

Contents

[1 Principles of Interpretation](#)

[2 Hebrews 6:4-6 \(Renewal Impossibility\)](#)

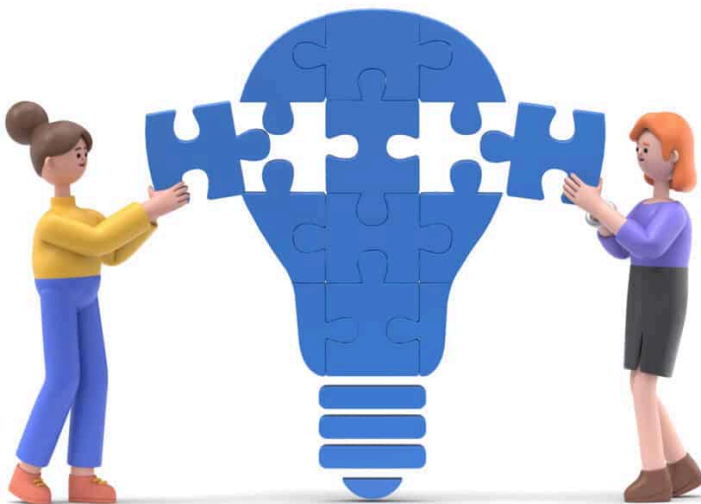
[3 Hebrews 10:26 \(The Willful Sin\)](#)

[4 Listen / Watch / Download](#)

Principles of Interpretation

Whenever we approach a biblical passage that apparently contradicts believers' eternal security of salvation, we can utilize several principles or tools to help us understand the correct and intended meaning of that text. First, we need to look at the historical and cultural context of the book to which the passage belongs and search for answers to questions like the following: Who is the author of the book? In what period was the book written? What is the theme of the book? To whom was it addressed? What issues of the day was the author trying to address? What was the author's tone and the atmosphere created by him? When doing this research, we might find important clues about the interpretation of our initial text. Second, we need to read the passage in its immediate context, meaning a few verses before it and a few verses after it, to see what the author was really talking about. Third, it is recommended to read the same passage in multiple translations of the Bible and in different languages, if it's possible, like English and Greek. Some languages are much richer in words and meanings than others. The Greek language is one of the most comprehensive and richest on earth. That is probably why God ordained things so that the New Testament was written during a period when Greek was prevalent. For instance, the Greek language has six different words for "love," three different words for "knowledge," and three different words for "wisdom." Moreover, the word "salvation" comes from the Greek word *soteria*, translated as restoration to a state of safety, soundness, health, and well-being as well as rescue, deliverance, and preservation from danger or destruction. However, as Christians, when we read the word "salvation" in the Bible in our native language, we think it refers only to salvation from hell and from the lake of fire. If we read these difficult passages in only one translation of the Bible and in only our native language, we can miss much of the text's initial intended meaning.

The fourth key to an authentic interpretation of complex texts on the security of salvation is to understand that salvation is a holistic and complete package, including salvation from hell, as well as physical health, material prosperity, and deliverance from sinful habits and addictions here on earth. Along the same lines, the fifth principle is that salvation includes our spirit, as well as our soul, and body. The salvation of the spirit is instant and eternal, while the salvation of the soul and body is progressive and happening here on earth. Sometimes, even as Christians, we might forfeit our lives here on earth earlier than God had planned and not reap the full benefits of the Gospel, primarily because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. We might even have periods of backsliding or apostasy. However, that does not mean we also forfeit our eternal salvation.



The sixth principle of interpretation is that salvation includes two parts: a minor part and a significant part. The secondary part has to do with atonement for our past sins, which grants us eternal entrance into the Kingdom and escape from hell, while the significant part has to do with the New Covenant of

blessings, holiness, peace, joy, health, and prosperity here on earth. The salvation Jesus Christ brought was not a salvation from hell primarily, but a salvation from sin and all the effects that entered the world with it. Salvation from hell is a by-product of salvation from sin. For example, let's look at the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. Their coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea is a symbol of our escape from sin and hell, of being born again and baptized in water. However, we all know that was not God's primary purpose—just to get them out of slavery, help them cross the Red Sea, and then let them live on their own in the desert. Deuteronomy 6:22-23 says God brought them OUT of Egypt to take them INTO the promised land of Canaan. Getting them out of Egypt was only a

