

Sin and Prayer

—How does sin affect prayer?

If we live a life of sin, how does that affect our prayers? Does God listen to the prayers of people who won't try to stop their disobedience, believing that their sins don't hinder their prayers?

1 Sin Hinders Prayer

God answers prayer "because we do the things that are pleasing in his sight" (1John 3:22). God does not expect sinless perfection by our own strength alone. However he does expect us to "abhor evil and cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9).

As Paul wrote to Timothy, "But you O man of God, flee these evil things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (1Timothy 6:11). If we refuse to meet this condition, then God refuses to hear our prayers.

Examples

- As one man said with reference to Jesus, "We know that God does not hear the prayers of sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God hears him" (John 9:31).
- If a man is ungracious towards his wife, how can he expect his prayers to be well received in heaven when he asks God to be gracious toward him? "Husbands dwell with your wives in an understanding way, as to the weaker vessel. Act as heirs together of the grace of life lest your prayers be hindered." (1Peter 3:7)
- If someone refuses, when genuinely asked to forgive, how can that person expect to receive forgiveness when asking God? As Jesus said, "If you do not forgive people their trespasses, then neither will your heavenly Father forgive you" (Matthew 6:14-15).

2 Prayer Allows No Falsehood

David understood the blessing of seeking forgiveness through prayer. However he also understood the need to be godly and honest and genuine before God.

Psalm 32

¶¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2Blessed is the one against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as it were by summer's heat . Selah

⁵I told my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD', and you forgave my sin in all its iniquity. Selah

⁶Therefore let all who are godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found..." (Psalm 32:1-6).

Do not think prayer provides a licence to sin. There is no loophole in prayer. Only a fool wilfully enters into sin intending afterward to pray for forgiveness —thinking that prayer makes sin of no consequence.

As Paul wrote, "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever you sow, that's what you'll reap. The one who sows to the flesh will reap corruption from the flesh. The one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit." (Galatians 6:7-8).

3 *Prayer Conquers Sin*

As we saw in the case of David, prayer under the right conditions is able to bring forgiveness and empowerment so that sin is not tolerated but rather it is conquered.

Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24) had fallen from grace. Peter said to him, "Your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:21-22).

If Simon genuinely repented, and asked forgiveness with a true change of heart, he would be forgiven, his sin conquered. He would be given this blessing: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and keep your whole spirit and soul and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Thessalonians 5:23).

With mercy and forgiveness, God offers us help in our temptations, and for this too we should earnestly pray and "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to cope; but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1Corinthians 10:12-13).

So we see that prayer is not an instrument for permitting sin, but for banishing it from our lives. Come to God for mercy. Don't try to hide your sin from him, nor seek his permission to go on sinning. Rather genuinely ask him to take away your sin and help you more than conquer it, through our Lord Jesus.