

Willful Sin Under the New Covenant

Key Bible Verses

Hebrews 10:26–29 AMP

For if we go on deliberately and willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of the Truth, there is no longer any sacrifice left to atone for [our] sins [no further offering to which to look forward].

[There is nothing left for us then] but a kind of awful and fearful prospect and expectation of divine judgment and the fury of burning wrath and indignation which will consume those who put themselves in opposition [to God].

Any person who has violated and [thus] rejected and set at naught the Law of Moses is put to death without pity or mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

How much worse (sterner and heavier) punishment do you suppose he will be judged to deserve who has spurned and [thus] trampled underfoot the Son of God, and who has considered the covenant blood by which he was consecrated common and unhallowed, thus profaning it and insulting and outraging the [Holy] Spirit [Who imparts] grace (the unmerited favor and blessing of God)?

Why No Sacrifice for Willful Sin in the Old Testament?

Willful sins under the Old Covenant represented something fundamentally different from unintentional transgressions—they constituted rebellion and unbelief against the covenant itself.[1] God’s sacrificial system was designed to address human failures of ignorance and error committed within the covenant relationship.[1] But deliberate violation operated under different rules entirely.

The Old Covenant contained no atoning sacrifices for intentional and willful sins, as documented in Exodus and Numbers.[2] Those who presumed to break the Law with arrogant disregard faced execution rather than ritual atonement.[2] This explains the gravity of David’s situation: when he sinned deliberately “with a high hand,” he recognized he should have faced death, and understood that even numerous sacrifices could not save him.[2]

The theological reasoning behind this distinction becomes clearer when examining the nature of willful sin itself. **Continued willful sin amounted to apostasy—a repudiation of the covenant relationship.**[3] Since the sacrificial system functioned to maintain covenant relationship by covering unintentional violations, it had no mechanism for addressing deliberate rejection of the covenant’s terms. **A person choosing to openly defy God’s Law wasn’t seeking restoration within the covenant; they were rejecting it outright. To offer a sacrifice in such cases would have been theologically**

incoherent—it would suggest that one could simultaneously reject God’s authority and receive His atonement.

There were four narrow exceptions involving specific types of willful deception[4], but these appear to have been cases where restitution and confession could restore the covenant relationship. For broader presumptuous sin, however, no provision existed because the offender’s stance toward God was fundamentally adversarial rather than penitent.

[1] F. F. Bruce, *New International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 1520.

[2] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 2:316.

[3] Marcus Dods, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Commentary* (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), 348.

[4] James Smith and Robert Lee, *Handfuls on Purpose for Christian Workers and Bible Students, Series I–XIII* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 18.

What is Willful Sin in the New Testament?

The New Testament distinguishes between ordinary sin and willful, defiant rebellion against God—and your standing depends critically on which you’re committing. If you confess your sins, God remains faithful and just to forgive them, and the New Testament readily offers forgiveness for all types of sins when people confess and repent.[1] When you sin deliberately, your legal standing before God isn’t broken—Christ’s death paid for all your sins, past, present, and future.[1] **You remain God’s child, though you rupture your fellowship with Him and experience His discipline.**[1]

However, Hebrews addresses a more severe scenario: **willful sin isn’t occasional wrongdoing but a conscious rejection of God.**[2] This describes a defiant spirit—like a teenager who, when corrected, stubbornly refuses to listen—which constitutes rebellion. [3] The willful turning from Christ described in Hebrews refers specifically to abandoning Christ after learning the gospel’s truth, which leads to judgment and lostness.[1]

The consequences differ based on your response. When a believer persists in unrepentant rebellion, judgment and fire follow—not hell, but God’s stern discipline of believers, whose salvation remains secure.[3] The most severe form of discipline for spiritual disobedience is physical death.[3] **Though willful sins can receive divine forgiveness, those committing them often fail to seek God’s forgiveness through repentance.**[1]

The critical distinction: occasional sin followed by confession differs fundamentally from sustained, deliberate rebellion. The former requires repentance; the latter, if unaddressed, hardens into apostasy—a turning away that severs your relationship with Christ entirely.

[1] Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews, James, Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 10:187–188, 10:194–195.

[2] Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1652.

[3] Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1327.

The sin Hebrews warns against involves someone who initially professed faith in Christ but then renounced that profession and returned to the old religious system[1]. **The Greek term for willful sin means “voluntarily, of one’s own accord,” contrasting with sins committed through ignorance or weakness[1].** Emphasis falls on the habitual aspect—the pattern of continuing in this sin[1].

