

WILLFUL SIN

GOD'S WARNINGS IN I CORINTHIANS 9:27, HEBREWS 6:4-8, and HEBREWS 10:24-30

ISN'T ALL SIN WILLFUL?

What is "willful sin?" How does God's Word, the Bible, define "willful sin?" Doesn't it seem that all sin is "willful" since all sin is an act of "our will." If it were not an act of our will, who else could we blame? Can we ever blame someone else for our "sin," since by its very definition "sin" is our "transgression of the law?" Even as Christians, don't we continue to fail every day and sin against God, if not in word or deed, then in thought? Didn't we willingly choose to be "sinful" through Adam? We see in the following verses that the Bible teaches even our thoughts can be sin:

Genesis 6:5 *Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Proverbs 23:7a *For as he thinks within himself, so he is . . .*

Mark 7:20-22 *And He [Jesus] was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness."*

Romans 2:15 . . . *in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,*

Concerning sins of ignorance, Jesus declares the following:

Luke 12:47-48 *And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few [lashes]. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.*

John clearly warns Christians in the following verses:

I John 1:8,10 *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.*

James leaves no room for escape when God says through him:

James 2:9-10 *But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*

Paul also documents his struggle with sin in the following verses:

Romans 7:15-16, *For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.*

Romans 7:24-25 ***Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh [I am serving] the law of sin.*

I Timothy 1:15-16 *It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am [not was] foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.*

God clearly tells us through Solomon:

Ecclesiastes 7:20 *Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.*

GOD'S SOLUTION FOR HIS CHILDREN

John 6:39-40 *This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*"

We have "eternal life," and can never "lose" our salvation, but in order to keep our "fellowship" right with our Heavenly Father and to avoid His faithful discipline, we should obey, as often as necessary, the following directions:

I John 1:7, 9 . . . *but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The promises of the above verses are so wonderful that at times they seem just too good to be true, and yet they are true because they are "God's" promises. But can you imagine someone confessing their sins to God in this matter, "Dear Lord, I want to tell you right now that I agree with you that I have sinned, and I am sorry, but I want you to know that this sin was against my will, I didn't really want to do this sin, in fact, maybe the devil made me do it." This confession would not be accepted by God, since the person is not taking full responsibility for his sin as an act of his will. As you will see in the following verses, this privilege of "confession" and "cleansing from all unrighteousness" can be revoked (only by GOD) for the Christian who "goes on sinning willfully," since "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins!"

IF WE GO ON SINNING WILLFULLY

All sin is obviously willful, and it would be utter nonsense (except to a psychiatrist) to try to claim otherwise. But not all willful sin is continuous, nonstop, and without repentance. There are many definite warnings in God's Word concerning true, born-again Christians who continue to live in sin day after day without struggle and repentance. The following is the only warning in the Bible that contains the word "willfully."

Hebrews 10:24-26 . . . *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near, for if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

Notice that in this warning "sin" is in its participle form--"sinning," communicating a continuous, nonstop, no-repentance action of "sin," or to use

the words in the verse, "go on sinning." The "willful" sin is continuing to "go on." The conjunction "for" ties this phrase to the previous phrase about "forsaking the assembly," which Christians usually do when they choose to live in continual "sin." They seldom want to be around other Christians, discuss the problem, or put themselves under the authority of the church elders. (If there is no repentance, Christians who continue in known sin and do not leave the church must be put out of the church, Matt. 18:15-17, I Cor. 5:3-13). The "prodigal son" went to "a far country," far away from his authority. Paul states:

II Timothy 4:10, 16 . . . *for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, . . .*

16 *At my first defense **no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.***

The previous warning to God's people in Heb. 10:25-26 continues as follows:

Hebrews 10:26-30 *For if we [Christians] **go on sinning willfully** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.** Anyone [of God's people] **who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.** **How much severer punishment do you think he [the Christian] will deserve** who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean **the blood** of the covenant **by which he was sanctified,** and has insulted **the [indwelling, sealing] Spirit of grace?** For **we know Him** who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "**The Lord will judge His people.**"*

Although many struggle with this and other warnings in the Bible, the last six words above should clear up any question about who this warning is directed to. It says "The Lord will judge His People," the true "sanctified" Christians--HIS PEOPLE! They are still saved, but since there "no longer remains a sacrifice" for their daily sins, the promises of I John 1:9 are no longer available, they have forfeited all kingdom rewards. The judgment seat of Christ will be "terrifying" for them. But some would ask, "What about the 'fire' mentioned? Doesn't that mean hell?" In this context, the "consuming fire" does not mean "hell," but the "fire" of God's judgment upon "His people!" Study the following "fire" verses relating to God's people. Notice that they all relate to the "works," behavior, and "fruit" of God's people. (The following verses have nothing at all to do with losing salvation, since that is impossible.)

Deuteronomy 4:23-24 *So watch yourselves [God's people who came out of Egypt], that you do not forget the covenant of **the Lord your God** which He made with **you**, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything*

against which **the Lord your God** has commanded you. **“For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”**

Luke 3:16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize **you** with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**”

John 15:5-6 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, **he bears much fruit**, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away **as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.**

I Corinthians 3:13-15 . . . **each** [Christian] **man’s work will become evident**; for the day will show it because it is to be **revealed with fire**, and **the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work**. If any man’s **work** which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s **work** is **burned up**, he will suffer loss; **but he himself will be saved**, yet so as through fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, **let us show gratitude**, by which we may **offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe**; for **our God is a consuming fire**.

