

(Hebrews - Part 30): Sin Willfully - No More Sacrifice

by A.W. Tozer

The passage in Hebrews 10:26 does not mean that only sins done before hearing the gospel can be forgiven, or that if a Christian sins, there's no hope after that. It means that the sin of unbelief in the word of God is a serious offense that leads to eternal loss if not repented of.

Duration: 35:15

Scripture: Isaiah 54:8, Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a personal experience of feeling down and encountering the Salvation Army on the street corner. The Salvation Army's song, 'I need no other sacrifice,' resonates with the preacher and leads to a discussion on the sin of unbelief. The preacher references the book of Hebrews, highlighting the sin of unbelief as a stubborn refusal to trust in the Word of God. The sermon emphasizes the importance of a free conscience and warns against allowing one's conscience to be trapped, using Scripture as a tool of Satan. The preacher concludes by affirming that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, even willful sinning.

Transcript

Now, this morning, I want to talk to you on a little text that has bothered a lot of people. I don't pick it out deliberately, but I simply won't skip it. It is the 26th verse of the book of Hebrews 10, chapter 10, verse 26.

Paul, or whoever wrote this book, and I assume Paul, says, "...for if we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and the fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." Now, that verse 26, "...if we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." I want to talk about this particularly today because this passage has been widely misunderstood, and is widely misunderstood, and very generally misinterpreted. It appears to be out of accord with the rest of the scriptures. It's not, but it seems to be out of accord.

Always keep that in mind. When you find a verse of scripture that seems to contradict another verse of scripture, always remember that it does not. The contradiction is in your mind.

It's because you do not have sufficient light. If you had sufficient light, you would know there was no contradiction there. This passage has been used as a club by responsible preachers to frighten half to death some of the Lord's people, and some of the Lord's sensitive and badly frightened people have used it against themselves.

And not only has the passage been misused by people against others and against themselves, but Satan, the devil, uses this passage. He uses it to malign God, and to create the impression that God is a short-tempered tyrant, ruling according to his own unreasonable and unpredictable whims. And the devil uses it to trap the consciences of people.

I suppose that, well, there's hardly a passage any way in the Bible that more people have inquired about than this one. I have had letters about it. I have had conversations over the phone.

I have had people who have come to see me in person, and they're usually very serious-minded, honest people, people who are very deeply in trouble because their consciences have been trapped. Now, a free conscience may lead to repentance, but a trapped conscience can only lead to despair. And there are many of the Lord's people whose consciences have been trapped.

And this passage of scripture is a trap that Satan uses to trap the people of God. But you say, if it's scripture, how could it ever be used as a trap? Well, do you remember what Peter said? Our beloved brother Paul, also according to the given wisdom unto him, has written many things which the unwise and the unstable and unlearned use to their own destruction. And when he says the unlearned there, he doesn't mean people who haven't been to college.

He means people who are not deeply learned in the scriptures. So our conscience gets in trouble, and we turn against ourselves and use this passage of scripture to beat down ourselves. I know who's doing this, it's the devil.

And then this prevents many a prodigal from coming home. If somebody had gone to the prodigal son and told him that there was a passage of scripture that said, if you left your father's house and went into the far country, there remained no more sacrifice for sin, he'd never have come back. Because he would have misunderstood it and being, if not an honest man, at least a sensitive man, as the passage shows, he would never have come back to the father's house.

And then another thing this passage does, it tends to draw away attention from major truths to minor truths, and to create argument and bitter feeling. It's astonishing, isn't it, how the whole Sermon on the Mount can be passed over and people will get together and argue over this one verse of scripture. But that's the way it's done.

And now we want to talk a little about this because of the fact that it has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, misused, both by the devil and by people, against the people of God. And I'm always on the side of the people of God. I sound sometimes as if I wasn't, because I'm pretty severe with them.

But I am severe with them as a father is severe with a little family of children that he loves unto death, and of which he's very proud. I am very proud of God's people and very happy to be with them, and recognize them as being the father's children. But I am not going to let them get away with a lot of bad manners and bad habits when they shouldn't.

