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THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM...

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Does God Hear Sinners?

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The Gospel of John, Chapter 9, tells us of a blind man whose sight Jesus miraculously restored. Some folks who knew the man, and had witnessed his amazing healing, brought him to the Pharisees. An angry confrontation resulted, with the Pharisees insisting that since Jesus had sinned by healing on the Sabbath, He could not be truly “of God” – and hence there must be some other explanation for the miracle.

The Pharisees insisted that the man give all the praise to God, not this “sinner” Jesus, as they labeled Him, whereupon the once blind man stated, “*Now we know that **God does not hear sinners**; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him*” (NKJV).

Before Jesus healed this blind man, His disciples wanted to know where to lay the blame for his affliction: “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” (vs. 2). Jesus replied, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him*” (vs. 3).

At first glance, this statement – that neither the man nor his parents had sinned – seems to contradict Romans 3:23, “*For **all have sinned**, and come short of the glory of God.*”

However, it’s reasonable to assume that the Lord, in this instance, was not claiming that this man and his parents had *never* sinned – but rather, it was *not because of their sin* that the man had been afflicted. Yes, sometimes disease may come as a punishment for sin, but in this case we see that an individual’s affliction may be an *opportunity* for God to display His power and grace. Certainly not all afflictions are a result of one’s one sin, for we live in a fallen world: “*Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the*

likeness of the transgression of Adam” (Romans 5:14, NKJV).

But what about the healed man’s declaration that “*God does not hear sinners*”? Is this a blanket statement, true at all times and in all situations?

It’s critical to note that, although the statement is recorded in the Bible, it does not come from the lips of Jesus – the apostle John is merely quoting, without additional comment, the words of the healed man. But it appears that this man was theologically sound.



We read in the Psalms, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, **the Lord will not hear me**”* (Ps. 66:18), and in Isaiah, “*But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and **your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear**”* (Isa. 59:2).

God is holy and totally without sin; this is the very reason that Jesus had to shed His blood – that His righteousness might be imputed (reckoned, credited) to us and that *fellowship with God* could be restored.

When we accept the sacrificial death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is a “great exchange” – our sin and shame for His righteousness. God no longer views us as *sinners* (even though we fail and fall short; see 1 John 1:8-10) but as *the righteousness of God* (2 Cor. 5:21)! We then have the promise that “*The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and **his ears are open unto their cry**”* (Ps. 34:15).

In light of this, could we argue that God absolutely **never** hears the prayer of a “sinner” – or unconverted person? I would be hesitant to insist that God must ignore unbelievers. We know that He must hear the one who turns to Him in repentance, otherwise no one could be saved. But, beyond this basic truth – and since God causes His rain to fall on the *just* as well as the *unjust* – is it not possible that He can hear one’s prayers if that person is reaching out to Him in **faith**, even though he or she may not have made a complete commitment to Jesus at the time?



I am reminded of the woman with the issue of blood, who pressed through the crowd to touch Jesus. It seems unlikely that this woman had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Savior, since this truth was generally hidden – at this time – from the masses. Most of the people considered Him a *prophet* or *teacher* sent from God – and did not, as yet, have the revelation that He was *God in the flesh*.

In addition, since God knows the end from the beginning, it is not hard to believe that the Lord could move in response to prayers from one who *will in time become a Christian*. Again, I would not want to limit God in this aspect. Angels are even sent to minister to those who **shall be** the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14)!

For this reason, we must accept the probability that God can, and **will** at times, hear the prayers of sinners – “sinners” being a broad term to describe those who, in this case, have not yet come into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the woman in the example above, had faith in Jesus as a **healer** – and so did the Roman centurion (Matthew 8) who was *not a child of Israel*. They had no personal relationship with Him, and their understanding of Him was vastly incomplete.

We should keep in mind that the **context** of the healed man’s statement of John 9:31 is that if Jesus were a sinner, He could not have wrought this miracle. Still, although we should not try to “second guess” whom God might or might not hear, we know that confidence comes from being truly born again, and in maintaining fellowship with Him. *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him”* (1 John 5:14, 15). I would encourage all people to pray and reach out for the

Lord, but at the same time remind them that *His obedient children alone* can have total confidence that **His ears are open unto their cry** (Ps. 34:15). †

Be Prepared!

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Matthew 13:18-23: (NKJV)

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the **word of the kingdom**, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. *But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.* Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. *But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*



I don’t apply these powerful words of Jesus only to the “salvation” message. What is the “word of the kingdom?” It is any message that comes to us from Almighty God and His kingdom – the dominion established by our Lord Jesus which is growing continually in the hearts and minds of His children.

We should be receptive to every word of the Kingdom that comes to us – whether gently spoken to us by the Holy Spirit during prayer and Bible study, or from the lips of another believer.

Sadly, these precious words, like seeds, don’t always fall on good ground. Sometimes we hear a powerful message and are filled with joy, but due to shallowness we quickly lose the impact of that word. It is forgotten and never brings change to our lives. Other times we get caught up in the cares and activities of this world, and allow its “weeds and thorns” to choke out the life-giving, transforming word.

The word of the Kingdom can come to us at any time, even by way of a total stranger at the most unexpected time. We would be wise to prepare the “soil” of our hearts each day to receive this precious seed when a sower visits our particular field! †