after salvation commits the “unforgivable sin” leading to The loss of salvation and eternal damnation. (Arminian view; Guthrie; Ellingworth; Thompson; DeHaan; Lange)
2. A true Christian who abandons his confidence in Christ and leaves the church doesn't lose his salvation but submits himself to public disgrace, has no sacrificial shield against physical judgment and endangers his physical life with death. (Hodges; Barnes)
- \*3. (Jewish) believers wanting to leave Christianity and go back under the O.T. Law being challenged by giving them hypothetical consequences for such a decision. (Gromacki; Wuest; Kent; Kelly; Morris; Lenski; Kistemaker;)
4. An unbeliever who has knowledge about Christ, but has not trusted in Christ to take away his sins, continues to reject Christ and leaves the Christian community. (Calvin; Hughes; Phillips; Hewitt; Pink; Steadman; Westcott; English; Stibbs; MacArthur; Bruce; Gill; Moulton; Dods)

**A wordy commentary or very free translation of what the writer is saying in Hebrews 10:26**

After going over all the details of the Old Testament system (the Old Covenant) and showing you that Christ changed the Old Testament system (the Old Covenant) by replacing it with the New Covenant (Hebrews 5: - 10:), if you continue to entertain thoughts of leaving Christ and the church to go back under the Old Covenant system, do you have any idea what that would mean to you as a Jew who has accepted Christ as Savior? It would mean there is no Old Testament sacrifice that will cover your sins because Christ ended it. It would mean that you place yourself under God's judgment and possibly face physical death. What do you think God would do to you for treating the Son of God as if He were nothing? Or counting the New Covenant which sanctified you as a common take-it or leave-it thing? Or insulting the Spirit of grace to go back to a system of fleshly works? The thought of leaving Christ and the church to go back to your former Judaism would place you in a fearful position of physical judgment in the hands of the living God.

**Insights into this passage**

**1. The Greek Construction (10:26)**

The Greek construction of verse 26, makes it clear that the author was not saying this happened or was in danger of happening, but what it would mean if it could happen.

**2. The word “if” (10:26)**

The word “if” in the Greek is not the same construction as in other places in the book of Hebrews.

In most cases the word “if” has come from the “conditional clause” a Greek construction of:

(1.) 1<sup>st</sup> class, assumed true, “ei plus the indicative verb”

(2.) 2<sup>nd</sup> class, assumed false, “ei plus the imperfect, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> aorist verbs”

- (3.) 3<sup>rd</sup> class, may or may not be, “eav and the subjunctive verb”
- (4.) 4<sup>th</sup> class, future expectancy, “ei plus the optative mood”

Some examples of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition we have seen in Hebrews have been:

- Hebrews 3:6 “if” is an example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition
- Hebrews 3:14 “if” is an example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition
- Hebrews 4:7 “if” is an example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition
- Hebrews 10:38 “if” is an example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition
- Hebrews 12:25 “if” is an example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition

In these cases, the writer uses the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition to “emphasize” the condition described.

However, Hebrews 10:26 has a different construction than the “conditional clause” stated above. The “if” in Hebrews 10:26 came from the “participle” which is the word “sin” (Gr. “harmartanonton” present active participle, genitive, masculine, plural, a conditional). The word “if” is based on the syntax of the participle making the participle a “condition” and thus adding the word “if” to the sentence.

Some examples of this construction we have seen in Hebrews have been:

- Hebrews 2:3 “if” is from the participle
- Hebrews 6:6 “if” is from the participle
- Hebrews 10:26 “if” is from the participle

In these cases, the writer wants to make the phrase “conditional” but not make it “emphatic.” The writer uses the participle here to de-emphasize the statement “willfully sinning” and place the emphasis on the next phrase in the sentence “receiving knowledge .”

### **3. The word “sin” (10:26)**

The Greek word for “sin” here is the word “to miss the mark” (“hamartia”).