secondary and necessary step for God to take them into the promised land. Many Christians think the promised land for us believers is heaven after physical death, but that is not so. Why? Because in heaven there will no longer be giants with whom to fight the fight of faith, like the giants the Israelites fought in Canaan. The giants of disease, poverty, curse, demonic influences, sinful habits, and addictions are here on earth, not in heaven. Canaan is the supernatural manifestation of the freedom of the New Covenant here on earth. Unfortunately, many believers think only of getting into heaven and escaping hell, and these are already granted to them anyway. They die in the “wilderness” without ever getting to live in the Canaan of the Gospel here on earth. We are called to heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, and raise the dead (Matthew 10:8). How many of these benefits of the Gospel happen regularly in Christian churches? They are almost nonexistent. However, we worry about hell! Why do so many believers still indulge in the world’s sinful pleasures? Because, like the people of Israel in the desert, if they haven’t tasted Canaan yet, they will always think back to Egypt’s “meat and garlic” when they were in bondage. Many Christians received Jesus just to have their sins blotted out. They crossed the Red Sea spiritually and then stopped there, waiting to die physically and go to heaven. And that’s why they tend to desire “Egypt” so much. Moreover, the people of Israel who died in the desert and never reached Canaan because of their unbelief were punished by God in different ways—primarily by physical death—but He never sent them back to Egypt.

The seventh and last principle that will help us interpret difficult passages is that “contending for the faith,” “continuing in faith,” “watching in faith,” or “doing good works” are all effects of genuine salvation and not conditions of maintaining salvation. Otherwise, salvation would not be by faith alone anymore, and we would have works to boast of before God.

Hebrews 6:4–6 (Renewal Impossibility)

Hebrews 6:1–9 (NKJV)

¹ Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let’s go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith

toward God,

² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

³ And this we will do if God permits.

⁴ For it's impossible for those *who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,*

⁵ *and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

⁶ *if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

⁷ For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it's cultivated, receives blessing from God;

⁸ but if it bears thorns and briers, it's rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

⁹ But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Many people have taught others (and some still teach today) that this passage clearly shows Christians can lose their salvation. And, in normal reading, it does seem this interpretation is correct. But, as is the case with many scriptures, we should be aware of the "heresy of the first glance." First, let's take a look at the historical context and the target audience of the Book of Hebrews. From a historical standpoint, the early church was generally made up of Jewish believers. Some of these people were genuinely born again and fully convinced of Christ and of the new way of salvation. However, others just got excited about Jesus Christ and, at the thought of Him being the expected Messiah, they gladly joined the church. But they had come out of centuries of their families being steeped in the Jewish traditions of going to the Temple to get their sins covered again and again on the holy day of atonement and offering other ongoing animal sacrifices. That sacrificial system had ceased for the most part after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. After the Temple was set on fire, Roman soldiers tore it down, stone by stone, to get melted gold that had run down through the

cracks. Probably, even after this time, there were still pockets of Jews performing animal sacrifices. However, without the Temple and the prescribed method for sacrifices, the days of animal sacrifices have ceased.

Before the destruction of the Temple, at the time the book of Hebrews was written, Jews had had a mindset of rules, laws, and repeated sacrifices, built into them over hundreds of years. Salvation by grace through faith in Christ was a radical shift from the Law of Moses, and because of that, many Jewish believers were having doubts about Christ and were struggling in their conviction of Him. They admired Jesus Christ, and they liked the new way, but they were not fully convinced in their hearts to give up on the Law of Moses and leave it entirely behind. For them, it was a little bit like moving from Greek Orthodoxy, Catholicism, or Islam (all based mainly on good works, worship of idols, and traditions) to simple faith in Jesus Christ. It was difficult for them to leave behind the works mentality. Besides the problematic mental shift due to hundreds of years of heritage founded on the Law, the Jews who wanted to fully dedicate themselves to Christ faced persecution and ridicule both from their Jewish community, as well as from their own relatives and family members. They were like the second type of ground from Mark 4:16-17, the stony ground concerning the Word of Christ about salvation. What do those verses say?

Mark 4:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the Word, immediately *receive it with gladness*;

¹⁷ and they *have no root in themselves*, and so endure *only for a time*. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the Word's sake, immediately they stumble.

