

## EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

### Message #23

### Hebrews 10:26-39

A pastor friend of mine asked me a while back whether or not I had known of any believer who willfully and knowingly made a concrete decision to sin. I said, “Yes,” it is the only way every believer sins and it is the only way I sin. He was somewhat taken back by my answer and asked me to explain it. I said every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and every believer is convicted by the Holy Spirit when it comes to sin issues. I do not believe that any believer who sins, just unknowingly or unwillingly sins. Any time any of us sin, we knew what we were doing and we deliberately chose to do it. We all sin willfully and I don’t know any other way that any of us sin. The Apostle Paul sinned that way and so do the rest of us (Romans 7:14-24).

It is this reality of “sinning willfully” that has perplexed those who tackle the book of Hebrews especially when it comes to this passage. **We come tonight to Hebrews 10:26 and a context that deals with the serious ramifications of “sinning willfully.”**

There is no question that this is a text which presents a strong warning, which has caused some to almost throw away their theological wits. Some suggest that this is not really addressed to true believers, and some suggest that this is written to true believers who can lose their salvation. This is one of the major passages used to attack the doctrine of eternal security.

But as you will see, neither of these interpretations is true or accurate. Now to understand this text, I want to handle some of the key matters in a five question/answer manner:

**QUESTION #1** – Is this text addressed to true believers?

**The obvious contextual answer from the text is yes, absolutely.** You cannot honestly read this text without seeing that it is aimed straight at true believers. We make nine observations:

- 1) The writer uses the pronoun “we” (**10:26, 39**), which means he includes himself in the warning and no book of the Bible was ever written by someone lost.
- 2) The word “knowledge” (**10:26**) is one that speaks of deep knowledge of the truth and no unsaved person is in a position to understand deep knowledge of God’s Word.
- 3) The person is said to have been “sanctified” by blood (**10:29**), which is language only used for a believer.
- 4) The text says “the LORD will judge His people” (**10:30**), which means this is aimed at God’s people.
- 5) The text says these people had been “enlightened” (**10:32**), which is language used for a believer.
- 6) These people had at one time been faithful to God, because they were focused on a better eternal possession (**10:34**).
- 7) These people could throw away their confidence and their reward (**10:35**), which is only possible if one is a believer.

- 8) These people are admonished to do the will of God (**10:36**), which is only possible for a believer.
- 9) These people could not shrink back to destruction even if they did willfully sin (**10:39**).

Clearly this text is aimed straight at true believers.

## **QUESTION #2 – What does it mean to willfully sin? 10:26**

Since when we sin we willfully choose to sin, what exactly does this mean? Dr. S. Lewis Johnson told the story of a girl who was meeting with a church leader concerning her baptism. As she was being quizzed, she was asked if she knew she was a sinner, to which she said, “Yes.” She was then asked if she had believed on Jesus Christ and again she answered, “Yes.” Then she was asked if she had experienced any change since believing on Jesus Christ. She said, “Yes. Before I believed I used to run to sin and now I run away from sin.” What is willful sin? When we sin, don’t we all run to it and not from it?

This obviously is the big point of the passage because everything else is connected to this. If you commit the same sin over and over again, is that willful sin? If you fail time and time again and then confess it over and over again, is that willful sin? What exactly is willful sin and what is the writer of Hebrews meaning by it?

Now there are at least **six contextual and grammatical observations** that we must make in order to “rightly divide” this:

- (Observation #1)** - The word “willful” means it is a definite, deliberate voluntary choice - The adverb “willfully” (εκουσιως) is one that means a free will voluntary choice.
- (Observation #2)** - The present tense “sinning” means it is a continual choice - The participle “sinning” is present tense meaning continual and habitual sin. The present tense means this is not referring to a specific act or moment of sin, but a continuation in sin.

**If we just based our definition on these two words, minus context, “willful sinning” is a freewill, free choice-type of continual sin in which a believer persists in choosing to sin and has no conviction or compulsion about the sin.** However, we cannot neglect the context because the context is not talking about any type of sin, but something specific?

