

Sunday, July 21, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (19)

Questions about prayer (1)

As we bring our study of prayer to its conclusion, I want to address some miscellaneous subjects related to prayer. After answering some questions about prayer, we will conclude with a lesson about making our prayers more effective.

I. Does God hear the prayers of sinners?

- a. To answer this, we must first define what we mean by the word, "hear". That word can mean, to audibly perceive sounds and words, to be informed (I heard you are engaged), or to listen attentively to something, to listen and respond positively.
 - i. God hears everything 1 John 3:20, Psalm 147:5 notes that his understanding is infinite. Hebrews 4:13 – all things are naked and open to Him.
 - ii. BUT the Bible also tells us there are things He does not hear – Isaiah 59:1-2, namely the prayers and pleadings of sinners, esp. rebellious (cf. Isaiah 1:15). See also 1 Peter 3:12, *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*" (cf. Psalm 34:15-16). Proverbs 28:9, *One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.* 1 Peter 3:7 describes how the prayers of an uncaring husband may be hindered.
 - iii. Understanding these 2 points, we necessarily infer that while God knows everything that everyone is saying, but there are those whom He will not acknowledge.
- b. Prayer is a privilege of the saved –
 - i. This has been a point of emphasis in our study about prayer.
 1. It is the saved who can go to God as their Father – He IS their Father (1 John 3:1, cf. Matthew 6:9).
 2. Jesus is our High Priest and mediator (Hebrews 4:14-16, Ephesians 2:18 – through Him we have access)
 3. 1 Peter 3:12 – it is the prayers of the righteous that God hears.
 4. And numerous passages that emphasize it is believers who pray to God – Philippians 4:6, 1 John 5:14-15, 3:22 – we keep His commandments, James 5:16, etc.
 - ii. The prayer for forgiveness is limited to the saved (Acts 8:22, 1 John 1:9), and even then, it is for those "walking in the light" (cf. 1 John 1:5-7).
- c. But what about Cornelius? – Acts 10:1-3
 - i. That Cornelius was not yet saved is clear from the text.
 1. Acts 10:6 notes that he is instructed to send for Peter who "will tell you what you must do."
 2. Acts 11:14, as Peter recounts these events, said Cornelius was told to send for him and he would, *"tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved."*
 3. Furthermore, after Cornelius and his family were baptized by the Holy Spirit, Peter commanded them to be "baptized in the name of the Lord" (Ac. 10:47-48). This was water baptism according to the text and takes us back to Acts 2:38.

4. So clearly, Cornelius was not saved as he prayed to God (or BY praying to God).
- ii. But God heard his prayers.
 1. What we must understand is WHAT God heard as he prayed.
 2. God knew the heart of Cornelius – he WANTED to be right with God which is why he lived as he did including his prayers often.
 3. What was he praying for? We are not told that.
 4. But we are told in Acts 10:4, “*Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.*” The word *memorial* is a word that means to call something to remembrance. God noticed (he sees all and knows hearts).
 5. He knew what Cornelius was doing and therefore responded by providing THE WAY that he could learn what he needed to do to be saved.
 6. Cornelius is NO different from any other example of salvation in Acts – EVERY example involved being taught by a person and acting upon what they were taught.
 7. The prayers of Cornelius did NOT save him (regardless of what he was praying for).
 8. So yes, God heard his prayers, but NOT in the same way as He hears the prayers of His saints.
- d. What about Saul (Paul)?
 - i. Acts 9 records the conversion of Saul. Acts 9:11 says that Paul was praying when Ananias was sent to him. Did his prayers save Him? Was he already saved as he prayed?
 - ii. Some contend Paul was saved when the Lord confronted him on the road. BUT let us notice the context.
 - iii. He is on his way to Damascus when he is struck blind and confronted by the Lord Jesus. Realizing who He was and his condition he asks, “What do you want me to do?” (vs. 6). *Then the Lord said, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’* For 3 days he was without sight and fasted and prayed to God (9,11).
 - iv. The prophet Ananias is told to go to Saul. Expression concerns because of his reputation, the Lord instructs Ananias to go and he does. When Ananias arrives he instructs Paul, who receives his sight, “and he arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Later, in Acts 22:16, Paul is recounting his conversion in Jerusalem before a crowd. We read that Ananias told him, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*”
 - v. God heard the prayers of Paul, but they did NOT save him. Like every other example in Acts, he was told what to do by a man and followed the instructions. He heard the prayers of Saul but not in the same way as He hears the prayers of the saints.
 - e. John 9:31 – we must be careful how we use this text. It is sometimes used as a proof text that God does not hear the sinner of one who has never obeyed the gospel.
 - i. Again, consider the context AND background to see the intent of this text.
 - ii. Jesus has healed this man born blind on the Sabbath. This angered the leaders (because Jesus dared to act on the Sabbath). They called Jesus a sinner and wanted the formerly blind man to admit that. He refused and made the observation, “*Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.*” (Jn. 9:25) After further discussion, we come to our text in vs. 31. In context it reads, *The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we*