For that reason, I am pretty severe, but I am severe with a smile. I never preach except with a smile in my heart and with the joy that I'm a part of the Church. But now, what does it mean here? What does this passage mean? And first, let's look at what it does not mean.

I think that it says, For if we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fear for looking forward to judgment. Now, what doesn't it mean? If we can determine what it doesn't mean, we're in a better position to find out what it does mean. I read in that deeply scholarly magazine, Reader's Digest, this week, about a woman who called up a police station and said, I just want to ask you, what bird is that out in front of my house? He said, It's an English sparrow.

She said, Thank you, and hung up. Well, you can see how silly that all is. He didn't know, he hadn't seen the bird.

If you have to explain it, of course, it had better not have been told. But fact is, she didn't know what it wasn't, and she didn't know what it was, and he told her what it was without knowing what it wasn't. And if he had known what it wasn't, he might have known what it was.

You see what I mean? Now, if you get a passage of scripture and you don't know what it is, anything that you don't know what is, you don't know what isn't. And if you can find out what it isn't, you will find out what it is. What doesn't it mean? Well, it doesn't mean that only sins done before hearing the gospel can be forgiven.

If after you hear the gospel and are enlightened, then you sin willfully, there is no more chance for you ever to be saved. Let's look at it like this. We have one chance to hear the gospel.

We hear the gospel and are not converted, but go on in sin. Then after that, we are finished. There is no more sacrifice for sins remaining.

Now, that's what it doesn't mean, because that would be to violate all the scriptures and to destroy all the longsuffering and patience of God. I want to ask you, listening to me now, you happy Christians in conscious fellowship with God, how many of you were converted to Christ the first time you heard the gospel? How many of you were converted the second time you heard the gospel, or the third time, or the tenth time you heard the gospel? Some of you were teaching in Sunday school and teaching others before you were converted. Some of you were giving to the Church or to foreign missions and sending out the gospel that you well understood before you yourself surrendered to God and gave your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior.

Now, if this passage meant that when you once heard and understood, for that's what the word enlightened means, and you sin after that, you're done. Now, this couldn't mean this for the simple reason that that would rule out everybody listening to me now, I'm quite sure. I do not think there's anybody here that was converted the first time you heard the gospel.

Some people wait a long time. I wish they didn't. I was converted when I was 17.

I wish it had been 14 or 12 instead of 17. But I had heard the gospel and was able to preach it very shortly after I was converted. So it doesn't mean that only sins done before hearing the gospel can be forgiven.

And if it meant that, then God would be requiring us to do what he would not himself do. Because he told us that we were to forgive other people 70 times, seven times. And if we're to do it and he demands it of us, then I would assume that he would do it himself.

So I think we can say that this rules out any such a definition or interpretation as the one I've suggested. And it does not mean that if a Christian sins, there's no hope after that. Because that would be to contradict the scriptures again.

Listen to this passage of scripture. This is one I give often to people who come in great distress or write me in great distress. I often give this to women, because this is about the only passage, or at least large or full passage, that talks directly to the woman.

Mostly it talks to men. If any man hear my voice and so on. But here it says, women, sing, O barren that did not bear and break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that did not prevail with child, and so on.

Then it says, Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed, neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame. For thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer, the whole one of Israel, the God of the whole earth, shall he be called.

For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

Now, here was a woman who had left her husband and forsaken him, and he had forsaken her, and they were separated, and he had turned his back on her finally in grief and sorrow. But he said, It is only for a small moment, in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me.

For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that has mercy on thee. Now, if that passage is there, and then this passage teaches in Hebrews that when a Christian sins, he is dead.

That if he sins, there is no hope for him, for there is no more sacrifice for sin remaining for him. Then what are you going to do with Isaiah 54? What are you going to do with the 51st Psalm? The 51st Psalm was written by a man who was after God's own heart and who had walked with God and written psalms. And then he was tempted and sinned, and he certainly sinned deliberately, falling over the edge of a cliff.

He sent for this woman, he sinned, and then to get out of it he had her husband murdered. There was a malicious affliction. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I and my sin as he knew, all the writers of the Hebrews knew. And if it was to be true that when a Christian sins, that ends it all, and there's no more sacrifice, no fountain for him to wash in, no lamp that he can look to to take away the sins of the world. But if somebody says that's Old Testament, that doesn't make any difference, but I will grant that for the sake of the argument for those who may believe that.