- (Observation #3)** - The conjunction “for” which begins **verse 26** connects us to the previous context.
- (Observation #4)** - The willful sin actually tramples the Person and work of Jesus Christ (**10:29a**).
- (Observation #5)** - The willful sin actually considers Christ’s blood as unclean (**10:29b**).
- (Observation #6)** - The willful sin actually mocks grace (**10:29c**).

When spiritually-minded believers sin they are immediately convicted and are driven to confess it to restore fellowship with God. When believers willfully sin they are not convicted, and they voluntarily are driven more and more into the sin.

**QUESTION #3** – To what does the conjunction “for” (γὰρ) grammatically connect? **10:26**

**Do not overlook how verse 26 begins; it begins with the conjunction “for.” This is a critical grammatical point to this whole context.** This key point is often overlooked. In fact, the New International Version of the Bible leaves it out. It translates the verse “If we deliberately keep on sinning” and doesn’t even include the conjunction “for.” But this becomes the key to proper interpretation of the text.

The “for” which begins **verse 26** is connected to the preceding context, which challenges believers to hold fast to their confession concerning the wonderful finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ (10:22-23). **It is Jesus Christ who gives us access to God through His shed blood and we are not to waver in our faith concerning this point.** Some of these Hebrew believers were apparently toying with the idea of turning away from their faith-focus on Jesus Christ and willingly going back under the O.T. Mosaic Law. Dr. J. Vernon McGee said this sin meant one actually went to the Temple and offered blood sacrifices after Jesus Christ had offered Himself (*Hebrews*, pp. 576-577).

**In the context, we may define “willful sin” as the sin of a believer in which he willfully and deliberately, of his own accord, continually chooses to disregard the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, and continually chooses to no longer acknowledge the value of Christ’s shed blood in his relationship with God, and he continually mocks God’s grace system of salvation and sanctification.** One who willfully sins would rather rely on his works than on Jesus Christ.

To drift back under law after we have been saved by God’s grace is a deadly serious apostasy. Dr. Joseph Dillow saw this grammatical point when he wrote: “This biblical writer apparently thinks it is possible for righteous ones, who are sanctified, perfected forever (verse 14), and who have proven their confession... to finally reject Christ and apostatize from the faith” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 459).

There is a huge difference between a struggling Christian who has moments of sin lapses and the Christian who actually and willingly deserts Jesus Christ and the whole grace of God. Dr. S. L. Johnson observed that one of the signs that one is starting to apostatize in their faith is that they forsake themselves from assembling with other believers and they begin to decline in their faith, hope and love (*Hebrews 10:26-31*, p. 3).

**QUESTION #4** – What are the promised consequences of willful sin?

In these verses there are two main consequences spelled out:

**(Consequence #1)** - There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. **10:26-29**

What does this mean? Does it mean if you struggle with a sin over and over again, you eventually reach a point where Christ’s sacrifice for you runs out? Would Christ say, “I paid for your sins to point A, but now that you are at point B, I no longer pay for them?”

That is not it at all. Those of us who have believed are still all sinners. In fact, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. When we sin, God wants us to come to Him and confess it and find the cleansing the shed blood gives (I John 1:8-10).

In **Hebrews 10:26**, the word “remain” (απολειπω) is critical to us understanding this. It means that the sacrifice has been deserted, abandoned or left behind (Smith, p. 52). **If a believer deserts or abandons the marvelous truths pertaining to the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood, there is no longer any place to go to resolve sin matters.**

What I understand this to practically mean is that it is possible to reach a point in which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ no longer protects the believer from God’s chastising judgment(s). Generally speaking, the blood of Jesus Christ is the propitiatory means of having our sins forgiven so that we do not have to worry about God’s judgment (I John 2:1-2). All of us individually know that there is much grace flexibility with God when it comes to us and our sin.