know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.

- iii. The blind man was talking about Jews who were rebellious against God. This is a well-established teaching in the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:15, 59:1,2; Psalm 18:41, Jeremiah 11:11, etc.). The Pharisees were not treating Jesus like a Gentile, but like an unfaithful Jew who had rejected the Law of Moses (as they perceived it).
- iv. The observation of this now healed man was more akin to a Christian who has rejected God and is living in sinful rebellion (2 Peter 2:20-22, Hebrews 10:25-31, etc.).
- v. But the point still stands, if one is living in sin and refuses to repent and obey God, his prayer will NOT be heard, whether it be a non-Christian asking for forgiveness (who is refusing to obey the gospel) or a Christian who refuses to repent of his sins.
- f. So in summary, while God hears and remembers the prayers of one who has not obeyed the gospel, that prayer does NOT save him. BUT, I am convinced God will providentially make the way of salvation available. But it is up to the one who needs salvation to respond and obey.

II. **What about the sinner's prayer?**

- a. Briefly, the sinner's prayer is what is often encouraged by advocates of "faith only". In articles and lessons dealing with our salvation they will "invite" you to be saved and say something like, "pray this prayer with me" and this offer some sort of prayer asking Jesus to come into your life and save you. At the conclusion of every sermon, Joel Osteen will say something like, "If you prayed that simple prayer, I believe you got born again." He then encourages you to study further and find a Bible believing church.
- b. The problem with this is the sinner's prayer is NOT found in the Bible.
- c. The problem with the "sinner's prayer" is that you are asking God to answer your prayers when you have not submitted to His will. You are asking Him to save you apart from the blood of Christ (When do we come in contact with His blood? Romans 6:3-4 in the waters of baptism. Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27-28, etc.)
- d. The previous point answers the problem with the sinner's prayer. Neither Saul (Paul) nor Cornelius were saved as they were praying to God.

III. **What Does it mean to call on the name of the Lord?**

- a. Another expression often tied to salvation (and the sinner's prayer) is the expression, "Calling on the name of the Lord."
- b. Earlier this year (January 7, 2024), I presented a lesson about this subject.
- c. The fact is, that expression – found in Acts 2:21 & Romans 10:13, BOTH point to a process that involves everything one needs to do to be saved. We are asking God to save us by submitting to His will. Scriptures teach one must upon hearing God's word, believe in Him (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, Mark 16:16, etc.), repent of his sins (Acts 2:38, 3:19, cf. Luke 13:3 & 5), confess Him as Lord and Christ (Romans 10:9-10, 1 Timothy 6:12-13) and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:11-12, etc.).
- d. Finally, consider Acts 22:16 that we have already noted. *Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* This text ties that expression to baptism. And this explains 1 Peter 3:20-21 – its not about getting wet, but "the answer of a good conscience..."

And thus we answer some questions related to prayer. We will address some more next week. But, now I encourage you to examine yourself. Does God hear your prayers? If not, let us help you change that.