

The Sinner's Prayer

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Have you ever heard or recited a prayer that sounds something like this?

"Dear Jesus,

I am a sinner.

I repent of my sins.

**Please forgive me and save me by your shed blood;
come into my heart.**

I want to receive you as my own personal Lord and savior.

Amen"

*****CAN A PRAYER LIKE THIS SAVE YOU AND ME?*****

Before we propose to answer that question, let's make an observation. Since the 1950's, in what appears to be "unity," Evangelical Christianity has nearly totally embraced a theological concept that has come to be known as the "Sinner's Prayer."

The purpose for this website is to examine the theology of "The Sinner's Prayer" by putting it under the light of Scripture to test its validity.

For this purpose, we will ask and answer questions concerning "The Sinner's Prayer" using the Scripture* as our **ONLY** guide!

* All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version, a Public Domain Document

Questions FOR the Scriptures and Answers FROM the Scriptures:

1. Where is the "Sinner's Prayer" found in Scripture?

Scripture:

None

Answer:

The "Sinner's Prayer" is NOT found anywhere in Scripture.

2. Did Jesus authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" when he spoke of the Pharisee and the Publican (Tax Collector) praying in the temple?

Scripture:

"And he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."
-- Luke 18:9-14

Answer:

No. The context clearly shows Jesus relaying here a lesson on humility, not on a salvation experience. First of all, this parable was told during the time of the Mosaical Covenant. Both men were in "physical covenant" relationship w/ God since both men were Jews, though the Pharisee was in great need of spiritual covenant **restoration**. Jesus had not yet died and His Will had not gone into effect. Christianity was unknown, the church had not yet been established and no one could become a Christian, even if a person desired to do so.

3. Did Jesus authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" in his discourse with the Thief on the Cross?

Scripture:

"And one of the malefactors that were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." -- Luke 23:39-43

Answer:

No. Jesus and the thief both lived and died under the Mosaic Covenant. The Will of Jesus (the New Testament) was not yet in effect. The thief, being a Jew, was in "physical covenant" relationship already, though he clearly was in the need for spiritual covenant restoration. As with the previous example, at this moment, Christianity was unknown, the church had not been established and no one could become a Christian even if they desired to become one. Jesus, "Immanuel -- God with us," forgave his sins and restored his Jewish brother to covenant relationship with himself and they both were in Paradise together later that very day.

4. Did Jesus authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" in Revelation 3?

Scripture:

"As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." -- Revelations 3:19-20

Answer:

No. Jesus was speaking to Christians (the lukewarm church of Laodecia), not to non-Christians. Jesus is calling for restoration, not an initial salvation experience, in this passage.

5. Does Jesus invite us or do we invite Jesus?

Scripture:

*"**Come unto me**, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." -- Matthew 11:28-30 (emphasis mine RM)*

Answer:

Jesus invites us to come to Him. We do not invite Jesus to come to us.

By "asking Jesus to come into our hearts" is to reverse roles with God Himself!

The one who invites is greater than the one who accepts!

6. Did Paul authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" in Romans 10: 9, 10, and 11?

Scripture:

"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth

confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be put to shame." -- Romans 10:8-11

Answer:

No. Paul is addressing Christians, not non-Christians, in this text. He makes it clear in verse 8 that the object of verse 9 (where he notes confession and salvation) is a group of people ALREADY in Christ. Verse 8 states that the word IS near them, that the word IS in their mouth and that the word IS in their heart ALREADY. Existing salvation in verse 8 is characterized THREE times in the PRESENT TENSE. Paul's statements in verses 9 and 10 clearly reference a restorational confession for Christians ONLY, who daily confess Christ and the reality of His resurrection by both word and deed, thus confirming their belief and resulting ultimately, in salvation. Paul wrote Romans to the church (saved Christians ONLY). In 1:7 he asserts the following:

- 1) "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be SAINTS..." (KJV) [saints are Christians, not alien sinners] and
- 2) "Grace to you and peace from God OUR Father, and the LORD Jesus Christ." (KJV) ["IF" God is our FATHER and Jesus Christ is our LORD, then Paul is addressing ONLY Christians].

Furthermore, in the context of chapter 10, Paul addresses his audience as "Brethren." Now, some would say that "Brethren" might refer to Paul's Jewish "brethren" in the flesh. However, this cannot be the case for in 9:31 he asserts that Israel had "not attained to the law of righteousness." (KJV) and then finally in 10:1 says that his "...heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they [non-Christian Israel] might be SAVED." (KJV). Clearly, the text and the context of Romans 10:9 and 10 refer ONLY to Christians and is NOT a statement having ANYTHING to do with a non-Christian.

7. Did Paul authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" in Acts 16 when he encountered the Philippian Jailer?

Scripture:

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God." -- Acts 16:25-34

Answer:

No. First of all, the jailer's belief required IMMEDIATE action which he took as we note clearly in verse 33 where he was baptized IMMEDIATELY or AT ONCE (as noted in another version), there was no delay. Secondly, "belief" is NOT belief if there is not a willingness to obey the Lord's commands. The Lord Himself so stated in John 14:12-15:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father.

