

## Does God hear the prayers of sinners?

John 9:31

Many People in the church today believe this verse from John 9 teaches that non-Christians cannot pray or if they do, God will not hear them. Lets look a the entire context to begin our study.

" 13 ¶ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a **sinner** do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "**He is a prophet.**" 18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know **this man is a sinner.**" 25 He replied, "Whether he is a **sinner** or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 **We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.** 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out."

The use of the word **sinner** in verses 16, 24, and 25 establish its meaning in this context, i.e. the Pharisees were saying Jesus was a sinner because he performed this miracle on the Sabbath. In an effort to prove Jesus was a prophet the ex-blind man tried a little logic on his critics:

Major premise: God does not hear (listen to) sinners (meaning Jesus, a fellow Jew).

Minor premise: God heard (listen to) Jesus, proven by the miracle.

Conclusion: Therefore Jesus is not a sinner.

Although the goal of this paper is to prove the major premise is incorrect, making the syllogism faulty, I don't think that is the reason the Pharisees rejected the conclusion. The conclusion contradicted their personal conviction, therefore: "it had to be wrong!" So they threw the ex-blind man out of the meeting!

I think we can learn several things from this story?

- 1) Sometimes our hardships are God providence for a future benefit to us or others, John 9:1.
- 2) We should accept every good thing as a blessing from God, as the blind man did his sight, James 1:17.
- 3) Truth is never established by majority vote. The majority may sometimes have the truth, but truth is established by the evidence, not by how many people accept it. The majority in our story, the Pharisees, said Jesus was a sinner.
- 4) Religious leaders are not always right. The Pharisees, in this case, were wrong.

Many suggest another lesson can be learned from this story, i.e.

**"God does not hear the prayers of sinners today."**

Is this statement true?

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If taken literally it certainly is **not** true for two reasons: 1) Romans 3:23 says all have sinned, which would mean that God hears the prayers of **no one!** And 2) If literal then God does not hear (is not aware of) certain things some people say, but 1 John 3:20 says "...For God is greater than our hearts, and **He knows everything.**"

Since this comment cannot be taken literally, can/should we consider the possibility that this comment is simply the ex-blind man's opinion and not an inspired truth? Do we have other examples in the Bible of **uninspired** men saying things which are correctly and accurately recorded in the Bible, but not a true statement? Look at the following two verses in this very same context: verse 16 "Some of the Pharisees said 'this man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath'" (was this a true statement?) and again the Pharisees said the verse 24, speaking of Jesus "...we know this man is a sinner," which was also not a true statement. Why then is it so difficult to check out the possibility that the ex-blind man might also be stating his opinion, which might be the third case in our context of a statement being correctly recorded but simply not true.

Do we have any evidence the ex-blind man's statement is just his opinion and not truth? Let us read again the introduction to the story of Cornelius, Acts 10:1-4, and especially Cornelius' retelling in v. 30-31:

*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" 4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.*

*30 Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.'"*

The angel plainly said (v. 31) God had heard the prayer of Cornelius! Cornelius was a sinner in the general sense that all men are sinners, but also in the sense that he was not a Christian. Worse than that he was not even a Jew! Yet God heard his prayer. Therefore the statement of the ex-blind man in John 9:31 was just his opinion and **not** an inspired truth, just like the other two examples (verses 16 and 24) previously mentioned. It is sometimes overlooked that at the time the ex-blind man spoke there were **no** Christians. How then can we apply this saying today to the church and say non-Christians are not heard by God when they pray?? Also, at that time **no one's** sins were forgiven since Christ had not died yet. Therefore all were guilty of sin, implying God heard no one's prayers! We can certainly understand how the ex-blind man could, speaking his own opinion, make such a mistake. But for those who think this statement is "God's law," I ask "what did it mean when God guided him to say it?" And what reasonable or scriptural evidence can be offered to substantiate any suggested answer?

Some think about all spiritual blessings being **in** Christ and therefore no one outside of Christ (unbaptized) could receive any spiritual blessing such as answered prayer. Please check the pertinent scripture from five of the most popular versions, Ephesians 1:3:

ESV - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

ASV - ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ:

KJV - ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

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NKJV - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, -- (Note that the New KJV version changed the translation of the word "all" to the word "every," which agrees with the other versions)

NIV - ¶ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with **every** spiritual blessing in Christ.

This passage teaches "God blesses us with every spiritual blessings in Christ!" Or every spiritual blessing is available in Christ. Or in Christ every spiritual blessing is present. Does this mean there are no spiritual blessings available to those outside of Christ? Before you answer this question please consider these five facts:

- 1) The most famous passage in all the Bible is "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Is there any among us who would say this sacrifice is **NOT** a spiritual blessing? Yet it was for "the world," i.e. everybody in the world, even (especially) sinners who are spiritual outside of Christ.
- 2) The Gospel of Christ is to be preached to "all nations ..." (including [especially] non-Christians)! Is the Gospel a spiritual blessing? "Yes, but only to those who accept it!" Does this imply that we must be **in** Christ before we can receive the spiritual blessing of the forgiveness of our sins??
- 3) The written word of God is for every creature under heaven, even (especially) non-Christians! Yet it is a great spiritual blessing for all who read it!!
- 4) Cornelius. His prayer was heard, Acts 10:31, and answered, Acts 10:32-33. Please, **please** do NOT infer from this that God hears, in the sense of answering, every prayer of every sinners. For God never answers **ANY** prayer asking for something contrary to the teaching of His word, the Bible!! ... And last but not least:
- 5) Cornelius. He received the spiritual blessing of the **baptism of the Holy Spirit**, Acts 10:44-48, before they were baptised in water for the remission of their sins.

These facts prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Eph. 1:3 means every spiritual blessing is available in Christ but a few are also available to the non-Christian, therefore the ex-blind man's statement "**We know that God does not listen to sinners**" is but another accurately recorded statement from an uninspired man speaking his personal opinion which is not in harmony with the teaching of God!

I received the following pertinent comment for my son, thought you might also be interested.

"I had figured that God heard the prayers of everyone simply due to the Centurion (Cornelius). In addition, if God did not hear or take any action whatsoever as far a prayer from the unbaptized goes... What about people who are struggling with the truth, are not Christians, but studying to see if there is a God and what he might want them to do. A person like this might very well offer a prayer asking for God to help them sort out their mind and make the message clear. God sits off in the distance waiting for them to be Baptized before hearing any of their prayers?? This is just supposition as I can offer no scripture to substantiate this thought but it does seem odd to me that God would not hear the prayers of someone searching for the truth."

As always your comment are greatly appreciated. ....Cliff