

The Power of Prayer (Cont. from pg. 2) Frankly, I don't know how to explain the results of the study described above. *Are there circumstances in which God with heed the prayers of unbelievers?* Certainly Cornelius was one example of this (Acts 10:4) although this account seems (primarily) to be a sign that the Gentiles were given access to the gospel. *Is Satan ever allowed to work miraculously in his efforts to deceive man?* Although there is some sense in which Satan's power was restricted by Christ's death (Revelation 20:1-3, Hebrews 2:14, Luke 10:18, John 16:11) the Bible also promises some time in which Satan would be allowed to deceive with **"all power, signs and lying wonders"** (II Thessalonians 2:9).

What we can know for sure is simply what the Bible teaches—**"...The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man**



avails much" (James 5:16); **"...If we know that He hears us, whatever we ask we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him"** (I John 5:15). In Christ there is great comfort in the knowledge that the Creator hears and answers our prayers. Outside of Christ there is no such comfort.

By Kyle Pope

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The Power of Prayer

Several years ago I heard about a study that was done to scientifically test the "power of prayer." Researchers took a large group of hospital patients and divided them into two groups. Without their knowledge by a collection of people representing all types of belief. There were people who were religious, agnostic and even atheistic. The other group of patients (also without their knowledge) was not prayed for. Amazingly the group that was prayed for recovered dramatically while the group that was not, showed little improvement. To test the results even further the researchers did the same test on laboratory specimens of bacteria. Just as happened with the human patients researchers found that the bacteria that was prayed for grew well while the bacteria that was not grew little. In the study it was also found that the most effective prayers were what might be called "open ended" prayers. That is to say prayers that appealed—"may whatever is best work out." The conclusion drawn by the researchers was that they had discovered scientific evidence that "prayer works." (Cont. on pg. 2)

The Power of Prayer (Cont. from pg. 1)

While as a Christian I found this somewhat interesting it also brought to my mind a number of questions that a person must consider about the (so called) “power of prayer.”

I. “Whom does God hear?” While the Bible makes it clear that God by nature “fills” heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24) it is also clear from Scripture that man’s sin and unbelief effects God’s willingness to receive our prayers. Isaiah 59:1, 2 teaches us that when sin separates us from God **“He will not hear”** man’s appeals to Him. II Peter 3:12 declares—**“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.”** This exposes the falsehood of imagining that an unbeliever could simply pray to God for salvation because God refuses to hear such prayers.

II. “Who is man’s ‘Advocate’?”

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ serves as man’s **“Advocate”** (I John 2:1), that is He is the **“go between”** communicating man’s requests to God. Hebrews 7:25 says of Jesus that **“...He is able to save**

to the uttermost those who come to God THROUGH Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Emphasis Mine). What does that tell us about those who would presume to approach God without Christ? Jesus answers this by declaring—**“...No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6).

III. “Is there ‘Power’ in prayer?”

It is becoming more and more common even among Christians to hear people speak of the “power of prayer.” I am personally **very uncomfortable** using that phrase. There is no more “power” in the act of prayer than there is “power” in the act of baptism. The reason that both can effect change in the human life is because of the “power” of God. Of baptism the Bible teaches that it “saves” us—**“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** (I Peter 3:21). Of prayer the Bible teaches—**“...this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, HE HEARS us”** (I John 5:14 Emphasis Mine). To claim that there is “power in prayer” seems to me to ascribe magical powers to prayer itself rather than giving credit to the one towards whom our appeals are directed. **(Cont. on pg. 4)**

“Go & Learn What This Means”

In Matthew 9:13 there is a simple and yet profound statement. As Jesus was criticized for His association with **“tax collectors and sinners”** (9:11), He gives this admonition—**“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”** (NKJV). As He quotes an Old Testament text from Hosea 6:6 it is interesting to consider what He instructs the Pharisees to do. He challenges them to learn the meaning of Hosea’s statement. The statement itself is easy enough to understand: God wants people to be merciful to others more than He wants us to offer some great sacrifice. Yet, Jesus seems to suggest that although they might understand the words, they had not truly learned the principle. By criticizing His association with “sinners” they were failing to see the importance of the mercy He demonstrated in trying to teach sinners. He tells them to “go and learn.”

There are many things in the Christian life that have a similar application. We may understand that God wants us to be longsuffering and kind (I Corinthians 13:4), or that His word can work in us if we will study (I Thessalonians 2:13; II Timothy 3:16,17), but, we may not yet have learned how to act with patience and kindness or we may not let God’s word work within us. We

may understand that God is with us from day to day (Hebrews 13:5) and that peace of mind is offered to us when we go to God in prayer (Philippians 4:6,7), but, we may not yet have learned to trust Him through times of difficulty appealing to Him that we might have this peace. In each of these cases, we like Jesus’ critics need to “go and learn what this means.”

The important thing for us all to remember is that we must always try to both understand what God has said and “learn” how to apply it in our lives. It is easy for us to get discouraged when we see our lives fall short of what the Lord teaches. However, in Christ Satan doesn’t win when we fall short but when we surrender. Paul shows us that even though he understood the Lord’s care in his life he had to “learn” to be content. In Philippians 4:12 he declared— **“...I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”** Just before this Paul stated - **“...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”** (vs. 11). Our task is just the same. May each of us work to better understand what God has said and diligently come to know the Scriptures. Yet, at the same time may we each take it a step further by “learning” what these things mean in our own lives.

By Kyle Pope