As the passage shows, the same way many Jews received the Word with gladness. They perceived something, they got excited, but they had no root in themselves. They were not genuinely born again. When things began to get rough for the Word's sake, when things didn't flow as easily as they were supposed to flow, and when problems with people arose and persecutions, these Jews tended to fall back into the Law and into the system of animal

sacrifice. However, they were not falling away from a saved state into a reprobate state because they had not been entirely convinced about Christ in the first place.

There was probably not even a discussion about losing their salvation at that time like we have today or becoming a reprobate, since all Jews were the people of God, even when they were under Moses's leadership.

They wanted to serve God. When the people of Israel were in the wilderness on their journey to the promised land, after they crossed the Red Sea, God never threatened them with sending them back to Egypt, even when they sinned. Yes, they were punished for their sins, and many of them died in the desert and never made it to the promised land, but He didn't send anyone back to Egypt, which would mean losing our salvation for us Christians.

This is the target audience of the Book of Hebrews. The text of Hebrews is addressed primarily to these people I've just described, as shown by the first two verses of the book:

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past *to the fathers* by the prophets,

² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

The fathers mentioned here are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest of the fathers of the Jewish people. The book of Hebrews attempts to establish these people in their faith and explain to them the heart of the Gospel in a more profound way by contrasting it and comparing it with the Law of Moses. It compares the new things in Christ to the old. It shows how Jesus Christ is superior to everything else they knew until that point—superior to the fathers and the prophets of old (Chapter 1), superior to the angels (Chapter 2), superior to Moses (Chapter 3), superior to Joshua (Chapter 4), and superior to the Levitical priesthood (Chapter 5), in which the priests offered sacrifices day in and day out in the Temple. These Jewish believers found it difficult to believe Christ's sacrifice was enough and they didn't have to keep sacrificing animals. The word "again" is key throughout the whole book of Hebrews.

The people of whom Paul says, “those who were once enlightened” in Hebrews 6:4 were just tasters of salvation and not drinkers; they were exposed to its benefits, but they were not fully saved. They only “tasted of” or “sampled” Christ. They never truly converted to faith in Him. “Enlightened” doesn’t necessarily mean “regenerated” or “saved” because being enlightened about something doesn’t necessarily secure a commitment to action based on what you have been enlightened about. A good analogy would be the difference between marrying someone and going out on a few dates with that person. People can learn things about Christ and thereby admire Him, and they may enjoy being part of a fellowship but have no real, lasting commitment to Him. They might have been invited by someone to church, and they heard about Jesus and the Gospel, and they were enlightened, but never decided for Jesus. This is not the same thing as the repentance and the faith by which a person is joined to Christ and saved. In Matthew 27:34, we can see that, when Jesus was on the cross and became thirsty, He was given sour wine mingled with gall that He tasted only but didn’t drink.

Matthew 27:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But *when He had tasted it, He would not drink.*

So, you can taste something and then refuse to drink it.

Then we have the expression “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” which doesn’t necessarily mean the Holy Spirit has come to live in those people forever as He would in the case of believers. A few examples of partakers in the Holy Spirit who ended up badly are King Saul and Samson from the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit came on them for a while, and they did great things for God, but then they fell. Another excellent example of a partaker of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is Judas Iscariot, Jesus’s disciple, who cast out demons and healed the sick but later fell away and was lost. He had not even been saved yet, because Jesus had not died on the cross at that moment, and Judas died without manifesting any faith toward God like Peter did after he fell. Judas was just a partaker—a taster—not a drinker.

You might ask: “How is that possible? How can people be in the church for some time, do all kinds of activities, see the power of God, and still not be born again? I personally know someone devoted to the Lord who later on went away from Christ. Are you telling me that person was not born again?” Well, I don’t know. They might have been genuinely born again, in which case they will come back to Christ, or they were not born again at all. Only God and that person can know what was going on in their hearts. No one from the outside can know what the other person really believes. The Bible says in 1 John 2:19 the following:

1 John 2:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, *they would have continued with us*; but they went out that they might be made manifest, *that none of them were of us*.