Sinning willfully, whether it means singularly or repetitively, does not relate to the Christian deliberately sinning, as if a Christian never sins. John tells us all Christians sin, (1 Jn. 1:8). Every Christian sins by going against God’s righteous character and does so willfully and deliberately.

The writer of Hebrews did not use the Greek word for “falling away” (“paraptoma”), the Greek word for “refusing to yield or be persuaded” (“apeitheia”), or the Greek word “falling away” (“apostasia” or one of the other 22 words for “departing”). He used the word for sin which means “missing the mark.”

The writer wanted to stress that certain choices would cause them “to miss the mark” which the writer of Hebrews had been pointing out all through the epistle. The Jews who were converted to Christianity through salvation, wanted to go back to the Old Testament sacrificial system received from Moses due to persecution from unsaved Jews.

The Greek word “sin” (Gr. “hamartia”) has no definite article with it, stressing the “quality or character” of the sin rather than the actual “identity” of the sin. It would have been better to translate the word “sin” as its meaning of “missing the mark.” So the translation would be, “If we willfully continue missing the mark....”

### **4. What was the “sin?” (10:26)**

The “sin” is not a “willful sin” versus other types of sins thus incorrectly making this sin the “unforgivable sin.” The writer is not saying this is the sin of “willfulness” because there is no definite article with the word sin. The “quality or character” of sin is “leaving the new covenant Christ died to

provide” by returning to the old covenant of Judaism. The “sin” is further described by the results of this sin found in 10:29:

1. trampling the Son of God underfoot
2. counting the blood of the covenant a common thing
3. insulting the Spirit of grace

#### **5. The word “willfully” (10:26)**

Many commentators state that before salvation (which many falsely equate with baptism as salvation) all sins were from ignorance, however, after salvation all sins committed are “willfull” (Gr. “ekousios”). Thus with this view point every one who is saved and commits willfull sin would lose his salvation. This is not what this passage or the Bible teaches.

#### **6. The Greek construction of the words “willfully,” “sin,” and “we” (10:26)**

The adverb “willfully” and the participle “sin” and the verb “we” form what the Greek terms a “genitive absolute” construction.

The “genitive absolute” construction indicates the writer’s focus. The writer is telling the reader this first action “if we willfully continue to miss the mark” is less prominent, less emphatic, less stressed then the next phrase “receiving the full knowledge of truth.” The “genitive absolute” construction separates these two ideas, allowing for the first phrase to be conditional and placing the emphasis on “receiving the truth.”

#### **7. “After receiving the knowledge of the truth” (10:26)**

The writer is stressing “receiving the knowledge of the truth.” Some have tried to make this phrase mean “after we have been saved” and also make the sin a “willfull sin” thus showing that “if someone willfully sins after he gets saved, he loses his salvation.” This statement violates the context and the writer’s purpose.

The writer of Hebrews teaches “eternal security.” Hebrews 10:14 states, “for by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Notice the words “perfected forever” Hebrews 10:17 states, “and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” The perfect tense is used here stressing past action with continuing results. There is also a double negative used in this section showing emphatically the impossibility of God remembering sin that is paid for by the cross.

#### **8. “There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26)**

What did the writer mean by “sacrifice for sin?” The writer was referring to Numbers 15:30-31 where it reveals that the Jew under the Old Testament system who committed sin willfully, had no provision to the Old Testament Levitical sacrifices as a covering for sin. If a saved believer is in view, Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross could never be taken away.

#### **9. “Judgment and fiery indignation” (10:27)**

There are those who want to make this phrase equal with “hell” and “eternal damnation.” However, the writer is stating that the judgment is “physical death,” as referred to in Exodus 31:14 and Deut. 17:12. These verses teach willfull sin brings judgment in this life: one of cutting the individual off from the church and the other of physical death. Hell and eternal damnation is not mentioned in these passages.

