



Does The Bible Teach A Sinner's Prayer?

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Does the Bible teach a “Sinner’s Prayer”? Much of so-called “Christianity” now practices something that can be called the “Sinner’s Prayer.” Many are taught that they must invite Jesus Christ into their lives by saying this sort of prayer. But, is this prayer according to the teachings of the scriptures – or is it a false man-made tradition? This question is important to your eternal salvation!

What Is The “Sinner’s Prayer”?

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Society (on their website <http://www.billygrahamlibrary.org/PGView.aspx?pid=13>, accessed November 12, 2014) teaches the following prayer as a necessary step in receiving Jesus Christ: “Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen.”

Although the specific wording of the “Sinner’s Prayer” differs, the central components are usually the same. In almost every suggested “Sinner’s Prayer” you will see, you will be taught that you must acknowledge that you are a sinner, that you believe in Jesus’ sacrifice, that you are turning away from sin and to God, and that you are inviting Christ to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior.

Those who advocate the practice of saying a “Sinner’s Prayer” point to Bible passages that talk about receiving Jesus Christ into your life, calling on the name of the Lord, and confessing Christ. Consider the following verses:

1. Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

2. John 1:12: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

3. Romans 10:9-10: “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

4. Romans 10:13: “For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Certainly, each one of these Bible passages teach the truth. But, do they teach the practice of a “Sinner’s Prayer”? As we prepare to examine that question further, I want you to appreciate the fact that none of these passages say anything about a prayer for salvation.

No Bible Example Of A “Sinner’s Prayer”

If the Bible taught that such a prayer is involved in obeying the instructions we have just observed, wouldn’t you expect to find at least one example of an individual saying that kind of prayer in the Bible? However, you can search the scriptures your entire life – and you will never find one example of the “Sinner’s Prayer” as it is practiced today!

Now, there are examples of sinners who pray in the Bible. Sometimes folks might appeal to these examples to justify the practice of the “Sinner’s Prayer.” However, let’s look at these passages and consider whether they authorize the “Sinner’s Prayer” today.

The first example comes from a parable Jesus taught (often called the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector).

- Luke 18:9-14: “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

Notice that this passage is *not* a passage about salvation. Instead, Jesus is teaching a lesson (as indicated by verse 9) about humility to individuals who trusted in themselves and looked down on others. To apply this passage in such a way so as to find a “plan of salvation” that authorizes a “Sinner’s Prayer” would be full of errors and inconsistent with its context.

The second example comes from Acts 8 and Simon, the sorcerer. This verse records Peter’s instruction to Simon after he had sinned. Acts 8:22: “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”

This passage *does* record a sinner’s prayer; but, not the “Sinner’s Prayer” that many religious organizations practice today. You see, the “Sinner’s Prayer” we have been talking about is said to be involved in an individual becoming a Christian. However, the prayer in Acts 8:22 was

not commanded in order to *become* a Christian. Instead, Simon had already become a Christian (go back and read Acts 8:12-13 to see how). Then, after he became a Christian, he sinned. Now, he is told that he must repent and pray that God would forgive him. Therefore, Acts 8:22 does not talk about the modern-day “Sinner’s Prayer”!

The third example is found in reference to Saul, during the time of his conversion. Perhaps there are some who would like to point to Saul’s prayer as authority for the “Sinner’s Prayer” today. Acts 9:11: “So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.’”

Again, here is a sinner who is praying. But, is his prayer inviting Jesus to come into his heart for salvation? As you read the larger context (and also read the parallel accounts of Saul’s conversion in Acts 22 and Acts 26), you should see that Saul’s prayer was not like the modern-day “Sinner’s Prayer.” Saul did not “ask Jesus into his heart” by saying this prayer. Instead, he had to be baptized in order to have his sins washed away (see Acts 22:16).

The final example is from Acts 10 – and the example of Cornelius praying. Acts 10:2: “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.”

Just as we saw with Saul, here is another example of a sinner who was praying. But, this prayer was not anything like the modern-day practice of the “Sinner’s Prayer.” As you consider the context of this verse, you will also see that Cornelius did not “ask Jesus into his heart” by saying this prayer. Instead, Cornelius still had to hear the message of the gospel and be baptized (see Acts 10:48).

Not only do these passages not teach the “Sinner’s Prayer”; but, you will not find an example *anywhere* in the pages of God’s word that does! Consider the following points.

- 1. Jesus never taught the “Sinner’s Prayer.”** Certainly, if God expected us to say some sort of a “Sinner’s Prayer” in order to be saved, Jesus would have said *something* about it! But, Jesus never even mentioned such a prayer.
- 2. The apostles never taught the “Sinner’s Prayer.”** If Jesus didn’t teach the “Sinner’s Prayer,” you would at least expect His apostles to have taught it. However, the apostles *never* taught it.
- 3. No examples of conversion included one.** As you read through the book of Acts, you will notice many examples of conversion to Christ. Of all the examples of conversion in Acts that give detailed explanations as to the things that were done – *not one* of these examples included the “Sinner’s Prayer”!

Is it an accident that there is not a single example of the “Sinner’s Prayer” in the Bible? Is it just a coincidence that the words of the “Sinner’s Prayer” are always *suggested* – and never quotations from scripture? Not at all! The “Sinner’s Prayer” is not part of God’s plan for saving mankind!

Calling On The Name Of The Lord

Now, I want to revisit the commandments of God to call on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13), accept Jesus Christ (Revelation 3:20; John 1:12), and confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10). I mentioned earlier that these passages present the absolute truth (just as all Bible passages do). However, the question becomes, “What does the Bible teach is involved in keeping these commandments?”

First, confessing the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation – as Romans 10:9-10 indicates. In order for an individual to be saved, he/she must believe on the Lord Jesus and confess Him. Acts 8:35-37 shows how this is part of becoming a Christian: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then 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.’”

Second, obeying all that God has instructed for salvation is necessary to receive Christ into your life and call on the name of the Lord. The scriptures teach the following as being necessary for salvation (note that this is the Bible’s plan of salvation): Hear God’s word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Specifically, notice that the Bible says baptism is involved in calling on the name of the Lord in Acts 22:16 (recording the instructions Ananias gave to Saul): “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” So, it is not the “Sinner’s Prayer” that is necessary in order to call on the name of the Lord; but, obedience to Christ’s commands that are necessary!

Conclusion

The “Sinner’s Prayer” simply does not originate with God! Instead, it originates with man. It is often said to be involved in salvation; but, the Bible says *absolutely nothing* about it! Let us all cast aside the false practices of men (like the “Sinner’s Prayer”) and determine to only follow God!

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