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God Hears Not Sinners

By Harold Turner

In John 9:31 the Bible states, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." This statement makes a very clear point as to whose prayers God responds. It is clear that as long as one is classified as a sinner, his prayers will not be heard. The Greek word "akouo", which is translated as "heareth" in John 9:31, denotes more than just recognizing a sound, but rather signifies that God answers the prayers. The meaning of John 9:31 is, "Now we know that God answereth not sinners..." This is clearly illustrated in Isaiah 59:1-2 where the prophet said, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." This indicates that sin is a barrier through which man cannot pray, and stands to prevent God from answering the prayer.

Prayer is a blessing to those who are doing God's will. It is not a blessing to the lost, but to the saved. Jesus shows this in John 15:7, saying, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." This statement actually lists three things required before God will answer our prayers. (1) We must be in Christ, (2) we must abide in Him, and (3) His words must abide in us. Therefore, those who are not "in Christ" do not have the assurance that God will answer their prayers. Those outside Christ are classified as sinners.

But aren't there other Scriptures that teach the sinner to pray to God for forgiveness? What about 1 John 1:9 which states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Does this teach the alien sinner, the person who has never become a Christian, that God will forgive his prayers if he will confess them? Who is the antecedent of "we", "our", and "us", in 1 John 1:9? The context clearly shows them to refer to those in fellowship with the Father, those who are walking in the light, and who have continual access to the blood of Christ,

which cleanses them from all sin. It does not refer to the alien sinner, and to apply it in this way is to deal dishonestly with the Scriptures. There is no forgiveness to those walking in darkness. This blessing is extended to those in the light.

Does Acts 2:21 teach the alien sinner is forgiven through prayer? It states, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." To understand this passage, we again need to look at the context. We might first need to know just what salvation the statement refers to. Surely we recognize that the word "salvation" does not always refer to forgiveness of sins. The preceding verse would show that such is true here. It speaks of a time when "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come." It is in view of this time that salvation is promised to those who call on the name of the Lord. The salvation of this text is eternal salvation, and not the forgiveness of sins. Does this mean, then, that God promises eternal salvation to all who pray? In Matt. 7:21 Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto mee, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And Heb. 5:9 states that Jesus is "The author of eternal salvation unto all who obey him." These two passages clearly show that eternal salvation is promised only to those who obediently do the will of God. When Jesus returns every tongue will confess him, but it will be too late for salvation to the disobedient.

Acts 2:21 is stated in the early part of Peter's sermon. After he proved Jesus to be the Son of God, the Lord and Christ, the people asked, "What shall we do?" In verse 38 Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Did he contradict what he had just told them in verse 21? Or, did he possibly forget what he had told them in verse 21? Let's not forget that he is being guided "As the Spirit gave him utterance." Acts 2:21 is speaking of eternal salvation at the coming of the Lord, while verse 38 is speaking of the remission, or forgiveness,

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Born Again Christians

By Ernest Loomis

In recent years the expression "Born again Christian" has been heard on most every corner and from most every religious denomination. President Carter claims to be a "born again" Christian, and also some of the "Watergate" figures make this claim. In fact, the title of a movie being shown nation wide describing the "conversion" (?) of one of the Watergate figures is BORN AGAIN.

It seems that in the mind of some it is no longer enough to be just a plain Christian; unless one is a "born again" Christian he is only second rate! Apparently what most people mean by "born again" is having been baptized in the Holy Ghost, or at least having received some special measure of grace or power not given the average Christian. This belief was once confined primarily to Pentecostalism but in recent years it has spread across denominational lines and now can be found in most religious groups, including Catholics, Protestants, and even the church of our Lord.

We do not question the sincerity of anyone who claims to be "born again." We do, however, question sincerity as a standard to measure or determine truth or error. Paul lived in all good conscience before God while persecuting Christians (Acts 23:1), but even though he was sincere he was in error. The only standard of authority we have on this, or any other spiritual subject, is the Bible. So the question is not how sincere one may be, but what does the Bible say about it?

In John 3:3 Jesus states that "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus is simply showing that there is no Christian other than a "born again" Christian. If one is a Christian, he is born again, and if he is not born again he is not a Christian, it is just that simple. It is not Christ, but man, who makes the distinction between a "born again" Christian and just a plain Christian. To speak of a "born again" Christian is like speaking of an "unbelieving" infidel. Surely no one

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I Prevented The Dawning

By Harold Turner

All of us would like for life to be completely free from problems. Yet Job 14:1 reminds us of the unpleasant fact—"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." This would indicate that God did not design life here on earth to be free from problems.

Though problems are unpleasant disturbances in our life, they may also be considered as challenges through which strength of character may be developed. James indicated this when he wrote, "By brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4.) Problems can become a stepping stone to prepare us for a more complete life.

