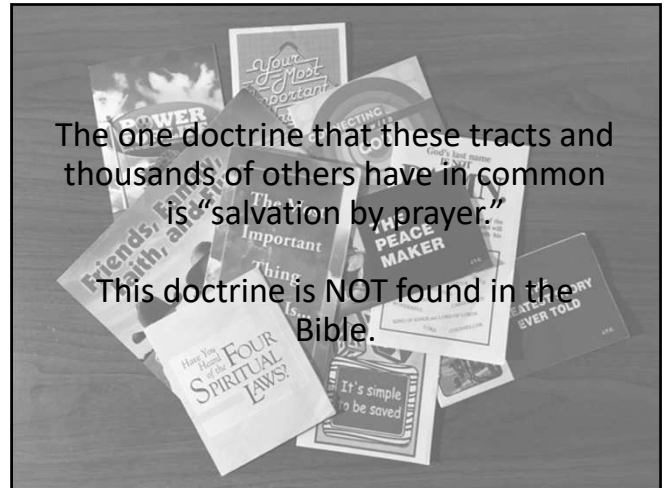


1



2

The False Doctrine of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Perhaps you have received a tract with a message similar to this:

You can know you are on your way to Heaven.

First, realize God loves you. (John 3:16)

Second, realize that everyone is a sinner. (Romans 3:23)

Third, realize that sin has a price that must be paid (Romans 6:23)

Fourth, realize Jesus Christ died to pay the price for your sin. (Romans 5:8)

*Finally, **pray and ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior, and claim His promise of eternal life.** (Romans 10:13)*

3

The False Doctrine of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Or perhaps you have received a tract with a message similar to this:

"Accept Jesus into your heart through prayer right now and he'll receive you. You will be born again at the moment you receive Jesus into your heart and trust him as your Lord and personal Savior. God loves you and forgives you of all of your sins. Simply accept Christ and ask Him to come into your heart. He will save you by praying the following prayer right now ..."

4

The False Doctrine of "The Sinner's Prayer"

"Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my personal Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be."

5

The False Doctrine of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Many tracts that instruct the reader to recite "The Sinner's Prayer" will then add something like this:

Now That You Have Received Christ

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of the will, many things happened, including the following:

Christ came into your life (Rev 3:20; Col 1:27)

Your sins were forgiven (Col 1:14)

You became a child of God (John 1:12)

You received eternal life (John 5:24)

You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Thes 5:18)

6

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

The roots of the Sinner's Prayer doctrine go back less than 300 years, and the idea was not accepted into mainstream religion until the 1930's.

Charles Finney (1792-1875) was an Ohio Presbyterian minister who promoted "The Mourner's Seat" or "The Anxious Bench," the practice of targeting sinners to come down and sit on the front row to signify repentance.

Finney wrote, *"The church has always felt it necessary to have something of this kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles, baptism answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ, were called out to be baptized. It held the place that the anxious seat does now as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians."*

7

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Dwight Moody (1837-1899) took Finney's system and modified it, so that instead of people making a public decision under pressure, they were asked to join him and a group of counselors in a room called the Inquiry Room.

The possible converts were asked questions, taught some scripture, and then prayed together. The idea of prayer being the end of the process of conversion became a standard technique for "receiving Christ" in many protestant denominations and soon spread across the U.S. and the U.K.

Although not yet called "The Sinner's Prayer," this is where the idea began to be practiced.

8

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

R. A. Torrey (1856-1928) modified Moody's approach to include on-the-spot street conversions, popularizing the idea of instant salvation. The notion of "Receive Christ right now, right here" became a normal part of evangelism.

Billy Sunday (1862-1935), was a former Major League Baseball player, converted at the Moody-associated Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. Sunday toured the country on his "crusades," delivering fire and brimstone sermons, many with political overtones, often exhibiting humorous or outlandish behavior, followed by an offer of salvation to any who walked down to the front where he was standing. Sometimes a "sinner's prayer" would be offered, other times people were told they were saved because they came forward and shook his hand. Sunday distributed a tract, "Four Things God Wants You to Know," which ended with a prayer for salvation.

