

God is Always Listening DJ Curry

In Acts chapter 10, we have Cornelius, a centurion. The Scripture calls him "(A) devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2 NKJV). The Scripture compliments Cornelius well but does not name him as being saved or as being a disciple of Christ. (*That is to come at the end of this chapter.*) In Cornelius' description the Bible says that he prayed to God always. What would be of these prayers to God coming from a lost soul? An angel will shortly appear to Cornelius and say the following, "... Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). Here in Acts chapter 10, we have an example of a man who is not in a saved condition, but his prayers are heard. His acts of charity are observed and accepted by God. Yet, he still was not saved. He needed the gospel spoken to him, so Peter was sent so Cornelius could hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. This fact that God heard Cornelius' prayers further proves there is no such thing as a sinner's prayer for salvation. However, we have heard of some teaching that God cannot hear the prayers of the lost. If we claim God cannot hear the prayers of the lost, then we have limited His all-knowing ability or omniscience. "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" (Heb 4:13).

The most common Scripture I have witnessed people claim God cannot hear the prayer of the lost comes from John 9:31. "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31). In this Scripture's context Jesus had just recently healed a blind man. Now, the blind man is being questioned by the Jews, and the blind man gives this statement. The one speaking here, the blind man, is not inspired and is capable of saying something incorrect like this, or the blind man could have meant that God does not heed sinners.

We know God can hear the prayers of the lost, such as Cornelius, and the best way to understand God's ear to prayer is that He can hear but will not always listen or heed. "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" (Isa 59:1-2).

We can see the error in taking the position of God not hearing the lost in the conversion of the apostle Paul. In Acts 9:9, 11, we can read that Paul had been praying for three days, and Jesus heard him. If we take the position that God can only hear the saved, then we must also say Paul was saved at this point before Paul's baptism, just as those who deny the essential act of baptism for the remission of sins. The correct way to put it is that God does not heed the prayers of a sinner. He can certainly hear the message but, due to their unrighteousness, will not give an audience to the message. "Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them" (Ezek 8:18).