



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

May 2023

“THE SINNER’S PRAYER” VERSUS “OBEY THE GOSPEL”

Throughout the denomination world of the twenty-first century, it is common for people to talk about and encourage others to pray “the Sinner’s Prayer.” “The Sinner’s Prayer” is impossible to define from a biblical perspective. Why? Because such a concept is not in the Scriptures. Let that fact sink in.

The basic idea of “the Sinner’s Prayer” is this: a lost person (one who has never been saved by the blood of Jesus) can pray to the Lord and ask for forgiveness, and the Lord will save them. In essence, according to this teaching, a person who is lost before praying this prayer will be saved by the time he/she speaks the last word of the prayer. So, per this doctrine, salvation comes via sincere prayer.

In the tract entitled “Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws,” it is written, “You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer . . . God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested 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 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’” [Taken on 1 December 2022 from www.4laws.com; written by Bill Bright]. Numerous similar quotes could be supplied, but this one shows the basic thrust of “the Sinner’s Prayer,” though some may not use that exact terminology.

“What about 1 John 1:9? Does that verse not teach that a person can be saved by praying?” It does state that God forgives one who confesses sins: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” To whom is that statement made? In this verse, who are the “we” who confess sins? This epistle was written to those who have eternal life (5:13). Thus, the promise to forgive those who confess their sins is made to Christians, not those who are outside of the Christ.

“What about Luke 18:13? That tax collector was forgiven when he prayed. That sounds like the sinner’s prayer to me.” In His parable about a Pharisee

and tax collector, Jesus said the latter prayed, “*God, be merciful to me a sinner*” (18:13). Where was the tax collector praying? In the same place the Pharisee prayed – in the temple. Thus, the tax collector already was a part of God’s family. He did not pray to get into God’s family . . . he was a child of God before he started praying that prayer. This passage has nothing to do with the question of what a person lost outside of Jesus must do to be saved under the new covenant.

What about “obey the gospel,” does the Bible use that language? Yes, we read that term in Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and 1 Peter 4:17. The gospel includes the *facts* that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). However, one does not obey facts; one obeys commands/instructions. The gospel message includes commands that a lost person must obey before his sins are cleansed . . . commands such as believe in Jesus (Acts 16:31), repent (Acts 17:30), and be baptized (Acts 22:16). When one hears, believes, and complies with the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins, in Bible language, that person “obeys the gospel.”

Consider other Bible language that is synonymous with “*obey the gospel.*” People’s souls are purified when they “*obey the truth*” (1 Peter 1:22). Many priests “*were obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7). Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all those who “obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). Also, a person is freed from the bondage of sin when he obeys “*from the heart that form of doctrine*” (Romans 6:17). The context indicates this refers to being baptized into the Christ, a process which in a symbolic sense imitates the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (6:3-5). Conclusion: When one obeys *the gospel*, that is the same as obeying *the truth*, obeying *the faith*, obeying *Jesus*, and obeying *God’s pattern of doctrine*.

Praying “the Sinner’s Prayer” leaves the one who prayed lost. Praying such a prayer has never saved a single person! On the other hand, when one obeys the gospel/the truth, that person is forgiven of past sins. Think about that contrast. After initial obedience, God wants us to continue to obey the truth (Galatians 5:7).

-- Roger D. Campbell

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING JEHOSEPHATH

King Jehoshaphat reigned during the Old Testament period referred to as “the divided kingdom.” When the kingdom split after Solomon’s death, ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom (or, “Israel”), and the remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom (or, “Judah”). Jehoshaphat became the fourth king of Judah in the fourth year of the reign of Ahab in Israel (1 Kings 22:41). The full biblical account of King Jehoshaphat is found in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 17:1-21:3 (and also in connection with King Jehoram of Israel in 2 Kings 3).

The name Jehoshaphat is Hebrew, meaning “Jehovah is judge,” “Jehovah judges,” or “judged by Jehovah.” What is God’s judgment, or assessment, of King Jehoshaphat? 2 Chronicles 17:3,4 state, “*Now the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he...sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel*” (see also 2 Chronicles 20:32).

Though Jehoshaphat was a good king, he was not without flaws. While Israel in the north had not one righteous king, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) did have some who were godly. Many godly kings of Judah also made glaring mistakes, and the Bible is rather forthright in recording those mistakes. Jehoshaphat is one such example. The following is a summation of some key events in Jehoshaphat’s reign:

- **Jehoshaphat was a reformer.** His early reforms are recorded in 2 Chronicles 17, as he sought the Lord, campaigned to eliminate idolatry, and taught the nation God’s law. God blessed Jehoshaphat for his godly reforms by giving him material blessings and power. Later reforms of Jehoshaphat are recorded in 2 Chronicles 19. He sought to bring the people back to God and urged the nation’s judges (and other leaders) to do their work faithfully and without partiality.
- **Jehoshaphat’s greatest flaw was his alliances with ungodly kings in Israel.** At least three separate times, Jehoshaphat allied himself with wicked kings of Israel.
 - 2 Chronicles 18:1-3; 1 Kings 22:44—Jehoshaphat’s allied with wicked King Ahab. Jehoshaphat encouraged Ahab to hear from a prophet of God concerning the proposed battle, but the two kings went on to battle against God’s will. Though God intervened to save Jehoshaphat’s life, He sent the prophet Jehu to rebuke Jehoshaphat sharply for the alliance with Ahab (2 Chronicles 19:1,2).