#### **10. This passage can’t mean “the believer who willfully sins commits the unforgivable sin”**

This view would be impossible for the believer for a number of reasons: (1.) No one would be saved because every believer sins, (1 Jn. 1:8). Most sin has a element of willfull and deliberate choice to them; (2.) All sin is already forgiven; (3.) The writer to Hebrews teaches eternal security in the book and in this chapter we are studying, (Heb. 10:10,14,17); (4.) True believers can’t ever be drawn back into perdition or destruction, (Heb. 10:39)

## **11. Whatever view is held it must contain a “Jewish” element in it.**

This view reflects the Jewishness of the context and the book: (1.) Deliberate sin, such as leaving Christ and the church to go back under Judaism, would place the individual outside the O.T. sacrificial provision of the Law, as it did for Israel, which the writer of Hebrews brings into the context, (Num. 15:29-31; Heb. 10:26); (2.) The decision of leaving Christ and the church to go back under Judaism, would go against Christ as Israel went against the Law of Moses, (Heb. 10:28); (3.) The decision of leaving Christ and the church to go back to Judaism, would bring about judgment, just as it did to Israel in the Old Testament, (Deut. 32:35-36; Heb.10:27); (4.) The decision of leaving Christ and the church to go back to Judaism, would reject Christ’s provisions, (Heb. 10:29); (5.) The decision of leaving Christ and the church to go back to Judaism, would count the New Covenant, which replaced the Old Covenant, as a common thing, (Heb. 10:29); and (6.) The decision of leaving Christ and the church to go back to Judaism, would insult the Spirit of Grace, (Heb. 10:29). The spirit of the Law was the work of the flesh.

### **References:**

- Hebrews: Stand Bold in Grace, Robert Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, Pp. 173-176
- Hebrews, George Guthrie, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, Pp. 355-358
- Hebrews, R. Kent Hughes, Wheaton: Crossway, 1993, Pp. 40-48
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul Ellingworth, NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, Pp. 531-544
- Exploring Hebrews, John Phillips, Chicago: Moody, 1977, Pp. 147-150
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, Thomas Hewitt, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, Pp. 165-168
- An Exposition of Hebrews, Arthur Pink, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954, Pp. 609-624
- Hebrews, Harold Attridge, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, Pp. 292-293
- Hebrews, James Thompson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008, Pp. 208-211
- Hebrews: What More Can God Say, Ray Stedman, Glendale: Regal, 1979, Pp. 173-177
- Hebrews, M. R. Dehaan, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959, Pp. 140-144
- An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, William Kelly, Charlotte: Books, 1985, Pp. 193-197
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, B. F. Westcott, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, Pp. 327-339
- Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, E. Schuyler English, Neptune: Loizeaux, 1955, Pp. 316-325
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, Homer Kent, Grand Rapids; Baker, 1972, Pp. 203-209
- “Hebrews,” A. M. Stibbs, The New Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970, p. 1209
- “Hebrews,” Zane Hodges, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John Walvoord, Roy Zuck, Wheaton: Victor, 1983, p. 805
- “Hebrews” Charles Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible, Chicago: Moody, 1994, p. 1865
- Hebrews, John MacArthur, Chicago: Moody, 1983, Pp. 270-283
- Hebrews, F. F. Bruce, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, Pp. 258-266
- “Hebrews,” Leon Morris, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, Pp. 106-108
- “Hebrews,” John Peter Lange, Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960, Vol. 11, p. 177
- Hebrews, John Gill, Gill’s Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, p. 742
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, R. C. Lenski, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966, p. 357
- “Hebrews,” Albert Barnes, Barnes’ Notes on the OT and NT, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, p. 239
- Hebrews, Simon Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p. 295
- “Hebrews,” W. F. Moulton, Ellicott’s Commentary on the Bible, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1981, p. 327
- “Hebrews,” Kenneth Wuest Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 183
- “Hebrews,” Marcus Dods, The Expositor’s Greek Testament, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, p. 348