9

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Billy Graham (1918 - 2018) adapted Billy Sunday's tract, calling his formula "Four Steps to Peace with God." The following is from the billygraham.org website:

1. ADMIT your spiritual need. "I am a sinner."
2. REPENT and be willing to turn from your sin.
3. BELIEVE that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.
4. RECEIVE, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and life.

CHRIST says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20).

The BIBLE says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

What to Pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

10

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

Bill Bright (1921-2003), founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, wrote and published "The Four Spiritual Laws" in 1952, as an evangelistic tool for people to share with their neighbors and friends, or with strangers in public locations.

Like Sunday's and Graham's tracts, it ends with "The Sinner's Prayer," claiming that once recited, Jesus comes into your heart and saves your soul:

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

11

The History of "The Sinner's Prayer"

The Living Bible (1971)

By the late 1960s most evangelical organizations were printing some form of the Four Spiritual Laws in the last chapter of their books.

In 1971, The Living Bible (Paraphrase) was published with this theology inserted into God's Word:

"Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few welcomed and received him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn! – not a physical rebirth resulting from human passion or plan – but from the will of God."

(John 1:11-13, The Living Bible)

Underlined words have no support in the original Greek.

The Living Bible soon became a best seller, and the "translation" of choice for the evangelistic "crusades." How many millions of souls have been led astray by this counterfeit Bible?

12

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

"The Sinner's Prayer" is not found in the Bible.

The salvation that Jesus freely gives is not conditioned on prayer, but on obedience of faith.

*"... who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **obedience of faith** among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ ..."*
(Romans 1:4-6)

*"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to **obedience of faith** ..."* (Romans 16:25-26)

13

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

The doctrine of "salvation by prayer" prevents people from obeying the new birth taught by Jesus Christ.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?'" Jesus answered, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3-5)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

14

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Some who advocate the doctrine of "salvation by prayer" use Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector as a proof text.

"And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" (Luke 18:9-14)

15

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector does not prove salvation by prayer.

As Jesus contrasts the attitudes of two men, a self-righteous Pharisee and a humble tax collector, one thanks God he is not like the other, and one begs God's mercy, admitting his sin.

Both men in the parable are Jews under the Old Covenant, God's chosen people, inside the temple where Gentiles were not allowed.

The tax collector was not asking for salvation, but for God's mercy and forgiveness, just like King David had done in so many of his psalms.

16

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Many attempt to use Revelation 3:20 as proof that we must "ask Jesus into our hearts" for salvation.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

To understand the verse in context, we must read the previous verses.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent."
(Revelation 3:14-19)

17

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Revelation 3:20 cannot be used to justify "The Sinner's Prayer," as Jesus was not addressing those outside the church, but Christians.

Jesus was reproofing and disciplining members of His church in Laodicea who had become lukewarm in their faith, calling them to repentance.

18

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Many quote Romans 10:13 to show how we are to "call on the name of the Lord" for salvation.

"... for **"WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."**
(Romans 10:13)

The same passage was referenced by Peter in his gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

"AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Acts 2:21)

Both Paul and Peter were quoting Joel 2:32, as Joel prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, and that everyone, meaning both Jews and Gentiles, would now be welcome in the kingdom of God, as Peter expressed to the household of Cornelius:

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

19

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

What does it mean to "Call on the name of the Lord"?

It cannot mean knowing who He is and calling out His name.

"Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!'" (Mark 1:23-24)

"Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ." (Luke 4:41)

It cannot mean simply believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." (James 2:19)

Why are demons not saved? Because they do not obey Him.

"And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation ..." (Hebrews 5:9)

20

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

What does it mean to "Call on the name of the Lord"?

It cannot mean simply calling Jesus "Lord." Because Jesus said:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

21

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

So, what does it mean to "Call on the name of the Lord"?

The apostle Paul described his conversion to Christ:

"A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'" (Acts 22:12-16)

Paul was divinely instructed to be baptized to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. To "call on the name of the Lord" is to obey His commands. Jesus said:

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

22

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

The Sinner's Prayer is "a different gospel."

