**DOES GOD HEAR A SINNER’S PRAYER?**

In John 9:31, the Bible says, “Now we know that *God does not hear sinners;* but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” Many have latched onto this statement as though it was an *absolute*truth – i.e., that God will NEVER hear a sinner’s prayer. While I certainly believe what this text says, *I do NOT believe it is an absolute statement.* The reason I say this is because there were times in the Bible when God DID hear sinners! So, let’s take a deeper look into this matter…

**First, this question can be answered, “No,” or “Yes,” depending upon circumstances.** There are many examples of God refusing to hear sinners (Ps.34:15-16; 66:18; Pr.28:9; Jn.9:31; and 1Pt.3:12). In the context of such verses, the answer is clearly, “No, God does not hear sinners.” *However, I hasten to point out that if “God does not hear sinners,” period, then God hears no one!* I say this because, from one point of view, ALL are sinners (Rm.3:23; 1Jn.1:8). Further, while there are many examples of God refusing to hear sinners, *there are* ***also*** *many examples of God actually hearing sinners (Ac.8:22-23; 9:10-11; 10:4, 31; 1Jn.1:9).* So, it is simply wrong to say that “God NEVER hears sinners!”

**The next thing to consider is: What do we mean by the word, “hear”?** Indeed, there is a sense in which God “hears” everything! The Bible says, “For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether” (Ps.139:4). Further, the Hebrew writer said, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hb.4:13). These passages, and many others, prove that God hears, knows, and is aware of *everything* said and done by every person, whether saint or sinner! This is certainly one sense in which God hears a sinner’s prayer.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which God “will not hear” (i.e., He will refuse to respond to) a sinner’s prayer: “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, SO THAT HE WILL NOT HEAR.”(Is.59:1-2). Here is a clear case where God plainly says that He will not hear a sinner’s prayer. *But there’s more: These sinners were NOT “alien” sinners (Gentiles), but God’s own people (the Jews)!* Now, why would God not hear His own people? Let the writer answer: “For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity” (Is.59:3-4). Clearly, the reason God “will not hear” these people was because of their ***rebellion.*** They were murderers, liars, schemers, and evil doers! So, it is much closer to truth to say that God will not hear ***the rebel*** (whether saint or sinner).

**Here is yet another question: What do we mean by the word, “sinners”?** As previously noted, there is a sense in which we are ALL sinners (Rm.3:23; 1Jn.1:8). However, it is also true that there are different “kinds” of sinners. There are those who belong to God, and try to do right; yet they fall into sin from time to time (1Jn.1:7-9). It is clear from the Bible that God hears such people (v.9). On the other hand, there are those who reject the will of God. Some of them are alien sinners (Ep.2:11-12), and others are rebellious saints (Hb.6:4-6). *It should be clear by now that THESE are the ones whom God “will not hear”* (Is.59:1-4).

Putting all of these facts together, it should be clear that the issue of whether or not God will hear our prayers is not about “alien sinner” versus “child of God.” Instead, the issue revolves more around one’s ***attitude*** toward God. If one is a rebellious person, then God simply “will not hear” that one. And this is true whether they are an alien sinner, or a child of God! On the other hand, if one is sincerely seeking God, then God will likely hear their prayer.

To summarize this study: God will NOT hear the rebellious sinner – whether alien sinner (Pr.28:19; Ep.2:11-12), or erring Christian (Is.59:1-2; 1Jn.5:16). But God WILL hear all those who obey him (1Jn.3:22), as well as those who are honestly seeking Him (Ac.10:1-4, 31). **HOWEVER, NO ALIEN SINNER WILL BE SAVED BY HIS PRAYER!** Instead, we learn that God will bring the gospel to the alien who is honestly seeking Him (see Acts 10). Finally, all alien sinners must conform to God’s conditions of pardon for them (Mk.15:15-16); and all erring Christians must conform to God’s conditions of pardon for them (Ac.8:22). May we all strive to do exactly what God says (Mt.7:21)!

--Lanny Smith