According to this passage, some people can mingle with the body of Christ in an apparent authentic way, but not be from the body. This category of “tasters” canceled the power of the sacrifice of Christ for themselves by continuing to sacrifice animals repeatedly although they knew the truth. Their behavior showed that the work of the cross was ineffective. They were still waiting for a permanent sacrifice to come, so Jesus Christ would have to die again. In this way, they were sacrificing the Son of God again and put Him to open shame. But Paul comes along and says that if these people who tasted the grace of God and the benefits of the Gospel fall back to the Law as the basis for the forgiveness of their sins, then it’s impossible for them to repent and be renewed as long as they keep doing that. If they treat the sacrifice of Christ in this manner, then they remain unsaved because there is no other sacrifice for sins decreed by God as a satisfying payment for their sins.

God had declared the old system of animal sacrifice as being obsolete, that is, no longer valid and satisfactory, and Jesus’s eternal sacrifice had utterly replaced it.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate eternal sacrifice that removes every type of sin. Paul talks about rain and bringing forth fruits in Hebrews 6:7 and 8. These people have been rained on repeatedly with the good Word of God, with enlightenment, and have partaken of the power of the Holy Spirit. However, if they keep going in unbelief, they will yield thorns and thistles

(dead works) and end up being burned in eternal judgment. Notice in verses 4–6 that Paul uses the third-person pronoun—“those, them, they”—to talk about that category of people who are still on the sidelines, maybe even unknowingly, and not about those who are already in Christ, the beloved he addresses in Verse 9. He is convinced of better things accompanying salvation in their case.

Finally, even if this passage would have referred to genuine believers in Christ who fall away from faith and salvation (as we understand it), nobody can contend or prove empirically that it’s impossible for them to come back to repentance. As long as humans live on this earth, they have a chance for salvation and to come back to the Father, which would contradict this text. It’s quite interesting that some preachers use this passage to advocate for the possibility of Christians losing their salvation through sin, and after that, they make altar calls. Why would you call people for prayer and repentance? According to these verses, if they lost their salvation, they can never be renewed back to repentance. So, it doesn’t make any sense to call people to repent when they might have already lost their salvation.

Hebrews 10:26 (The Willful Sin)

Hebrews 10:11–29 (NKJV)

¹¹ And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

¹² But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

¹³ from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,”

¹⁷ then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

¹⁸ Now where there is remission of these, *there is no longer an offering for sin.*

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,

²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God,

²² Let's draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let's hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

²⁴ And let's consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

²⁶ For if *we sin willfully* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses's Law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the spirit of grace?

The most common interpretation of this text, which usually arises as an objection to the security of salvation, is that if genuine believers continue to sin willfully and if they repeatedly indulge in sin, they can lose their salvation. They can expect only the final judgment and punishment. However, this passage deals with the same issue discussed in Hebrews 6:1-9. The context here is the contrast between the repeated Old Testament sacrifices that never took away sins (see Verse 11) and the ONE sacrifice of Christ, for all

sins, of all time (see Verses 12 and 14). Verse 18 indicates that:

Since forgiveness has come only through Christ's sacrifice, there is no longer any other valid and acceptable offering for sin.

This last phrase is repeated in Verse 26, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins," which proves Paul is still in the same context when he speaks about sinning willfully.

In Verses 19–25, Paul tells the Jews what to do, considering the new way of atonement. Then in Verse 26, which begins with the word "FOR," the "knowledge of the truth" he is referring to is precisely what he had already told them: there is only one sacrifice for sin. This is the truth. "Sinning willfully" does not refer to intentional sinful deeds that would cause believers to lose their salvation and expect God's terrifying judgment. It is instead referring to the willful sin of unbelief in the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus. This is the one sin the Holy Spirit is now also trying to convince the world of, according to John 16: the sin of not believing in Jesus and rejecting the God-approved payment for sins. In other words, Paul says something like this: "My fellow Hebrew brothers, I keep telling you there are no more repeated sacrifices of animals for sins, but only one sacrifice of Jesus. This is the truth. But if you continue sinning willfully by not believing this truth and going back to the Law, there no longer remains a sacrifice for your sins, and you remain unsaved under God's wrath." Then, he continues in verses 28 and 29, saying that whenever somebody didn't obey the Law of Moses and put it aside, that person died without mercy. How much more severe will be the punishment of those who put aside the Law of Christ, trample underfoot the Son of God, and regard as unclean and common (gr. *Koinon* = common) the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and so insult the spirit of grace? That is the willful sin Paul is talking about here.

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[Session 3 - Renewal Impossibility and the Willful Sin \(Saved for Eternity\) - October 10th, 2023](#)