However, if a believer chooses to continually persist in sin and not respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, which leads one to confess sin to receive full forgiveness and cleansing, that sacrifice of Jesus Christ that could have protected him from negative judgment will not do so. **The warning here is that continual willful sin can remove the believer from the protective shelter of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and when one reaches this condition, according to Paul, God can and will do some devastating things.**

He can make one weak, sick or even cause one to physically die (I Corinthians 11:30-31). It is interesting to see that the subject of physical death is specifically mentioned right here in this context (**Hebrews 10:28**).

The writer is saying in the O.T. God’s people were sometimes physically executed on the basis of breaking the Mosaic Law. If God would execute His own people under the Mosaic Law, how much more would He do this to those who persist in doing unclean things after they have experienced the grace of God and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ deals with all of our sin issues all of our lives. That shed blood protects us from negative judgments when we have wretched sinful moments (Romans 7:24-25). But if a believer continually pursues willful sin and departs from a true Christological focus concerning the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God will not allow that sacrifice to protect and He will send His negative judgments.

In the immediate context of the argument, if we abandon our faith-focus on Jesus Christ, which gives us access to God, then there is no other sacrificial protection to which we may turn.

**(Consequence #2)** - There is the fearful expectation of God’s judgment. **10:27-31**

Any believer, who chooses to willfully sin, lives with a constant haunting threat of severe punishment from the hand of God. The specific O.T. punishment that is mentioned in the context under the law was physical death “without mercy.”

The believer who willfully sins is in danger of fiery judgment. We might ask, just exactly what type of fiery judgment is the believer in danger of? The answer, according to Paul in I Corinthians 3, is his works being burned up and death.

But this text says, concerning the believer, that he needs to think in terms of a “much severer punishment” (10:29) than even death (10:28). There are two applications we may make here to two types of people:

- 1) If a person is an unbeliever, there is something far more intimidating than death; it is hell. The moment the unbeliever takes his last breath on this earth he will enter a place that is far worse than anything he ever experienced in life. He will instantly be taken to a place of fiery eternal torment where he will burn in unquenchable fire and not be able to get even one drop of water for relief.
- 2) If a person is a believer, there are several things far more intimidating than death. Well, one might ask what could be more severe for a believer than a death judgment?
  - A. The believer could get before God and have God say “I find no pleasure in you at all” (10:38). Imagine standing before God and having Him say I never found any pleasure in you in anything you ever did.
  - B. The believer could get before God and have thrown away all his rewards (10:35). This would be worse than death.
  - C. The believer could actually experience a life worse than death.

God could permit a believer to experience a life far worse than death. God could prolong a miserable life for a person who turned away from His Son. He could prolong an illness or a mental depression. There is no doubt in my mind that some Christians are on mental medications because they have walked away from a true focus on Jesus Christ, and they will be on them until they either turn back to Him or die. He could permit a person who willfully sinned against Him to live many years, via artificial means, in a totally bedridden state. He could cause a believer to go mentally insane and spend the rest of their life in a mental institution. He could sustain the life of a believer in a way in which he never smiles or is happy.

Any believer who drifts away from a grace-focus on Jesus Christ is heading to some very serious consequences, many of which are worse than death.

Now there are three very dangerous theological actions from God’s perspective for the believer who willfully sins and turns away from Jesus Christ.

**Dangerous Action #1** - A believer may trample under foot the Son of God. **10:29a**

Obviously this is not a reference to literally trampling the Son of God with one’s feet, for the Son of God is seated at the right hand of God. What this metaphorically and spiritually means is that this person who turns his back on Jesus Christ tramples on the truth concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Any believer who turns his back on Jesus Christ is committing a serious crime in the sight of God; he is trampling down the grace work of the Son of God.

When a believer does not hold fast to the confession of Jesus Christ as being the only means of access to God, that believer tramples on the Son of God.

**Dangerous Action #2** - A believer may regard as unclean the blood of the covenant. **10:29b**

I want you to carefully notice that this is truly aimed at a believer because the blood sanctified him. We have seen much concerning the shed blood of Jesus Christ in Hebrews. His shed blood is the only thing that can give us forgiveness of sin. Apparently this type of believer actually no longer believes that it is only the blood of Jesus Christ that can make him clean and give him access to God. He perhaps relies on himself or his works or O.T. laws. It is possible that by regarding the blood as unclean, that he has even regressed to the point that he views Christ's blood as being that of an unclean sinner, not the Perfect Son of God.

