

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## DOES GOD HEAR THE PRAYER OF SINNERS?

By Kyle Pope

### Introduction

Since I first began preaching, the question arises from time to time – “Does GOD hear the prayers of non-Christians?” To answer this from Scripture, two things have to be balanced.

### The Omniscience and Omnipresence of God

The Bible makes it clear that the God of Scripture is a God who knows all things that happen within His creation. He is a God who fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24). **“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good”** (Prov. 15:3). David acknowledged, **“There is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, you know it altogether”** (Psa. 139:4). God is the One who **“searches the hearts”** (Rom. 8:27). Jesus was said to know, **“what was in man”** (John 2:25). God has such knowledge of both the wicked and the righteous. David told Solomon, **“The LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you: but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever”** (1 Chron. 28:9). This leads to the second thing that must be balanced.

### Sin Changes God’s Response to Us

In 1 Chronicles, we notice, although God **“searches all hearts,”** those who **“forsake Him”** will be cast off by Him. Isaiah 59:1-2, makes this clear: **“Your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”** Sin affects the manner in which God responds to us. Peter wrote, **“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”** (1 Pet. 3:12). Does this mean that God loses some measure of omniscience? No. God still knows all things, but His response to this knowledge is what is being addressed when Scripture says, **“He will not hear.”**

The case of Cornelius illustrates this. Did God know what Cornelius was praying? Yes. He was told, **“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God”** (Acts 10:4). Does that mean that God accepted Cornelius as he was? No—he needed to obey the gospel, and Peter still needed to teach him the truth. Because God knew the content of Cornelius’ prayers as He would the prayers of those in fellowship with Him? Absolutely not! Jesus taught, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you”** (Jn. 15:7). Cornelius was not yet abiding in Jesus’ words, so he could not make requests of God in the assurance that God would hear him. This privilege is reserved for those in Christ for whom He stands as an intercessor (Hebrews 7:25).

The only assurance we have that God will favorably respond to our prayers rests in having the proper relationship to Him.

### The Proper Balance

So let’s balance these concepts with one another. If we say, **“God hears the prayers of non-Christians”** we are failing to acknowledge the effect that sin has on God’s willingness to accept prayers directed to Him. This is one of the biggest problems with the false concept of praying the “Sinner’s Prayer.” According to Scripture, prayer is not what can change our condition so that God will accept our prayers; rather, it is through baptism that one comes into Christ (Rom. 6:3).

On the other hand, we must also take great care that, when we say, “God does not hear the prayers of sinners,” we do not give the impression that we are saying that God can’t hear what is said, for that would diminish His omniscience. Nor is it that God doesn’t want to hear the prayers of those outside of a saved relationship with Him, for that could give the impression that He is uncaring, insensitive, and calloused to man’s needs. This is part of Isaiah’s point, when He says, “**The LORD hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear**” (Isa. 59:1). It’s not that God is incapable of hearing or is disinterested. He wants us to come to Him, but we must do it on His terms. Anything less is an offense to Him. The wise man said, “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). – *Truth Magazine*, April 2019. ■

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## WHY IS REPENTANCE SO HARD?

By Kyle Campbell

The command to repent is one of the hardest, if not the hardest, to persuade people to obey. Not only do non-members have a very real problem with this, but many members of the church do as well. Why is repentance so hard? There are at least four concepts that repentance involves that make it difficult.

**Repentance involves a recognition of God.** It involves recognizing what God requires (Lk. 13:3; 24:47). God is the one who requires us to repent. Since He does so, the command is not an option. It involves a consideration of God’s “*goodness*” and “*longsuffering*” (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). God could easily bring judgment on us at any time, but He is gracious and gives us time to repent. How sad it is to see people misusing their opportunities.

**Repentance involves godly sorrow.** Godly sorrow is not repentance, but it leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). “*Godly sorrow*” is not sorrow because one has been caught in his sin. It is not sorrow for what sin has done to him. For example, a young man told of his experiences in trying to help his uncle who was an alcoholic. When he and others visited and encouraged him to repent, his uncle would shed many tears, but he would never change. That is not true repentance.

**Repentance involves a change of mind coupled with a change of action for good.** In Matthew 21:28-32, one of the sons “*repented and went.*” In Matthew 3:7-10, John the Baptist severely rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for not producing the fruits which demonstrate repentance. The phrase “*worthy for repentance*” really means, “answerable to amendment of life.” King Manasseh humbled himself and repented, tearing down the altars and idols he made for the people to worship (2 Chron. 33:10-13). Don’t be like Judas who changed his mind, but didn’t follow with good action (Matt. 27:3-5). One might say he has repented, but if he continues in his evil ways, he hasn’t repented at all.

**Repentance involves God’s blessings.** In the parables of Luke 15, the lost sheep, coin, and son all teach the same lesson. There is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10). Sins are blotted out and refreshing comes from the Lord when one repents (Acts 3:19; cp. Isa. 55:6-7; Ezek. 18:30-31). Why does this make repentance difficult? Because blessings also imply judgment (Acts 17:30-31). I believe everyone wants to be blessed, but we’ve got to remember that we’ll be judged too. An eternal condemnation is in play every day of life and in every decision you make.

Are you ready to humbly repent of your sins and no longer commit them? We may indeed come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), but only if we are ready to turn from sin. Are you ready to make a change? If so, please contact us. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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