

Hebrews 10

Can One Lose Their Salvation?

Hebrews 10:26-29

Bible Commentary

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Hebrews 10 we find a passage that is used by some who say that the Bible teaches that a believer can lose their salvation. This passage reads:

For if we 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 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 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 Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29)

Some would say this passage teaches that if a believer were to deliberately continue to engage in sinful practices after “receiving the knowledge of the truth” and having been saved, then they would lose their salvation. First, we need to look no further than the context of this passage to know that such an interpretation is invalid. In verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine, we see that the writer of Hebrews was referring to the sin of apostasy, or the sin of ultimately rejecting Christ and the sacrifice He made of Himself for the sins of mankind, which is the *only* provision that God has made for the sins of mankind (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

The “we” in verse twenty-six refers to professing Hebrew or Jewish believers, who are the individuals to whom the letter to the Hebrews is addressed. As with most any group or congregation of professing believers, some are genuine believers, and some are not. The writer of Hebrews was communicating that if professing Jewish believers received “the knowledge of

the truth”, which is to say that they received the proclamation of the Gospel message in their hearing, and they “go on sinning willfully” in that they ultimately rejected the message, then there remained for them no sacrifice for their sins, but only a fearful expectation of the judgment of God which will come upon all unbelievers. They would not be saved simply because they were descended directly from the twelve tribes of Israel, as Paul also taught in Romans 9:1-8 and 11:1-8.

The entire passage from which Hebrews 10:26-29 is taken is Hebrews 10:19-39, which is a call for professing Jewish believers to persevere in their faith, and not to return to the way of Judaism. It is apparent from this passage that there were some who were not continuing in the faith, but had apparently parted company with true believers (verse twenty-five). In verse thirty-nine of this passage, we see that the writer of Hebrews is contrasting those who “shrink back to destruction”, or those who do not continue in the faith, with those who “have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

Those who did ultimately depart from the faith showed themselves to be those who had never been saved in the first place, as the Apostle John also described them saying: “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” (I John 2:19). Though they had professed a faith in Christ, and they were associated for a time with others who were genuine believers, they had never been saved. As a result they did not continue in the faith with those who were true believers.

By their departing they showed themselves to be the false prophets Jesus warned about in Matthew 7:15-23, who claimed to be Christians, but were not. They were “bad trees” that could not produce good fruit. These are also the same individuals whom Jesus characterized as “rocky places” without much soil that had received the seed of the word of God, as we read in the parable of the sower. These rocky places received the seed of the Gospel message, and the seeds immediately sprang up, symbolizing an apparent conversion. But ultimately the heat of the sun withered the plants because they had “no firm root” in themselves, as Jesus described them, and therefore they bore no fruit (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21).

The sin referred to in this passage of Hebrews 10:26-29 is the sin of unbelief, or ultimately rejecting Christ after having heard the Gospel message, after “receiving the knowledge of the truth”. This sin of unbelief or apostasy will be committed by all of those who are not called to faith as Jesus taught in John 6:44 and 6:65. These are *not* true believers who “go on sinning willfully” in that they continued to participate in sinful behavior after they were saved, and therefore lost their salvation. Rather these were individuals who were unregenerate, because though they had heard the outward proclamation of the Gospel message, they had never been inwardly called by God to faith in Christ. Therefore they were still dead in their sins.

These individuals, if they are never called to faith in Christ, will persist in their unbelief and rejection of Him. They will ultimately be shown to be among those who do not receive God’s mercy (Romans 9:18), but who are “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22).

The writer of Hebrews himself attested to the fact that salvation through Jesus Christ is only for those who are called by God when he wrote: “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, *those who have been called* may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Hebrews 9:15, emphasis added). Peter also taught that salvation is only for those who are called by God to faith in Christ when he said: “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, *as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*” (Acts 2:39, emphasis added).

We know from Romans 8:30 that all of those whom God calls, He also justifies and ultimately glorifies. *None* of those who are called to faith in Christ are lost (John 6:37-40). To interpret Hebrews 10:26-29 or any other passage of Scripture as saying that a believer could lose their salvation would be clearly contradicted by many passages of Scripture. (See *The Eternal Security of the Believer – Parts 1 and 2*, in “A Book of Bible Study”.)

This passage in Hebrews 10:26-29 and a similar passage in Hebrews 6:4-8 both speak of the same group of people. These passages speak of those individuals among professing Christians who, though they have heard the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they claim to be believers, and they claim to have repented, they have never in fact come to faith in Him. They are not genuine believers who have lost their salvation, or who may be in danger of losing their salvation. Though they appeared for a time to be genuine believers because of their association with others who were, they were in fact not. As a result, the time came when they no longer continued in the faith, but fell away (See Hebrews 6:6).

Those who have heard the word of God and claim to be a believers, but ultimately they fall away and do not continue in the faith, are those who have “trampled under foot the Son of God”, and “regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant” by which they at one time claimed to have been sanctified. And in doing so they have “insulted the Spirit of grace.” (See Hebrews 10:29). They are not among “those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”, rather they are among “those who shrink back to destruction” (See Hebrews 10:39).

They heard the word of God, words that “are spirit and are life” as Jesus said, but they did not believe *because it had not been granted to them by the Father to believe*, as Jesus taught in John 6:63-65. Though they will claim to be Christians, they did not in reality ever come to faith in Christ (Matthew 7:22-23). Jesus again spoke of these unregenerate individuals and their inability to come to Him when He told His disciples the reason that He spoke to the crowds in parables: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” (Matthew 13:11).

Though many “receive the knowledge of the truth” in that they hear the spoken proclamation of the Gospel message, which is the outward call to men to put their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, only God’s elect will be called to faith with the inward, effectual calling of God that Jesus taught about in John 6:44 and 6:63-65. The rest are unable to come to Christ. Unless and until God intervenes in their lives, and effectually calls them to faith in His Son as we have discussed elsewhere, they will “go on sinning willfully” (Hebrews 10:26) by persisting in unbelief, because they can do nothing else. (Consider also I Peter 2:7-8).

Hebrews 10:26-29, and also Hebrews 6:4-9 have been used by some to say the Scriptures teach that one can lose their salvation after they have been saved as result of returning to a life of sinful practices. Though a believer will struggle with sin, and will sin at times after he is saved (Romans 7:7-25), no genuine believer will ever return to a life that is characterized by sin, as is clearly taught in I John where we read: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (I John 3:9).

The only way that either of passages could be made to say that a believer can lose their salvation would be to ignore the context of the broader passages from which they are taken, and to isolate them from the rest of the Scriptures a whole. In each of these passages, the individuals under consideration are not those who are genuine believers and are in danger of losing their salvation. Rather they are in fact the unregenerate who, though they had heard the Gospel message, and had shared with true believers in the preaching and teaching of the word of God, *they had never been saved*. As a consequence, they could bear no good fruit.

These unregenerate individuals are the false prophets whom Jesus warned us about in Matthew 7:15-23, who come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians. They will acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and even claim to have prophesied, worked miracles and cast out demons in His name, but they will one day here from Him the words: “...*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.*” (Matthew 7:23, emphasis added).