

What Does the Bible Teach About Willful or Deliberate Sins?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. Immediately following the gracious exhortation to draw near to God, the Hebrew writer offers an ominous warning.
 - 1. A warning against "willful sin" - Heb. 10:26-31
 - 2. It describes the condition of the soul of one for whom:
 - a. "There longer remains a sacrifice a sacrifice for sins"
 - b. There only exists "a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation"
 - 3. How does one get to such a dreadful state of affairs?
- B. Some members of the church believe in "once saved, always saved"
 - 1. Do not believe that habitual, deliberate sins have any worse consequences than occasional sins of weakness or inadvertence
 - 2. Believe that because they are members of a local church of Christ, that God will not allow them to sin to the point of becoming reprobate
- C. Does the Bible teach any form of the doctrine of once saved, always saved?
 - 1. It teaches that those who remain faithful are secure
 - 2. But it also teaches that a believer can become an unbeliever, at which point a person has every reason to fear for his salvation - Heb. 3:12-14
- D. The possibility of apostasy is taught in the Bible, especially in Hebrews
 - 1. The abundant warnings imply its possibility
 - a. Warning against drifting - Heb. 2:1-4
 - b. Warning against departing - Heb. 3:12-14
 - c. Warning against disobedience - Heb. 4:11
 - d. Warning against dullness, leading to apostasy - Heb. 5:11 - 6:6
 - 2. And now, a warning against willful sin - Heb. 10:26-31

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SIN WILLFULLY?

- A. Other translations
 - 1. "If we deliberately keep on sinning..." (NIV)
 - 2. "For if we willfully persist in sin..." (NRSV)
 - 3. "For if we go on sinning willfully..." (NASB)
 - 4. "For if we do evil on purpose" (BBE)
 - 5. "For if we sin deliberately" (RSV)
- B. Original text connotes repeated action
 - 1. Not an act of sin, but a state of sin
 - 2. Christians have moments of weakness or sin ignorantly - 1John 1:8-10
 - 3. It is not inadvertent sin but deliberate sin under consideration
 - 4. A state in which one knows the truth, yet chooses to deliberately and continuously persist in sin
- C. Can Christians achieve this state?
 - 1. Note the pronoun "we"; the author includes himself in the warning
 - 2. He later describes one who was sanctified by "the blood of the covenant" - Heb. 10:29

3. This warning is given to those sanctified by the blood of Jesus
- D. It has always been the case that children of God can so sin as to fall from grace, often never to rise again
 1. Num. 15:30-31 - "presumptuously" - with a high hand

II. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF WILLFUL SIN?

- A. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sin - Heb. 10:26
 1. The blood of Christ is no longer effective for one persisting in willful sin
- B. That which does remain
 1. A certain fearful expectation of judgment - Heb. 10:27
 - a. One can expect a judgment that is certain - Heb. 9:27; Acts 17:30-31
 - b. One can expect a judgment that is fearful - 2Cor. 5:10-11
 2. A fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries - Heb. 10:27
 - a. Fire - Rev. 21:8
 - b. Indignation - Rom. 2:5-9
 - c. Devour, not annihilate as in cease to exist, but destroy as in devastate and make utterly desolate - Matt. 10:28

III. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR PUNISHING WILLFUL SIN

- A. Is God just to bring such a punishment upon His children who have been redeemed by the blood of His Son?
- B. What was required under the Old Covenant?
 1. Death without mercy - Heb. 10:28
 2. Such was the punishment for a particular kind of sin:
 - a. Deliberate sin, where one rejected or despised Moses' law
 - b. Open and unashamed sin seen by two or more witnesses
 3. While there was mercy for sins of weakness or ignorance, there was none for open and deliberate sin under the Old Covenant
- C. What is required under the New Covenant?
 1. One is worthy of much worse punishment - Heb. 10:29
 - a. What could be worse than physical death? Fiery indignation!
 2. Why? Because a Christian who sins willfully has:
 - a. Trampled the Son of God underfoot
 - 1) The word "trampled" comes from katapateo - "denotes contempt of the most flagrant kind" (Moffat)
 - b. Counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing
 - 1) The blood of the covenant - Heb. 9:11-22, 13:20
 - 2) Such a person considers Jesus' blood a common thing
 - 3) The blood of Deity, the rarest substance in the universe
 - c. Insulted the Spirit of grace, a reference to the Holy Spirit
 - 1) Through Whom the message of salvation was given - John 16:13-14
 - 2) Through Whom sanctification takes place - 1Cor. 6:11

- 3) Or perhaps it is referring to the spirit (disposition) of God's unmerited favor
 - d. "To apostatize is to blasphemously insult the Holy Spirit, to wantonly treat the personal, gracious nature of His power. What greater crime can be imagined than to despise God's Son, regard His sacrifice as no more than an ordinary death, do outrage against His gracious Spirit, and of this by one who once acknowledged Jesus as Lord?" (Neil Lightfoot, Commentary on Hebrews, 195)
- 3. This passage clearly teaches two things:
 - a. That a Christian can so sin as to reach this point of open rebellion against Jesus
 - b. That the punishment reserved for such is worse than death, and deservedly so
- D. This is consistent with God's nature
 - 1. "But, isn't God a God of love?" - 1John 4:8
 - a. He also loves His only begotten Son. Do we really believe that He will indulgently treat mistreatment of His Son?
 - 2. He is also a God of justice; One who judges His people - Heb. 10:30; Rom. 11:22
 - a. To who much is given, much is required - Luke 12:47-48
 - b. Those who despise His love set themselves up to be the recipients of His wrath - Rom. 2:4-6
 - 3. Therefore it truly is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God
 - a. Heb. 12:28-29

IV. HOW CAN I AVOID COMMITTING WILLFUL SIN?

- A. Many worry about whether or not they have committed willful sin for which there remains no more sacrifice - Heb. 10:32-39
- B. Remember your early confidence
 - 1. Reminds them of their former days, shortly after their conversion
 - 2. Those days in which they were made a spectacle by their own sufferings and remaining steadfast in the joy of their recent salvation - Heb. 10:32-34
 - 3. And by sharing in the sufferings of others, including those of the author
 - 4. They knew they had a better and enduring possession in heaven
 - 5. Perhaps they had forgotten their early zeal; if they could just go back and remember how eager they were to serve God and to endure difficulty, they could rekindle the same spirit and avoid apostasy
 - 6. It is such confidence they must be careful not to cast away, for only in holding fast is there great reward - Heb. 3:6, 14; Rev. 2:4-5
- C. Endure to the end
 - 1. Endurance is needed to receive the promise - Heb. 10:36
 - a. Remember that the Lord is coming - Heb. 10:37
 - b. Remember that the just lives by faith - Heb. 10:38

- c. If one draws back (becomes unfaithful), he will have nothing for the Lord to be pleased with when He returns
- 2. The author speaks of his own confidence - Heb. 10:39
 - a. Deliberately cultivate our own confidence; believe to the saving of the soul, or be faithful unto death - Rev. 2:10

Conclusion:

- A. We can look forward with great anticipation to eternal, if we:
 - 1. Remember and rekindle the confidence of our conversion
 - 2. Endure to the end with the faith that saves
 - 3. Never forgetting that one can fall from grace and then fall into the hands of the living God
- B. How much better to be upheld by the hand of God than to sin with a high hand
 - 1. Psalm 37:23-24