OTHER WARNINGS AGAINST CONTINUED, UNREPENTANT SIN

I John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his **brother** committing a **sin not leading to death**, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit **sin not leading to death**. There is a **sin leading to death** [unconfessed continual sin]; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 Or do **you** not know that the unrighteous [Christians living in sin] **will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived**; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, **will inherit the kingdom of God.**

Ephesians 5:5-7 For this you know with certainty, that **no** [Christian] immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, **has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words**, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do **not be partakers with them**; . . .

Galatians 5:16, 19-21 But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh**. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, **enmities, strife, jealousy,**

outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Hebrews 6:4-8 *For in the case of those who have once been **enlightened** and have **tasted of the heavenly gift** and have been made **partakers of the Holy Spirit**, and have **tasted the good word of God** and **the powers of the age to come**, and **then have fallen away** [again], it is **impossible to renew them again to repentance**, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground [the Christian] that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing [reward] from God; but if it yields **thorns and thistles**, it [the Christian] is **worthless** and close to being cursed, and it [his work] ends up being **burned**.*

As in Hebrews 10:24-30, the above warning in Heb. 6:4-8 is also to genuine born-again Christians. They have seen the light-- "enlightened," they have the "gift" of eternal life, they are "partakers of the Holy Spirit," and have experienced the "word of God," and the kingdom "powers." Although forgiven as far as hell is concerned, a Christian can, after "falling away" into unconfessed sin numerous times and repenting, come to the point of no return, when it is "impossible to renew them again to repentance." As we saw in Heb.10:26, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins!" A Biblical example of this is the saved Israelites who came out of Egypt, led by Moses, who were to be rewarded with the "promised land."

I Corinthians 10:1-6 *For I do not want you to be unaware, **brethren**, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. **Nevertheless, with most** [over 599,990 Jews plus aliens] **of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.***

They continued to sin and anger God until He decided to let them die in the wilderness; likewise any believer can sin to a point where his opportunity to receive further kingdom rewards may be gone. He becomes "disqualified!" He may lose rewards and even lose his life! *The believer who is "disqualified" usually doesn't know that he is.* Some other O.T. examples of those who became "disqualified" are Aaron, Moses, Korah, Eli's sons, Eli, King Saul, and Solomon. In the N.T. we see Paul's concern for this possibility in his own life if he allowed himself to become undisciplined and not address his sins:

I Corinthians 9:27 . . . **but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

The previous warnings are all for true Christians, and failure to respond to these warnings will result in "disqualification," (possibly physical "death") and loss of "inheritance," not loss of salvation. You cannot lose eternal life. Studying the following verses will reveal that the "inheritance" is the "reward" for faithful "works." Do not confuse "inheritance" (a reward for our work) with the "free gift" of eternal life (because of Jesus' work).

Colossians 3:23-25 **Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he [the Christian] who does wrong [sins], will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.**

WARNINGS TO CHRISTIANS WHO REFUSE TO FORGIVE

The warnings in the above verses apply to Christians living in continued moment-by-moment unrepentant sin. These warnings do not apply to the Christian who is struggling with "sin" and failing, yet dealing with his sins and confessing them before God. If a brother is practicing sin, the Christian has the authority to confront him and, if the sinning brother does not listen, to separate from him and even pray for his discipline. But if he repents and seeks forgiveness, we must forgive him. No Christian has any authority whatsoever to decide if that brother is in a I Cor. 9:27, Heb. 6:6, or Heb. 10:29 situation. That is determined by God, and Him alone! We must forgive! Jesus warns us:

Luke 17:3-4 ***“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”***

In His above teaching, Jesus might have had the following proverbs in mind:

Proverbs 24:15-16 ***Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; Do not destroy his resting place; For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in time of calamity.***

In the following verses Jesus expands His teaching on forgiving a sinning brother who “repents,” that is, he apologizes and seeks forgiveness:

Matthew 18:21-22 ***Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”***

Four hundred ninety sins against Peter, and yet Peter is told to forgive his brother, not accuse him of practicing willful sin. Some people erroneously interpret Matt. 18:15-17 to say that if the sins were not "against him," Peter would not have to be concerned with the brother's sins at all, however love demands that we are to be concerned about a "brother's" known sins, whether they are sins against us or not. For example, Peter's sins were not against Paul in Gal. 2:11-14, but Paul was faithful to confront him. Jesus continues to make the importance of forgiveness clear by the following parable:

Matthew 18:23-35 "***For this reason*** [context--Matt.18:21-22], *the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have **patience with me** and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.*

*"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have **patience with me** and I will repay you.' But he was **unwilling** and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.*

"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers [jailers; spiritual application--demons?] until he should repay all that was owed him. (Christians who are unforgiving are always very troubled people.)

"My heavenly Father will also do the same [demonic oppression?] to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

CHRISTIANS WHO REFUSE TO FORGIVE ARE COMMITTING UNREPENTANT WILLFUL SIN!

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