Let me read you from the New Testament, a man named John. He says, If we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. That's 1 John 1 and 2. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all evil.

Jesus Christ came that he might destroy the works of the devil. And so, my little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. You can't dispensationalize that out of you. That's for Christians.

So that if it were true that if a Christian sins, willfully sins after he's converted, after he's heard the knowledge of the truth, it doesn't even say converted, he's heard the knowledge of the truth and been enlightened, then why was 1 John 1 and 2 written? And again, look at this man, Peter. Peter certainly didn't accidentally curse and swear and deny his Lord. There was no accident there.

Peter was sneaky, and he wanted to get out of difficulty. So when they said, Aren't you one of his disciples? He saw the Lord was in trouble, and he didn't exactly want to get out. The easy way was a bad thing to do, and he repented afterwards and the Lord forgave him.

In fact, he was the one the Lord hunted up. And what about the universal experience of religious people? What about it? They say that what is the great mission man there in the east, one of the eastern cities of the United States? I've forgotten his name for the moment. But this man, I think it was seven times that he backslid.

Now, I don't think a person ought to backslide, and I don't want ever to drop one lonely word that would encourage any child of God to leave home. I don't want to encourage anybody in any measure to do wrong. Rather, I want to encourage them to do right, always to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flecked ears.

Some of the Lord's people do backslide. One of the greatest preachers that I ever heard, I suppose in my lifetime, I'll not name him. You probably have not heard of him.

He was a great Bible teacher, one of the greatest Bible teachers that I ever knew. He wasn't one of these textualists, but he was a man who knew what the Bible meant and was recognized all over this continent and abroad as a great Bible teacher. That man, after he had been a Christian for a while and even had been in the ministry, had a terrible fall and for some time was in this condition of backsliding, and then like Peter, came tearfully back to his Lord and lived on to be a very old man.

And when I knew him, he had a long white beard and eyes that were black as if they had been bored in with a red-hot poker. He would stand and look out over his audience, and the light of God was on his old face, and he would teach the word. But like David, he had fallen.

But now, if this passage means that nobody who has heard the word could ever be restored again after they had sinned, then what about that man, and what about Peter, and what about the universal experience of religious people? The simple fact is, one passage of scripture is never enough to establish a doctrine. Always remember that. And you young Bible students and men who will be later preachers, I think they mostly come out Sunday nights.

But anyhow, if you are here, let me remind you that you never establish a doctrine on one verse of scripture, because it takes more than one to establish a truth. Here is the rule. If this verse says it, and this verse confirms it, then you are pretty likely to be right in your doctrine.

But if you go over here and you find it, and you go over there and you find it, and you go back there and you find it, and you go on further forward and find it, then they all say the same thing, and you know you have the truth. For instance, the verse 16 isn't enough to establish the doctrine of the love of God. But if you go back to the book of Deuteronomy and hear God say, I have loved you, and I loved your fathers and chose them, if you go on into the book of Psalms and you hear the Holy Ghost talk about his love, and you go on into the book of Isaiah and hear the Holy Ghost talk about the love of God, you go on into the prophets and hear Isaiah talk about it, and then you come into the New Testament and hear Christ talk about it, then you hear the apostles talk about it on through to Revelation, you know you have a doctrine you can live on and die on, world without end.

But never reach into the Bible and get one verse and make that either hope or despair, because it isn't enough. Every Bible school, every seminary knows that dogmatic theology is builded upon the harmony of more than one verse of scripture. Now, you say, give scripture.

When the devil took Jesus up onto the pinnacle of the temple, he said, Now, jump off, he said. Jump off of here, because it's written. It is written.

He shall give his angels charge concerning thee. Yes, said Jesus, but again it is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Truth lies not in the angels shall keep thee, but it lies in the angels shall keep thee, but don't tempt God.

And when the Lord says that he will hear your prayer, it doesn't mean that the Lord makes an unconditional promise to answer your prayer. It means that there are others who he'll answer your prayer. So we get the truth, not by writing one passage to death.