- 2 Chronicles 20:35-37—Jehoshaphat later made a foolish alliance with Ahab’s son, Ahaziah. God hindered their efforts, however, and Jehoshaphat wisely ended the alliance (1 Kings 22:48-49).
- 2 Kings 3—Ahab’s third foolish alliance was with Jehoram, Ahaziah’s brother (and another son of Ahab). Jehoshaphat again was the lone voice of reason, encouraging them to inquire of God and, as a result, God gave them the victory.

Considering Jehoshaphat’s life, knowing these events are recorded “*for our learning*” (Romans 15:4), what are some lessons that Christians can learn?

- **Righteousness exalts a nation.** God says so! “*Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people*” (Proverbs 14:34). When a nation’s leaders seek God, the whole nation is blessed (see 2 Chronicles 17:5,12).
- **One’s choice for a spouse has great and far-reaching effects.** Jehoshaphat’s choice to have his son marry Ahab’s daughter altered the diplomatic policy of the entire nation of Judah (2 Chronicles 17:1) . . . and not for the better! Moreover, that alliance led Jehoram astray, to walk “*in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done*” (2 Kings 8:18). Marital choices matter!
- **Good men make mistakes.** Jehoshaphat was a good man but, as a human, he made mistakes (as everyone does, Romans 3:23). But God, is—as He says Himself—“*merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*” (Exodus 34:6,7). Our failures need not be fatal, if we only turn to God, seek Him, and obey Him.
- **Seek God’s counsel and help.** Though he erred in his alliances with the ungodly kings of Israel, Jehoshaphat set a great example of always seeking God’s counsel and help. When several nations came against Judah, he led an extraordinary prayer, asking for God’s help (2 Chronicles 20:5-27). He taught the nation to serve God wholeheartedly (2 Chronicles 19:9).

Jehoshaphat is a great example of one who loved the Lord and sought to do His will. Though he was not sinless (and no mere human is), the overall course of his life was to follow God’s will. As humans, we all err from time to time, but may our hearts and lives, like Jehoshaphat’s, always be inclined toward God.

-- Chad Dollahite

Jesus — the Bread of Life

Throughout the book of John, we frequently see Jesus making claims about Himself which start with the words “I am . . .” That is true in John 6:35, where it is written, “*And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’*”

Jesus obviously was not claiming to be literal bread that we consume as food for our physical body. If He is non-literal bread, then in what sense does He serve as a sort of symbolic bread for mankind?

Before the Christ made His claim to be the bread of life, some antagonistic Jews reminded Him that their ancestors had eaten bread/manna which came from heaven. Would Jesus match the amazing feat of providing bread miraculously? (John 6:30,31). The day before this, He had fed about five thousand men plus women and children (6:4-15,22).

In Jesus’ response, He described Himself as bread:

- “the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32)
- “the bread of God” (6:33)
- “the bread of life” (6:35)
- “the living bread” (6:51)
- “the bread which came down from heaven” (6:58)

(all emphasis in the quotes above is mine, *rdc*).

So, as “*the bread of life,*” Jesus is the true bread, the bread of God, the living bread which came down from heaven. Just as manna was a gift from God to the Israelites in the wilderness, so the Christ is God’s gift to mankind. Israelites needed manna; we need Jesus.

What is there about bread that correlates to Jesus and His role in God’s plan to save us? Bread was a staple food item in Jesus’ day. Consuming bread provided sustenance for a person’s body, helping to keep it alive. In the same way, Jesus provides life to mankind (John 10:10). “*For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself*” (John 5:26). Without bread/food, a person will die. Without Jesus, one cannot live spiritually.

Jesus provides *everything* that a person needs for his spiritual well-being. As the Master said, His followers will never hunger or thirst (John 6:35). Hunger and thirst are two of our strongest desires. When one finds Jesus in harmony with what the Bible teaches, he feels a sense of satisfaction, contentment, and completeness. True disciples of Jesus are not searching for something or someone better. Why? Because they know that Jesus alone can provide just what they need. It is in the bread of life that we have all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). “*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift*” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

-- Roger D. Campbell

Lessons from 1 John 2:22-26

1 John 2:18 begins a warning against the danger of false teachers. Gnostic teachers were assaulting the church during this time, claiming to have “special knowledge” from God. One of the things they advocated was that Jesus did not come in the flesh. They taught that Jesus was the biological son of Joseph, that the Spirit came upon the Christ at His baptism and departed from Him before His crucifixion. They are described as “antichrist” (1 John 2:18). They denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (1 John 2:22). In teaching this doctrine, they were working to deceive (1 John 2:26).

John says that the brethren would be able to recognize these false teachers easily. How? Through both the miraculous spiritual gifts that had been given to them and God’s word (1 John 2:20-29).