*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do. **If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.**" (emphasis mine RM)*

Jesus CLEARLY commands baptism, as noted in Mark 16:15-16:

*"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth **and is baptized** shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." (emphasis mine RM)*

Baptism is commanded for anyone who BELIEVES. **Baptism is NOT required of those who choose not to believe.**

One other point. When the jailer asked; "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" in verse 30, he had NEVER even heard of Jesus Christ, let alone the gospel! His inquiry had to do with the salvation of his PHYSICAL life! However, Paul and Silas told him what he needed to do to be saved SPIRITUALLY! Paul and Silas went to his home, and while their wounds were being dressed, taught the Jailer and his household the gospel. As soon as he heard the gospel, he believed in Jesus Christ, repented of his sins, confessed the name of Christ... and along with his household... was baptized for the remission of his sins... THE SAME HOUR OF THE NIGHT! Finally, there was NO REJOICING until AFTER the baptism.

8. Did Jesus authorize the "Sinner's Prayer" with Nicodemus in John 3:14-16?

Scripture:

*"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him **should** not perish, but have eternal life." -- John 3:14-16 (emphasis mine RM)*

Answer:

No. First of all, the word "Should" refers to a UNIVERSAL OPPORTUNITY, not a universal guarantee. "IF" God were issuing a universal guarantee, He would have used the word WOULD or SHALL. (BTW, some "modern" paraphrases have inserted

the word "shall" to change God's own Words.) Secondly, in order clearly illustrate his case, Jesus refers back to an instance in the OT as noted in Numbers 21:5-9:

*"And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, and there is no water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, because we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee; pray unto Jehovah, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, **when he seeth it**, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, **when he looked** unto the serpent of brass, he lived." (emphasis mine RM)*

The illustration that Jesus uses is of an ACTIVE faith, NOT a passive faith, for the Israelites had to LOOK upon the serpent for salvation, they had to DO something... **not as a work** but as an **active faith response**. Those Jews choosing to state belief "only" and did not move to look upon the serpent perished.

AGAIN, belief without obedience is NOT belief at all... it is a LIE.

9. In Scripture, what does "calling on the name of the Lord" really mean?

Scripture:

*"And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? **arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.**" -- Acts 22:14-16 (emphasis mine RM)*

Answer:

"Calling on the Name of the Lord" in Scripture is synonymous with BAPTISM, they are ONE AND THE SAME.

10. Are people saved by grace or by works?

Scripture:

*"...**for by grace have ye been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **not of works**, that no man should glory." -- Ephesians 2:8-9 (emphasis mine RM)*

Answer:

People are saved by grace, not by works.

11. Is belief a work of God or of man?

Scripture:

"And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled. Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed. They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.**" -- John 6:25-29 (emphasis mine RM)

Answer:

Belief is a work of God.

12. Is baptism a work of man or of God?

Scripture:

"...in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith **in the working of God**, who raised him from the dead." -- Colossians 2:11-12 (emphasis mine RM)

Answer:

Baptism is a work of God, it is NOT a work of man!

IF baptism is a "work of man" in the Ephesians 2 model, then so is belief.

IF baptism, accused of being a so-called "work of man" by evangelicals, is eliminated from the salvation experience, then so MUST belief be eliminated as well... if we are to be biblically consistent!

Questions for the Proponents of "The Sinners Prayer":

1. Who has the correct words to the "Sinner's Prayer?"

SCRIPTURE: _____

2. What happens if a person gets the words wrong in his/her "Sinner's Prayer?"

SCRIPTURE: _____

3. How can the same "Sinner's Prayer" get a person into multiple denominations?

SCRIPTURE: _____

4. How can multiple denominations, all teaching conflicting doctrines, use the same "Sinner's Prayer" for membership?

SCRIPTURE: _____

5. How were people saved before the modern day text of the "Sinner's Prayer" became part of the American religious landscape via the Billy Graham Crusades?

SCRIPTURE: _____

6. What happens when the same preacher keeps switching the wording of the "Sinner's Prayer" Sunday after Sunday?

SCRIPTURE: _____

7. Why were the Pentecostians in Acts 2 told to "repent and be baptized" instead of repeating the "Sinner's Prayer?"

SCRIPTURE: _____

Conclusion:

The "Sinner's Prayer" is a modern day extra-biblical concept unknown until relatively modern times. When the New Testament was written, the salvation experience, **totally by grace**, required a willing hearer, an active and respondent believer, a total repentance, a public confession, a baptism for the remission of sins, a faithful life from then on and a continual eager willingness to spread the gospel to others wherever one went.

Why would it be any different today?

Thank you for prayerfully reasoning with us regarding the Scriptures! May God bless you as you continue

"searching the Scriptures daily to see whether or not these things are so!"

For more information, or if we can encourage you towards more study in God's Word, visit www.archdale.org and click on the "Who We Are" button, or write to:

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