We get the truth by taking all the scriptures and putting them together. Now, what does it mean? That's what it does, and now what does it? Well, there are two words here, sin and sacrifice. And the sin held up here particularly is the sin of unbelief.

You read the book of Hebrews and you'll find that's the sin they're talking about. The sin of unbelief in the word of God, a sulky, stubborn refusal to go on. Israel back there in the Old Testament took a vote of no confidence, voted a vote of no confidence against God.

They said no, they would not. And the writer to the Hebrews warns, Now don't do as they did. You remember in the third chapter, don't do as they did.

For with whom was he grieved these forty years, even those that sinned in the desert, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swear he that they should not enter into his rest? But to them it believed not. So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Basic unbelief was the trouble of the Jew.

And so the writer to the Hebrews says, Now you are Hebrews, and you have in you the streak that your forefathers had. And they voted no confidence in the olden days, even though they had sacrifice there, a sacrifice which was made by the priests. Now, he says, there has been a fulfillment of all of those sacrifices in Jesus Christ.

The old Jews used to offer their sacrifice and get forgiven for their sins. And if they sinned again, they offered another lamb and another lamb. But now, says the man of God, there is no more.

You Jews, don't go and look to your old sacrifices, for they are out. They have no meaning, because they have been fulfilled in Christ. This tenth chapter from which this passage that I use this morning is taken, says, For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never, with those sacrifices which they offer year by year, continually make the comer thereunto perfect.

But it says that Christ offered one sacrifice for sin forever, and so there isn't any other sacrifice. And if you Jews who always were going back and always filled with unbelief and always stubbornly rebelling, if you turn away now from this last, final sacrifice and go back to your altar, your altars don't count. There is no more sacrifice for sin.

There is no place to look. Either it's Jesus Christ, or there is no sacrifice, no place to go. So if you go on in your sin, don't imagine you can go back and start over and offer another lamb and go back to an altar.

You can't do it, says the Holy Ghost here through the man of God. There is no more sacrifice for sin. But a fearful looking-forward of judgment.

So for all of us, it's this. It's either Christ or eternal loss. If we draw back from him and still sin and go on willfully and refuse to go on with him, there is no place else to remember sin.

The old sacrifices of the Hebrews were out. And so it's either Jesus Christ, our Lord, or else it's eternal loss and a fearful looking-forward too of judgment that shall devour the adversaries. So there isn't any place to hide.

The phony hiding places that people create for themselves, phony hiding places. You might as well hope to hide from the judgment of God if you refuse the blood of Jesus Christ and look around for hope somewhere else, looking for another sacrifice which had been done away and ruled out. If you do, you are like the man who might go to Christmas Island, where they are putting off the big bombs now, and make himself a paper tent and say, I'm safe in my paper tent.

One big boom and there's no paper tent and no man and no anything. So the great judgment of God is like the bomb, and when it lights or lands upon a nation or a city or a man or a church, there is no place to hide, only in Jesus Christ, the Lord. I tell you, the book of Hebrews is a book of complete repudiation of all the Old Testament sacrifices and the establishing of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

No matter how many willful sinners there might be, the blood of Jesus Christ still cleanses from all sin. What other kind of sin would there be except willful sinning? If a man loses his temper, he doesn't do it willfully? I suppose not. But if he loses his temper and beats his neighbor up, just at what point does he cease to be spontaneous and become willful? Would you tell me that? Just where in the matter of beating his neighbor's ears down, just tell me where does he cease to be spontaneous? I don't think God makes an awful lot of difference between a sin that is a spontaneous burst of anger, say, or lust, and any other kind of sin.

But if a man wills to do evil and continues to sin and turns back to Israel and to the altars and to the old sacrifices, the man of God says, No, don't do it. They don't exist anymore. There remains no sacrifice.

Go on to perfection. Seek Jesus Christ, who is your Lord, and who offered a sacrifice for sin forever. So there is no place to hide.

The phony hiding places, God knows there are too many of them. I like to try to upset them all I can and torpedo them all I can. When they say, God is too loving to them, I like to torpedo that, for that's a phony hiding place.