The reality of problems is a fact of life that all must face. But the reality of problems is not as significant as is the attitude we form toward them. Our attitudes will help us to rise above the problems, or to be crushed by them. We may permit a problem to gain complete control of our life and rob us of joy and happiness that otherwise might be found. David once permitted this to happen in his life. He said, "I prevented the dawning of the morning." (Psalm 119:147.) The context from which this statement is taken indicates that problems had become so pressing in his life that his mind had become obsessed by them. Actually David had surrendered himself to these problems. At another time in his life he wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30:5.) Here he was able to defeat his problems, but there were times when he had prevented the dawning of a brighter day. There were times when he had wrestled with his problems all night and was unable to defeat them. But David blamed only himself for this, he said, "I prevented the dawning. His attitude permitted the problems to crush him, to control his mind and life.

There are numerous problems in life that are difficult to overcome. And sometimes it may seem easier to surrender to them rather than to fight to overcome. But in either case, our attitude is a strong determining factor as to who will win the victory.

One of the greatest enemies we face that causes us to prevent the dawning of joy in the morning is worry. Worry is not just a sincere concern about some serious matter, but a negative, doubtful, mistrusting attitude. Worry is anticipating some possible problem, and then letting the mind imagine the worst about it. The mind is often so obsessed by this

imagined problem that it affects our whole being in a harmful way. The mind becomes so centered on this problem that we can't sleep or rest, and it takes away our desire for food. Worry is considered as one of the basic causes for high blood pressure, heart trouble, and ulcers. It has been estimated that worry causes more diseases than all germs combined. And in addition to the physical diseases, worry can cause needless mental agonies, which rob us of happiness. But even more serious than all the mental and physical diseases that worry may cause, is its effect upon our spiritual relationship with God. Worry is wrong. The Bible teaches us not to worry at all (Matt. 6:31-34, Phil. 4:6), but rather to place our faith and trust in God. When we permit worry to gain the control of our mind, we are preventing the dawning of joy in the morning.

Another enemy that causes us to prevent the dawning of the morning is hate. Someone has said that hate and hell abide in the same heart. There is simply no way to get comfort and delight out of a life controlled by hate. When we have hatred in our heart toward another person, the very mention of his name shatters all our peace of mind, and snatches from us any happiness we might have. Hatred, like worry, is not only destructive to the mind, but to the body as well. It is also one of the basic causes for physical diseases. A person with a heart problem is at the mercy of the person who arouses anger within him. Men have been known to have fallen dead with a heart attack because they were aroused to a high degree of anger. Hatred is a thief of life. But the most serious affect of hate is its effect upon our relationship with God. Hate is wrong and sinful. God commands us, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:31-32.) Our attitudes can be changed. We do not have to surrender to resentment. Jesus taught that we must learn to love even our enemies, and do good unto them.

The Bible teaches us several things that can help us to overcome our problems. In Phil. 4:6-7 we are admonished to "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and

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Born Again Christians (cont.)

would argue that there are unbelieving infidels and just plain infidels. If one is an infidel he is an unbeliever, and if one is a Christian he is born again.

In John 3:5 Jesus stated, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Then in verse 7, he said, "Ye must be born again."

In every birth there must be a begetting, or planting, of seed from which the new life comes, and there must be a coming forth into the new life from that germinated seed. This is easily seen in the plant, animal, and human kingdoms, and is equally true in the spiritual kingdom. Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11.) James said, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." (James 1:18.) And the apostle Peter wrote, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1:23.) When one hears and believes the word, and repents of his sins, the seed has been planted and germinated, and is now ready to come forth into a new life. The person is ready to be born of water (baptized). In Romans 6:4 Paul shows that we are buried in baptism and then raised to walk in a new life. We come forth from the water a new creature.

Jesus explained the new birth in Mark 16:16, saying, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." There is no deep mystery or miracle in the new birth, but just simple obedience to Christ's plan of salvation. Everyone who has heard and obeyed the gospel of Christ is a "born again" Christian, and the one who has not obeyed the gospel is not a Christian.

We must not believe every thing we hear, but rather go to the Book, for it does make a difference what we believe and do.

Is Ambition A Sin Or A Virtue?

By Clovis Ragsdale

Today we live in the greatest economic society to be found in all history. No nation has ever been able to provide the basic necessities and luxuries for so many of its citizens as our nation is doing. Its no wonder that the rest of the world thinks that all Americans are rich, and by their standards of living, this is understandable. However, our economic success did not come about by accident. Hard work and good management, frugal living, and the abundant resources of the land have made possible this success. Most any person can enjoy the abundance of our nations resources if he is ambitious. Ambition is the key to most success. Webster defines this word to mean a strong desire to succeed, or to gain fame, power, or wealth.

