

The Sinner's Prayer Is Not Good Enough For Me! (And It Shouldn't Be Good Enough For You Either.)

Just before the year 2000 there was a lot of talk in the media about the threat of Y2K when computers would break down, power grids would "go out," Social Security accounts would be lost, bank records would be erased, and on and on it went. As it turned out, everything continued as it had in the years prior to 2000. But a lot of people believed the hype and were frightened by it.

Then came the Iraq war. The United States went to war because, among other things, it was an absolute certainty that Iraq had WMD's - weapons of mass destruction. And because it did, surely, we were told, once our troops hit the ground they would be killed in large numbers by the vast chemical reserves that Saddam Hussein had at his disposal. We know how all of that worked out. No WMD's were found and there were no mass casualties, at least not on "our" side. Yet, like Y2K, there were a lot of people who believed that WMD's existed before the invasion.

Because the "Y2K people" and the "WMD people" had special, classified access to intelligence and were in positions to know what the rest of the citizens didn't know they were trusted and believed. Many people were convinced that what they were told was in fact true. They were swept into a mindset that turned out to be completely erroneous.

Down through the history of man there have been other scares, threats, warnings, and "certainties" that also never panned out. Sometimes "false alarms" of this sort don't really hurt anyone. But what about certain pronouncements made by theologians? What if they, also with great sincerity, tell us something that is not actually true? Certainly regarding some doctrinal matters their erroneous statements do not do any great harm to anyone. No one will be in danger of damnation if a theologian mistakenly identifies who married Cain. But what if he is mistaken concerning matters of salvation and, believing what he says, we act upon and follow his advice? Jesus said in Matthew 15:13 "both [the teacher and the student] will fall into a ditch."

In the "world of religion" those who would follow Christ are not exempt from hearing erroneous information. Some religious groups have believed that Jesus Christ was going to return on a certain date and have believed it so strongly that they spared no time, energy, or expense in promoting a belief that turned out to have absolutely no truth to it whatsoever. In the end it made them look foolish and unfortunately has brought ridicule upon Christianity from persons who were already skeptics and scoffers of the Word of God. Shouting very loudly and promoting any "religious" doctrine that turns out to be false has done much harm to the cause of Christ over the centuries. It continues to do so.

The popular and widely accepted belief and practice of praying the "sinner's prayer" is one of those doctrines that will have the same effect when the Day of Judgment arrives. Sadly, it will be too late for anyone to do anything about it then. (By the way, no one knows when that day will arrive - not even those who say that they do know.) The vast majority of the "religious world" preaches and promotes this prayer as being the avenue or the means through which one can be saved. It is an alarming and disturbing truth for some to learn that the Bible does not anywhere say that salvation from sins can be or will be received by anyone in this way.

Many "religious" people reject this last statement as being unbelievable only because such a large number of religious groups say that this is the way to receive salvation. Sadly, many people who have prayed this prayer are resting their hope for their eternal salvation upon it. Their quick dismissal and rejection of anyone who says that the "sinner's prayer" for salvation is a doctrine that is foreign to the Bible do so because they have not taken the time to examine this issue for themselves. They have taken the word of a theologian that this doctrine is true. Having prayed this prayer with all sincerity and believing they were in fact saved after praying it, it is very difficult to convince these persons that what they did was all in vain, but that is exactly what they prayed - a vain prayer.

If you have prayed that prayer believing that you have been saved we hope that you will at least take the time to continue reading. Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 15:9. "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." You may want to read the context in which Jesus made that statement: "Religious" people were promoting a religious doctrine that was not from God. Jesus said that the doctrine those "religious people" were teaching was not from God, but from men. Therefore, that doctrine had no validity, no authority, and no approval from Him.

The "sinner's prayer" for salvation is such a doctrine; it is a doctrine made by men. Because it is, it cannot be found anywhere in the Word of God. Notice what we are saying here: teaching that salvation can be received by praying the "sinner's prayer" is a false doctrine; we are not saying that a sinner cannot pray to God. Of course, anyone can pray to God for whatever reason - salvation or otherwise. Whether or not God hears the prayer of a sinner, i.e., will in some way respond to it, we will leave to God. Certainly, God can and does audibly hear a prayer that comes from a sinner's lips. But hearing a sinner pray for salvation and granting salvation to a sinner following that prayer are two entirely different matters.