When they say, I don't believe there's a hell, I like to torpedo that one, for that's a phony hiding place. No place to hide. Hide in the blood of the Lamb.

We used to sing, Hide me in the blood of Jesus. And so if we hide in the blood, we're all right. Outside of that, there's no place to hide, and no sacrifice to sin, no penance, no righteousness, no doing good, no offering up of a lamb, no slave, a pigeon, or a redhead.

That's what it means. I told you what it doesn't mean. I hope this will encourage some dear people, for there are sensitive people, a little bit morbid, and a little bit on the neurotic side.

But if you're a little neurotic, don't let it bother you. Most of us are. My family claims I am.

My boys tell me I am. They are. Somebody wrote a book called Be Glad You're Neurotic.

I haven't read the book. But what does neurotic mean? It means nervous. My wife said this morning, some people think that there's something wrong with you because you move your shoulders.

So nothing wrong with me. I'm just double-jointed. Somebody wanted to know if I was crippled in the war.

No, I never even saw a bullet when I'm crippled. I'm just wiggly. And if you're nervous and sensitive, the temptation is, when you feel you have failed God, or even whether you have or not, the temptation is to take it awfully hard and begin to blame yourself.

And if you let that crystallize into a state of morbidity, you can hate yourself and condemn yourself and refuse to forgive yourself and refuse to believe God forgives you to a point where you're a mental wreck. And we have some mental wrecks. Now, those mental wrecks would be mental wrecks on something else.

Religion didn't make them like that. They were like that. And they wouldn't let religion straighten them out.

But if you will believe that there's only one sin that can't be forgiven, and that's the sin of attributing the works of the Holy Ghost to the devil, that's the unpardonable sin, that's the only one that can. All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, except the one. That's the unpardonable sin, and that's not before us here now.

And always remember this. The worried Christian has not committed the unpardonable sin. For it is part of the psychological state of the man who has committed the unpardonable sin that he doesn't know he's done it.

And when you hear anybody grieving for fear they have, you can always be sure they haven't. For in the Bible, the ones that did were arrogantly sure that they were righteous, and they'd have laughed out loud if you told them they'd committed the unpardonable sin. And the poor, grieved, sin-bruised people that wept at the feet of Jesus, they hadn't.

Even though they might have thought they had, they hadn't. So if you should be among those who are so sensitive and so nervously distraught that you feel hurt and self-condemned, and maybe wonder if you've committed the unpardonable sin and there's no more sacrifice for sin, the two don't mean the same, but a troubled mind can always make them the same. If you're worried, you haven't.

If you have, you're not worried. That's the rule of thumb. You can be sure.

Now I hope that what I've said this morning will do one thing and not another. I hope it will encourage God's poor, troubled sheep. But I hope it will not encourage them to be careless.

For we don't want to be careless Christians. We want to walk circumspectly for the time is drawing nigh. But we want to be cheerfully hopeful because of the goodness of God and because of the infinite efficacy of the blood of the Lamb.

We need no other sacrifice. I was walking up Halstead Street one time in the city of Chicago. I don't remember what it was that had gotten me down.

That was years ago. I think I was blue, oh brother. I'd stuck my finger in a glass of water and could have written.

But anyway, I was down and here was the Salvation Army. They were on the street corner and they had their drum and some off-key trumpets and they were singing, you know, hoarsely as they do on the street corner in the open air. But when I got there I heard them singing, I need no other sacrifice, I want no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me.

They sang, when I reach the pearly gates, I'll then put in my plea, it is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me. I felt as if I was two and a half feet taller and almost felt wings sprouting. I left them and I didn't tell them, to this day they don't know what they did for me, a poor discouraged preacher.

But I walked on the rest of the way up to Halstead Street to the church. My heart was singing and I said, thank God, thank God it's true. I ask no other sacrifice, I need nothing else, Jesus Christ is enough.

There remaineth no sacrifices in Israel anymore, but there remaineth a sacrifice before the right hand of God with the nails and marks in his hands. That's all the plea that I need and all the sacrifice that I need and all the hope I need, world without end. Amen.

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