There are two powerful lessons from inspiration that we must heed:

1. Do not give further attention to lies. There must be an initial examination to what we are hearing. While we do not have the miraculous gifts that came through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14-18), we examine any teaching by comparing with the standard of truth, the word of God. Remember the people of Berea: “*These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). When we see that a doctrine does not agree with the Bible, we need to classify it as false and let it go!

2. Pay more attention to truth. Remember what John penned in verse 21: “*I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*” In chapter one, John declared that the message which he and the other apostles delivered was truth, and that through the truth, fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ was provided and sustained. In this context, hold on to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

In broader context throughout the Old and New Testaments, everything regarding spiritual life is bound in the words of truth. That is why Solomon would write, “*Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding*” (Proverbs 23:23). Jesus would say to the Israelites in His time: “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’*” (John 8:31,32).

-- Dave Leonard

THE CHALLENGE TO OVERCOME THE FEAR TO TALK TO LOST PEOPLE ABOUT THE GOSPEL

The Lord thought it was a great idea to send a disciple, Ananias, to speak to a lost man who was praying in the city of Damascus. Ananias did not seem thrilled by the thought of approaching that fellow, who was the number one persecutor of the church.

That tormentor of God's people was Saul of Tarsus. We understand Ananias' hesitation in the matter of reaching out to Saul. However, Ananias overcame whatever apprehension or fear that he may have had in his heart. He went and spoke to Saul, who responded by being baptized into the Christ (Acts 9:18). And, "The rest is history."

Saul of Tarsus had a need. Despite his many favorable traits, he was lost in sin. He needed the Lord's mercy and forgiveness (1 Timothy 1:15,16), which are available only through Jesus' blood and His gospel. Brethren, when you I and possess the gospel, we have what people need to hear! Say this out loud to yourself at least five times: "I have what people need." Our Lord wants every person on the planet to hear His good news of salvation (Mark 16:15,16).

Saul was a ruthless adversary of God's people. Ananias knew that, so he had to overcome any reluctance to go to Saul. In modern language, Ananias had to step out of his comfort zone. Perhaps this is a good place for some evangelistic reminders.

First, few people would have called Saul "a great prospect." Yet, look at the result when Ananias took the gospel to him! Let us not be guilty of prejudging how a person will respond to the gospel. Our task is to sow the seed and leave the response in the hands of those who hear the gospel.

Second, if we do not teach the gospel, the lost remain lost. People are cleansed from sin only when they obey the truth (1 Peter 1:22). If there is no teaching, there will be no faith. Without faith, there will be no salvation. We have what people need!

Third, think about how many people indirectly owe(d) their salvation, at least in part, to the role that Ananias played. He taught Paul, who in turn taught and trained countless others. In evangelism, every little bit helps! (John 4:36,37).

So, what about the matter of fear in evangelism? As we contemplate approaching a lost person, or if we already are in the process of teaching someone, we might feel uncomfortable, nervous, or even scared. It happens . . . a lot. If you have struggled with fear, it does not mean you are a hopeless cause. At the same time, let us recall that the Lord does not want us to have a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). We must not allow any fear or apprehension to paralyze us. The

devil wants us to hush and not tell others what the Bible says. The Lord wants us to speak freely about His salvation (Acts 18:9). Moving forward, what shall you and I do? Will we be silent, or will we speak?

Why would fear ever be a factor in evangelism? Perhaps one is afraid to bring up "religion" with others. One might be afraid to ask for a Bible study. Why? Maybe because of a lack of experience. In life, when we have never done something in the past, that can cause us to feel intimidated, even terrified. Realizing that teaching a lost person one-on-one is a serious task, one might be afraid of not doing a good job teaching. They do not want to be a failure. Perhaps one is afraid that he does not have enough knowledge or will not be able to answer a prospect's questions.

God's saints ought to be confident people! Our Father is the Ruler of the universe (Psalm 24:1). Our Lord promises to be with His disciples as they carry out His teaching commission (Matthew 28:18-20). We have the truth (John 17:17), and when we teach it, we are doing what the Lord wants (Isaiah 6:8). Teach on!

How can we deal with and overcome the fear of approaching and teaching lost people? If we are fearful due to lack of experience, I have a thought about that: the only way to get experience is to get experience. Seriously. I recommend three phases: (1) observe how others teach, (2) practice teaching/role playing "off camera," and finally (3) jump in and begin teaching. You have to start sometime, right?

If you are afraid of not knowing more than a prospect, remember this: our goal is not to win a Bible knowledge contest but to help a lost person see the truth that is recorded in the Bible (John 8:32).

Have a method. This builds confidence, because with practice, you tell yourself, "I can do this." You might prefer to use only a Bible (or a Bible with some verse references prepared in advance), use pre-printed study pamphlets (like *Fishers of Men* materials or *Back to the Bible*), or show a person a DVD/video.

Pray about it. Come with boldness to God's throne to "*find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). Believe me, teaching others is a time of need!

Finally, accept this reality: we may never completely get over being nervous as we approach or teach lost people. Let each of us resolve to open our mouths, do our best, and walk by faith, not by fear.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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