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul warned the churches of Galatia not to fall for a distorted gospel that required circumcision. Many denominations today offer a distorted gospel that leaves out baptism, a command of Christ.

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

23

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Jesus warned:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber." (John 10:1)

The Sinner's Prayer is an attempt to enter the sheepfold (the church) by an alternative route, rather than by the Door of Jesus Christ and His one prescribed method of entrance into Christ. Paul wrote:

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." (Romans 6:3-7)

24

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Paul told the Christians in the churches of Galatia:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)

Any other method of entrance into Christ, such as the Sinner's Prayer, is a false approach spoken of by Jesus in His words, *"but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber."* (John 10:1)

The Sinner's Prayer does not put one into Christ, it does not clothe one with Christ, it does not make all one in Christ Jesus, and does not make anyone heirs according to promise.

Baptism for the remission of sins is the only obedient act that accomplishes all of these things. Teaching salvation without baptism is another gospel, a distorted gospel with a false hope.

25

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Many who advocate salvation by prayer say that we are not saved by works, and that baptism is a work, therefore cannot save.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This verse in context tells us that no one can earn salvation, that it is a gift, but the very next verse says we were created to do the works that God has given us to do!

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

How can we reconcile that works don't earn salvation, but are still required for salvation?

26

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

There are three kinds of WORKS mentioned in the Scriptures.

- Works of the law of Moses.

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." (Romans 3:28) (See also Galatians 3:2)

- Works of human merit and glory.

"... not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:9) (See also Titus 3:5)

- Works of faith, righteousness, obedience.

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)
(See also 1 Thessalonians 1:3)

27

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

- We are not saved by the works of the Law of Moses.
- We are not saved by the works of human merit and glory.
- We are saved by faithful obedience to the commanded works of God. Jesus said that faith is the work of God.

"Therefore they said to Him, 'What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" (John 6:28-29)

An obedient faith is a saving faith. Faith without works is dead.

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." (James 2:14-17)

28

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Many teach that salvation is by faith alone. The only time the words **"faith alone"** are found in scripture is here:

*"But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. **You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.**"* (James 2:18-24)

29

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Baptism for forgiveness of sins is a work of God, as He raises us who were dead in our sins as He raised Christ from the dead, so we can be alive together with Him.

"... and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions ..." (Colossians 2:11-13)

Jesus commanded baptism for forgiveness and salvation is offered to the obedient.

"And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation ..." (Hebrews 5:9)

30

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Baptism for forgiveness of sins was commanded by Christ and taught by His apostles.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

(Acts 2:36-39)

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the promise of eternal life.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." **(Romans 6:23)**

31

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

Baptism for forgiveness of sins was commanded by Christ and taught by his apostles and disciples.

*"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he **preached Jesus** to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from **being baptized**?' [And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing."* **(Acts 8:35-39)**

"And he ordered ("commanded" NKJV) them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." **(Acts 10:48a)**

32

What's Wrong with "The Sinner's Prayer"?

In the Garden of Eden, God said:

"... but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." **(Genesis 2:17)**

But Satan said:

"... You surely will not die!" **(Genesis 3:4b)**

Today, Jesus says:

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved ..." **(Mark 16:16a)**

But Satan says:

He who has believed and has NOT been baptized shall be saved. **(Sinner's Prayer doctrine)**

33



34

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Jesus came preaching the gospel, the good news, of salvation by forgiveness of sins, paying the price with His blood on the cross, resurrected the third day, and promising eternal life with Him in Heaven to all who will obey the gospel.

*"For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not **obey the gospel** of God?"* **(1 Peter 4:17)**

*"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not **obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed."* **(2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)**

35

How To Obey The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Hear the word of God
(2 Thessalonians 2:14-15; James 1:21)

Believe the gospel message
(Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24)

Repent of sins
(Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31)

Confess Jesus Christ
(Romans 10:10; Matthew 10:32-33)

Be Baptized for Forgiveness of Sins
(Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4)

Remain Obedient
(Matthew 7:21; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:12)

36