The word ambition is not found in the Bible. However, other words such as: diligence, striving, and labouring, are used to mean the same thing.

When Adam was placed in the garden he was instructed to care for it. He was given a job and a goal for which to strive. Many of the proverbs extol the virtues of diligence, ambition, and labor. The proverbs condemn the sluggard, the lazy, and the waster. For example, in Prov. 10:4 we are told, "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." And in Prov. 13:4, "The soul of the sluggard craves, and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied."

In the New Testament similar teachings are found. In Eph. 4:28 Paul said, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." This is ambition with a God given purpose. Also in 2 Thess. 3:10 Paul wrote, "If any will not work, let him not eat." And in Rom. 12:11, Paul instructed the Christians at Rome not to be slothful in business.

There are, however, many Scriptures that teach ambition to be restricted to certain limitations. The danger is that one may become over ambitious, and when such happens it leads to coveteousness. Solomon said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me." (Prov. 30:8.) And throughout the book of Ecclesiastes he teaches the danger of being overly ambitious. Jesus stated many things concerning the dangers of riches. In Matt. 19:23 he said, that very few who were rich would enter into the kingdom of God.

In the times of Christ, and in fact, in all times of the past, there were but two classes of people; the few who were rich, and the many who were very poor. The

middle class American of our present time is an economic oddity in the history of man. The class itself is divided into three segments, the lower, middle, and the higher class. To be a part of the great American middle class requires considerable ambition. It is sometimes referred to as the "rat race of American life."

The Christian of today is faced with a difficult problem. He has the responsibility that Paul stated in 1 Tim. 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." He also has the responsibility to meet the ever increasing monetary needs of the church, which require the Christian wage earner to be more ambitious than Christians in the earlier days of the church when the living standards were quite simple and when the church confined its expenses to that of helping the poor and supporting those who preached the gospel. Today in addition to supporting those who preach, we have the cost of maintaining comfortable buildings, as well as supporting mission programs and various benevolent works.

We have to face the fact that considerable ambition is required in our time. And the danger is ever present to become over ambitious. Ambition is like a deadly poison. Some of the best medicines are poison when taken in large quantities, but when taken in small amounts they can save life. Ambition unchecked is sinful, but when ambition is under the control of moderation it makes possible the advancement of Christianity, and is a virtue.

"A lot of people are honest as long as the day is long; but when it gets dark—look out!"

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Going 'Round In Circles

By Ordell Heavin

Have you ever noticed how that life never seems to run in a straight line? Haven't you often found yourself just going around in circles? Most of us know the feeling, and know that it increases as time goes by. Some times when a person gets lost he has the tendency to just walk in circles. Life is often this way.

There are destructive circles in life of enmity, vengeance, and retaliation, and there are circles of love, appreciation, and kindness. We chose the circle in which we desire to live. Someone once wrote this idea:

He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel a thing to flout,
But love, and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle and took him in.

Life in many ways is very much like a spinning circle. As the wheel of life begins to turn the young are at the center, and the wheel seems to turn slowly. But time does not stand still, and we begin to grow and slip toward the outer edge. The older we get the closer to the edge we slip. As the days go by the wheel seems to spin faster, and too soon the years go by and we slip off the edge into eternity.

As we go through life we make the choices that determine the circles we spin. For example, a young man sees a drunk lying in the gutter, and vows he will never take a drink. But one day he takes his first drink socially, and tells himself it won't get the best of him. He is unaware of the fact that there are some seven million problem drinkers today who once probably thought the same thing. The first drink may be the one which determines one's life pattern. There are millions to support this truth. Too, there is the young lady who prepares for college, but, who is very much unprepared for the worldness she finds in this new life. She has been taught and warned of the pitfalls of life, and she has held to the old standards of morality, but she is not prepared for the professor, who in a very subtle way denounces God and condones immorality in its rankest form. Neither is she prepared for the ungodly behavior of her classmates outside the classroom. Each day she is subjected to the powerful weapon of ridicule. Then one day she weakens and loses her place with the righteous.

It takes fortitude to stand under the enemy's fire. Once there was a man who was a faithful co-worker with Paul, but he became so entangled with the things of this world that he lost sight of his spiritual life. Paul wrote the sad news of his departure to Timothy, saying, "Demas

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God Hears Not Sinners (cont.)

of past sins. It refers to salvation in becoming a Christian.

It is only assumed that the expression "Calling on the name of the Lord" means prayer. The word "calling" in this statement is from the Greek word "epikaleo". This is the same word used by Paul in Acts 25:11, 12 where he said, "I appeal (epikaleo) unto Ceasar." Paul was using his rights as a Roman to call upon Ceasar for judgment, rather than being brought before the Jews. As a Roman he had this right. We call upon the authority of Christ for our salvation by being a doer of his will. Salvation is promised to those who obey, not to those who pray.

