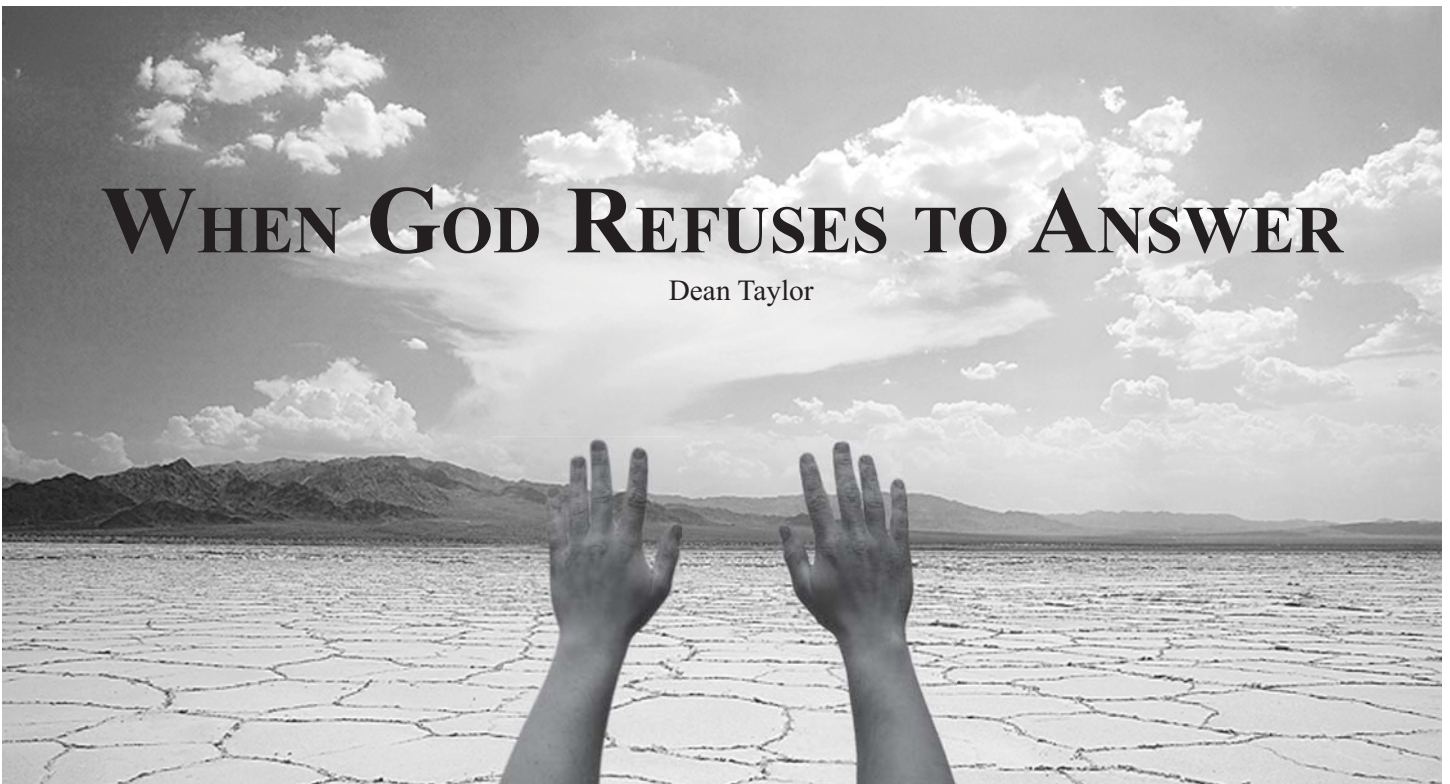


# WHEN GOD REFUSES TO ANSWER

Dean Taylor



In the early morning hours of December 7, 1941, an Army radar base on the northern tip of Hawaii suddenly noticed a target echo, larger than they had ever seen before. They promptly notified a lieutenant at the Intercept Center: “Large number of planes coming in from the north, three points east.” Upon receiving the notification, the man in charge ignored the warning, assuming it was the scheduled arrival of six US B-17 bombers. The radar base had neglected to say just how large the target echo had been, and the warning went unheeded. Instead of six friendly B-17s, those blips on the radar were several hundred Japanese aircraft, which 55 minutes later began destroying the US fleet at Pearl Harbor.

Sometimes we hear people saying “Ignorance is bliss.” While this might be true for a moment, the fact is, the truth eventually comes out. What is more, like the US Military on Hawaii on December 7, 1941, I have found that ignorance, and especially deliberate neglect, only makes matters worse.

The prophet Jeremiah revealed God’s inner thought about us: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.” Je. 29:11-12

Jesus revealed even more clearly that God hears us and even answers our prayers in miraculous ways. Mark recorded Jesus saying: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall

speaking with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Mk. 16:17-18

The apostle John teaches that this awareness of God’s favor and benevolence should act as a source of strength and confidence. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 Jn. 5:14-15 That’s quite a promise! The problem is that too often I don’t seem to be experiencing the power of God like these passages clearly indicate. Why?