The book of Acts has been called the "book of conversions." It is called that because in that book the accounts of several conversions are recorded. There are ten such accounts. As they relate to the subject of this abbreviated tract it is interesting to note that in those conversion accounts not once is anyone ever told to pray the "sinner's prayer" or to "invite Jesus into your heart" for salvation - not once! Nor did anyone ever do it! You would think that if there were any place in the Bible that taught that one should pray this prayer for salvation it would be in this "book of conversions." But you cannot find it. It simply isn't there.

What we do find is that people were told to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:37 that he could be immersed in water for salvation if he believed with all of his heart. The eunuch said he did and then he was baptized. This follows the pattern of Jesus' statement in Mark 16:16. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." We also find that people were told to repent of their sins. Paul told an audience of intellectuals in Athens in Acts 17:30 that God "...now commands all men everywhere to repent." Apostle Peter said the same thing in II Peter 3:9 - the Lord is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." These two apostles were in agreement with Jesus Who said in Luke 13:3 and 5 - "...unless you repent you will all likewise perish." So at least belief (faith) in Christ and repentance are required for salvation. Neither of these two apostles ever told anyone to pray the "sinner's prayer." But, for salvation to be received, more than faith and repentance was required in "the book of conversions."

Baptism in water in the name of Jesus Christ was also a requirement for salvation. In fact, there is not one case of conversion in "the book of conversions" that did not also include this act of obedient, repentant faith. The first sermon that was ever preached, as far as what is recorded, is that of Peter's in Acts 2. When he was finished he said in Acts 2:38, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." And as we already noted, when the Ethiopian eunuch confessed his faith in Christ it is said in Acts 8 that the preacher who "preached Jesus to him," Philip, "went down into the water, and baptized [the eunuch.]" In the same chapter, it is stated that the Samaritans to whom Philip had earlier preached "the things concerning the kingdom of God," baptized "both men and women." Again, we notice that not once in the Bible was anyone told by those who preached the gospel of Christ to "repeat the sinner's prayer after me and invite Jesus into your heart."

When one takes the time to read the "book of conversions" he will notice time and time again that people were always told to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, and be immersed in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. Even the great Saul of Tarsus who later became the Apostle Paul was baptized to have his sins washed away. Before his immersion he had already fasted, Acts 9:9, and prayed, Acts 9:11, for three days but it was not until he was baptized that his sins were forgiven or "washed away" as

Acts 22:16 states it. If anyone ever prayed for his salvation it was Saul of Tarsus after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 but that is not how he received salvation.

Perhaps you have prayed the "sinner's prayer" in all earnestness. And when you ended your prayer you may have believed with all of your heart that you were saved. (There are many who have lingering doubts - not sure if they were in fact saved.) You did this because this is what some religious person told you to do saying this is how you would receive forgiveness from God. The fact that you did this was not sinful nor a sign of your rejection of God's Word that prescribes quite a different way to receive salvation. You did it because you trusted the person who told you to pray that prayer. But what do you do now? You can admit to yourself that what you did is not what the Bible teaches. Or, you can refuse to allow the Bible to have the final and ultimate authority in this matter. A heart filled with too much pride to admit that the "sinner's prayer" is a doctrine or commandment of men will not obey God and His Word and certainly will not lead to one's salvation in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth Who is the Christ.

There is nothing shameful in having done something in error thinking that it was the right thing to do. Even the Apostle Paul did that. In Acts 26:9 he admitted to King Agrippa that "Indeed" he "thought" that he "must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" which included shutting "up in prison" and putting "to death" "saints" of God as well as punishing, persecuting, and compelling them to blaspheme. (Acts 26:10-11) But to come to a knowledge of the truth regarding salvation and then to refuse to do what is written in God's Word is more than shameful; it is damning. It is our prayer that you will now do what is right. Follow God's plan of salvation and then praise and glorify him in a prayer that comes from the heart and across the tongue and lips of one who has been saved because he has done what the Bible says to do for salvation.



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