What about the man in Luke 18:13-14? This man confessed, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And Jesus said that he left the temple justified. Wasn't he forgiven through prayer? Let's not miss the fact that this publican was a Jew, and living under the period of the Old Testament before the New was given. He is not to be compared to an alien sinner because he was a part of God's people under the law of Moses. Both in the Old and New Testaments God required repentance and prayer as a means to being forgiven. But in neither, are these requirements given to becoming a child of God. Under the Old Testament before a Gentile could come under that covenant he had certain requirements to meet, one of which was the circumcision of every male member who desired to be a part of these people. He was not prayed "from a Gentile to a Jew", and the alien sinner is not prayed from a sinner to a Christian. In every example of conversion in the New Testament, not one person was instructed to pray to become a Christian, rather in every case they were told to do as Jesus instructed in Mark 16:15-16. Upon hearing the gospel, Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. . ." In Acts 2:38 baptism was preached to be "For the remission of sins." In Acts 22:16 baptism was required to "Wash away sins." In Rom. 6:3, and Gal. 3:27 Paul stated that baptism puts one into Christ. And in 1 Peter 3:21, Peter said that "Baptism doth also now save us . . ." Upon being baptized into Christ we become a child of God, and can then truly call upon him as our Father. But He is not the father of those outside Christ.

The conversion of Saul is a good example which shows that one is not saved through prayer. In Damascus Saul prayed and fasted for three days (Acts 9:9-11). Jesus had told him to go into the city, and it would be told him what to do. But Saul was not saved after three days of fasting and prayer. After three days, Jesus sent Ananias to instruct him what to do. Ananias said to Saul, "And

Confusion Or Unity?

By Lavern Stewart

Would it be reasonable to think that the Bible teaches one thing in one place and the reverse of that in another place? For example, would the Holy Spirit cause one writer of the New Testament to teach that baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21), and inspire another writer to say that baptism does not save, but rather that one is saved by "faith only"? Would God inspire one writer to warn men about falling from grace and inspire another to say that one cannot fall from grace? This would be confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

Some people think that all the denominations are right with God even though they are teaching conflicting doctrines. Did Jesus say that anything that is taught in the name of religion is all right? In Matt. 15:13-14 he said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch." And in John 17:20-21 Jesus prayed that all who believe in him be one. But someone says, "Oh, we are all one; we are all trying to go to the same place." But this isn't what Christ said. He said that all believers be one as "Thou, Father art in me, and I in Thee." Do God and Christ say opposite things about what it takes to save men? Do they contradict each other about matters of faith? They do not, and neither must men disagree on what the Bible teaches. This unity of faith can be had only when all religious people resolve to take the Bible; and the Bible only for their guide. The Holy Scriptures furnish men completely, 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." After three days of prayer, Saul still had his sins. If one were saved through prayer, why wasn't Saul saved in this manner? Jesus has not required prayer as a condition to becoming a Christian. Prayer is a blessing extended to God's children. Peter stated, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Peter 3:12.)

Jesus has made it possible for us to have a Father who will hear and respond to our prayers. He is our Intercessor, our Advocate, and our Mediator. And he has promised, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7.) Those outside Christ do not have this privilege, for "God heareth not sinners."

I Prevented The Dawning (cont.)

minds through Christ Jesus." Following this instruction will help us to solve many of the disturbances in our life. In 1 Cor. 4:5 we are told to "Judge nothing before the time. . ." Rather than anticipate all sorts of things about some matter, we should judge only from the facts. This principle will help us to overcome worry, hate and many other such things that disturb our minds. In Rom. 8:28 Paul states a principle that we should learn to believe and trust—"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The Bible provides us answers to all our problems. It is not God's desire that we spend our life in gloom. We must learn to prayerfully and intelligently evaluate our problems, and look to God through prayer and the study of His word for the solution. We can overcome, for God is on our side.

Going Round in Circles (cont.)

has forsaken me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. 4:10.) We must use great care about the choices we make in this life.

We enter this world, we struggle, we hope, and we die. Our children repeat the same cycle, and their children after them. However, the cycle doesn't end at death, for death is the door that leads to either eternal rest or eternal damnation. If we choose to live in the circle of greed, lust, envy, retaliation, hate, etc. we are rapidly spinning toward eternal destruction, but if we will choose to live in the circle of God's love we are spinning toward eternal life.

We cannot stop the spinning, but we can choose the circle of life in which to spin. Through repentance and obedience we can step from the circle of death into the circle of life. I urge you to get off the devils "merry-go-round" and come into the circle of God's love. Live faithful to him in this life, and you can then live eternally with the one who gave himself that you might have this blessed privilege.

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