Perhaps the little phrase in the middle of this last promise can be a guide. It says “if we ask anything *according to his will*.” Apparently John is letting me know that it is possible to ask for things that are *not* according to God’s will. As much of a blessing as it is to read these scriptures about God hearing us, I find it sobering to read that the Bible also teaches us that there are certain times or circumstances in which God will *not* hear us. Because the gap between abiding in God’s will and the ruin of ignoring His will is so great, I have looked at a few instances in the Scripture that God specifically tells us that He will not hear. They are sobering. As you read through them, ponder your prayer life. Are your prayers being answered? Do you have a close connection with God? Read over these passages and let God speak to your heart.

## Sin in general

Unfortunately, most of the time our perception of sin is too light. We too quickly forget that our benevolent God who keeps “mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” also said that He “will by no means clear the guilty.” Ex. 34:7 In other words, God does not just “forget about it.” Those sins must be paid for—and the price was great. In our Christian walk, if we go on presumptuously continuing in sin we destroy our relationship with God.

The following are just a few verses that speak about God refusing to answer because of sin in our life:

- “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Ps. 66:18
- “Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it ...” Ez. 14:13
- “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 Pe. 3:12

## Have you have stopped listening to the Word of God?

The Bible lets us know that God continually desires to speak with us and pour His grace into us. Sadly however, many get a little of Him and then feel they have had enough. This is not acceptable to God. He lets us know that a Christian life is an entire life, not just one moment. When we turn away from Him, He removes even what we once had. Consider the following verses:

- “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” Pr. 28:9
- “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.” Mk. 4:23–25
- “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Ro. 10:17
- “And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.” Lu. 9:35

## Strange fire

When we stop listening to God’s Word, we end up making things up. We think our inventions are great ideas, but to God they are a great offense. Sometimes in our worship of the Lord we may feel that we are pleasing Him, but in real-

ity we are flatly disobeying His Word. In these situations we once again ponder why God is not answering. After reading these examples of how God dealt with “*strange fire*,” we might reconsider this silence as mercy.

- “And they set the ark of God upon a new cart ... And when they came to Nachon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.” 2 Sa. 6:3,6-7

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- “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.” Le. 10:1-2
- “And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?” 1 Sa. 15:13-19

## Covetousness

Another hindrance to an open relationship with God is the love of other things. We may think this is a light offense, but God calls it idolatry. As Paul says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Co. 3:5 Scriptures tell us that our Lord will not tolerate a halfhearted love of Him. He desires all of our heart. As Exodus records, “For the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” Ex. 34:14



Perhaps the reason that we do not have a close relationship with God is because our heart really desires something else more than Him. In God's promises to hear our prayers and to answer them, the apostle John reminds us that our confidence comes from asking "according to God's will." Allow the following verses to examine what really is at the seat of your desire.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Ja. 4:1-4

## Is there a breach in your marriage relationship?

This might seem like a strange question to ask with regard to God hearing our prayers. Nevertheless, God has revealed that this relationship can have a direct correlation to God hearing us or not.

"And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." MI. 2:13-14

The apostle Peter warns husbands: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not **hindered**." 1 Pe. 3:7 That word *hindered*, by the way, comes from the Greek word "*ek-kop'-to*" which means, "to cut out, cut off of a tree." That's perhaps a stronger word than our common understanding of the word *hindered*.

## Unforgiveness

Another big hindrance to answered prayer is unforgiveness. This sin is so serious that Jesus even let us know that if we continue in it, He will no longer forgive us!



Unresolved spats in family life result in hindered prayers, prayers that are "cut off."

- "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mk. 11:25-26
- "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Mt. 6:14-15
- "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Mt. 18:35
- "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." He. 12:15

## Double minded

God wants us to be full of faith, not doubting His promises. If we are only praying halfhearted prayers, then this could be why God is not answering.

- "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Ja. 1:5-7
- "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Mk. 11:24
- "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." 1 Ki. 18:21
- "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." He. 10:22
- "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Mt. 6:6-7

## **Not helping the poor**

What we call “spiritual” is not always what God calls spiritual. In both the Old and the New Testaments, helping the poor and needy has always been close to the heart of God.

“He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.” Pr. 14:31

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.” Le. 23:22

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Is. 1:16-17

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” Mt. 25:41-45

## **Are you fearful to confess Christ before men?**

Finally, are we ashamed to name the name of Christ? Does being a follower of Christ embarrass us? Are we living a double life—holy at church, but worldly at work? Apparently our witness is very important to Jesus. So important, that Jesus told us that if we are too fearful to be an outward witness for Christ, then He will deny us before His Father. Is this why God is not answering?

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Mt. 10:32-33

The promises that Jesus gave to His followers are too wonderful to just let slip away with the lust and cares of this world. If God is silent, we need to find out why. We don’t want to be like the US Military on Hawaii and ignore the early warnings, when in fact our life may well be on the brink of disaster. Oh, may God give us the grace to apprehend His promises and enjoy the fellowship and blessings that He had in store for us. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Co. 7:1~