**Dangerous Action #3** - A believer may insult the Spirit of grace. **10:29c**

Any relationship we have with God is a grace-relationship which rests totally on the work of Jesus Christ. Trampling on the Person and work of Jesus Christ insults the Spirit of the grace system. That word "insult" (ενοβριζῶ) is one that means to make mockery of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 157).

When a believer moves away from trusting in the value of Jesus Christ's shed blood for access to God, he makes mockery of the whole grace system to which the Holy Spirit drew Him. **When a believer sins over and over again and refuses to go to God and confess the sin, he makes mockery of the grace that is offered for the sinning child of God.**

Now in **verses 30-31** the writer quotes Deuteronomy 32:35-36 to make the point that if God's people anger God, He will judge His N.T. people in a similar way as He judged His O.T. people. **God is a judge and God is going to judge. Drift away from Jesus Christ and you are heading to a guaranteed judgment.**

Now the way God judged His O.T. people was by permitting their lives to fall apart. He permitted His people to be dominated by others and they never accomplished what He could have accomplished with them and for them.

If a believer in Jesus Christ doctrinally apostatizes pertaining to the Person and work of Jesus Christ, he may be certain he is heading to a Bema Seat judgment that will feature a living and angry God. Not only will his works be burned up, but God will intentionally make the believer's life miserable.

**QUESTION #5** – What applications should the believer make? **10:32-39**

There are seven specific actions mentioned here in the context of willful sin:

**Application #1** - Remember back to when you were willing to stand for Jesus Christ.  
**10:32-33**

The believer who has turned away from Jesus Christ needs to go back in memory to the time when he was willing to take a stand for Jesus Christ no matter what it cost him. Think back to that moment when you first were enlightened by God and were willing to speak up and stand up for Jesus Christ.

**Application #2** - Remember back to when you suffered because you were focused on the future. **10:34**

Remember back to when you were so focused on Jesus Christ that you joyfully endured things knowing you had an eternal inheritance coming.

**Application #3** - Do not throw away your confidence or your rewards. **10:35**

As you think of these things, get your focus back on Jesus Christ so you do not throw away your confidence or rewards. The confidence would be a reference to the moment we see Jesus Christ. There are two ways we may face Jesus Christ - in shame or with confidence (I John 2:28). Our focus on Jesus Christ will determine how we face Him.

**Application #4** - Realize that God wants us to endure in our faith before we receive the promise. **10:36**

Believers need to realize that anything God permits us to experience is designed to develop our faith in Jesus Christ and not move us away from Jesus Christ. Those who keep their faith and focus on Jesus Christ will receive the promise of full rewards.

**Application #5** - Realize that soon Jesus Christ will return. **10:37**

God has a date marked on His eternal calendar and you may be certain that date will come and the Lord will return. Think about this for a moment. There is coming a day soon when we will see Jesus Christ. Keep your focus on Him.

**Application #6** - Realize God finds no pleasure on one who shrinks back from their faith. **10:38**

One of the most serious threats to a believer is that God would have no pleasure in the believer at all. What a moment it would be to get before Jesus Christ and have Him say, "I have no pleasure in you or anything you did."

**Application #7** - Realize that we cannot ever lose our salvation or our souls. **10:39**

Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful (II Timothy 2:13).

Suppose you are here and you know there is a sin you are doing willfully over and over again. What do you do? What hope do you have? Where do you turn? Here it is, clear and simple. **The only hope you have is the grace of God found in Jesus Christ.** His shed blood is the only thing that can cleanse you. Every time you sin, you go to God and confess it. Ask God to create in you a clean heart and mind.

Do not ever drift away from your focus on Jesus Christ. Hold fast to Him, for He is the only One who can make us clean and give us access to God.