This matters because willful sin isn’t an occasional act (which can be confessed and forgiven) but a conscious rejection of God[2]. The sin involved a deliberate rejection of the gospel’s truth, with some believers apparently considering abandoning Christ to return to Judaism and avoid persecution³. Willful sin after receiving knowledge of the truth means rejecting God’s provision and going one’s own individualistic way[2].

What are Consequences of Willful Sin for the New Testament Believer?

The consequences are severe. **Anyone rejecting Christ’s sacrifice would find no other means of handling sin, leaving them with no path to God[3].** Trampling the Son of God underfoot represents a condition far worse than violating the Mosaic Law, picturing strong antagonism toward Jesus[3].

However, when believers sin deliberately, their legal standing before God isn’t broken because Christ’s death paid for all sins—past, present, and future—and sinning Christians remain God’s children[3]. They break fellowship with God and experience His discipline[3]. **The critical difference: willful turning from Christ leads to judgment and lostness, showing the person never made genuine commitment to Jesus[3].**

¹Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*

²Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1652.

³Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews, James, Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 10:188, 10:194–195.

Willful sin involves a defiant spirit—a conscious rejection of God rather than momentary weakness or stumbling.[1] This describes a state of “deliberate and voluntary defiance to the will of God,”[2] not isolated moral failures that can be confessed and forgiven. The distinction matters: occasional acts of sin differ fundamentally from a conscious rejection of God.[3]

When someone deliberately persists in sin after understanding God’s truth, there

remains no sacrifice available for those sins.[1] This doesn't mean God's mercy becomes exhausted. Rather, those who have rejected Christ's atoning work cannot have it performed for them again, and they have put themselves outside God's covenant, leaving no other covenanted means of grace available.[2]

The consequences are severe. A terrifying expectation of judgment and fiery indignation awaits.[1] However, this judgment is not hell itself, but God's discipline of believers—Scripture uses fire to describe divine discipline, and the author addresses Christians whose salvation remains secure.[1] The most extreme form of such discipline is physical death.[1]

Beyond divine judgment, there are natural consequences of sin alongside God's personal chastisement, and confession doesn't erase these results—a Christian cannot escape the consequences of wrongdoing.[4] Sin damages a believer's joy, power, testimony, fellowship, and eternal reward,[4] though salvation itself is not forfeited.[4]

The core issue is trajectory: unaddressed rebellion only intensifies and spreads.[1] The warning addresses those who have genuinely encountered God's truth but choose sustained defiance rather than repentance.

[1] Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1327.

[2] F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, with Notes and Introduction, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 155.

[3] Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1652.

[4] A. R. Stanford, *Handbook of Personal Evangelism* (WORDsearch, 2007), 35–36.

Practical Applications for New Testament Believers

The New Testament's warnings about willful sin offer several practical lessons for contemporary believers. Rather than abstract theological concepts, these warnings address concrete behavioral patterns and their consequences.

Recognize the gravity of deliberate rejection. Willful sin involves deliberately turning away from known truth, particularly when someone has experienced full knowledge of the gospel[1]. The danger lies not in stumbling through weakness but in consciously choosing disobedience. While divine forgiveness is available for willful sins, those committing them often fail to seek God's forgiveness through repentance[2]—suggesting that the practical lesson involves cultivating immediate responsiveness to conviction rather than hardening oneself against it.

Maintain community accountability and church participation. Spiritual coldness develops when believers become negligent about gathering together[1]. Warnings about disruptive behavior aim to produce repentance and restore the erring person to obedient fellowship, pursued with loving clarity rather than timidity[3]. This suggests that avoiding isolation and remaining open to correction from the faith community

provides essential protection against willful sin.

Understand the self-deceptive spiral. Those who entertain false ideas or refuse to acknowledge disobedience follow a dangerous path where self-deception develops gradually through self-granted leniency and ignored warnings, ultimately leading to self-condemnation through willful rejection of truth[3]. The practical application is vigilance about small compromises and responsiveness to early warning signs.

Grasp the finality of persistent rejection. The difference between forgivable deliberate offenses and unforgivable defiance relates to whether the offender shows penitence or continuing defiance—persistent rebellion nullifies the means by which forgiveness becomes possible[4]. This underscores that ongoing repentance and submission, not perfection, sustains one's relationship with God.

[1] Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of Hebrews* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2004), 45–46.

[2] Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews, James*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 10:188.

[3] Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 9:386–387.

[4] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 139.