

Doctrinal Summary of
Prayer: Reasons for Rejection-Harboring Sin

In Psalm 66:18 David identifies that God rejects prayer requests because of sin harbored in man's heart.

"If I regard wickedness in my heart, the LORD will not hear;"

The word "regard" is translated from the Biblical Hebrew word רָאִיתִי ("ra-iy-tiy") which more literally means, "I perform the completed action to perceive the reality of something in my mind's eye." It identifies that something has been recognized mentally for what it is after observing it through the senses. This recognition results in an individual having a perceptive knowledge of reality concerning that which he observed and then recognized. The individual performed the action to observe and then recognize what was in front of him. In David's statement what might be recognized is whatever wickedness might be in his heart.

The word "wickedness" is translated from the Biblical Hebrew word אָוֵן ("a-vehn") which more literally means, "that which undercuts and replaces the standard." It is used generally of the idea of evil in the Old Testament and applies to anything that fails to meet God's standard, either purposely or accidentally. It differs from unrighteousness in that it moves beyond the idea of merely not meeting the standard to the idea of working against, supplanting, or destroying God's standard. As such it results in barrenness and worthlessness along with separation from God who has nothing to do with that which undercuts righteousness and offers itself as a replacement to the standard. Wickedness in one's behavior is derived from wickedness in one's heart (cf. Luke 6:45).

The word "heart" is translated from the Biblical Hebrew word לִבִּי ("lib-biy") which refers to the storage place of man's beliefs. It is the heart of man that is the source of all of his actions (cf. Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:18-19; Luke 6:45), it is the natural heart of man that is desperately wicked (cf. Jer. 17:9), and it is the heart of man that God knows the secrets of (cf. Ps. 44:21). In the heart man can store righteous or unrighteous beliefs regarding morality, norms, standards, and protocols. Whichever morals, norms, standards, and protocols man stores in his heart that are righteous produce actions that are in harmony with God's standard. Conversely, whichever morals, norms, standards, and protocols man stores in his heart that are unrighteous produce actions that are wicked, undercutting God's standard and design for that which man should have had in his heart. Here, David identifies that if he perceives wickedness in his heart God will not hear his request.

The words "not hear" are translated from the Biblical Hebrew words לֹא יִשְׁמַע ("loh yish-ma") which more literally means, "He will not perform the incomplete action to hear and respond positively to what He heard." It identifies that God will not go through the process to carry out the action of responding in agreement or favorably toward granting that which has been requested.

David identifies a principle that reveals how God operates towards those who knowingly harbor sin in their hearts. He simply will not grant the request. Rather than harboring sin in his heart, the Church Age believer should repent of his thought process, confess his repentance to God, and then he can have the confidence that God will hear and respond favorably to his prayer request (cf. 1 Jn. 3:21-22). But if he continues to harbor wickedness in his heart, then God is not going to favorably respond to his request.