

# A Search for The Sinners Prayer

Does God Ask The Sinner to Pray for Salvation?

By Roy William Wheeler, Jr.

You hear it all the time, on TV, Radio, “*Pray this prayer, ask Jesus to come into your life, Ask God to forgive you; confess your sin and ask God to forgive your sins.*” You can find in written articles of pamphlets, books, etc., that the sinner who believes is to pray for his salvation and God will give it to him or her.

Here is one example found in a devotional booklet called “Open Windows”, published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention of Nashville, Tennessee. It is in Volume 66 - Number 1, inside page of the cover.

It is entitled “God’s Plan of Salvation.”

‘Jesus Christ was with God the Father before the world was created. He became human and lived among humanity as Jesus of Nazareth. He came to show us what God the Father is like. He lived a sinless life, showing us how to live; and He died upon a cross to pay for our sins. God raised Him from the dead.

‘Jesus is the source of eternal life. Jesus wants to be the doorway to new life for you. In the Bible He was called “Lamb of

God” (John 1:29). In the Old Testament, sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. Jesus became the sacrificial lamb offered for your sin.

‘Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but through me” (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

‘Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.

‘By faith receive Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.

‘Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

‘You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

‘After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.’

Is this the way the sinner receives forgiveness, is the sinner’s prayer Jesus’ truth? In Jesus’ own words, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall

make you free.” (If you abide in His word!) Where in His word, the New Testament of the Bible, does Jesus tell alien sinners to pray any prayer similar to the one given above, and he will be saved (forgiven of all past sins.)?

Jesus on another occasion told the Pharisees, *“You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; but you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”* (John 5:39-40)

We are not questioning salvation in Jesus, who is the savior of the sinful. We are questioning HOW the sinner is to come to Jesus as set forth in the “sinners prayer.” It is GOD’S plan of salvation. Does His plan include praying to Him for the forgiveness of sins. Does He forgive the sinner when the prayer is said?

Since Pentecost of Acts chapter 2, about AD 30, we live under the New Covenant of which Jesus is the mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). It is by this “will” that the sinner is sanctified through the sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 10:10).

In this “SEARCH” for the sinners prayer, one must understand that we need to handle aright the word of truth. It must be recognized that we are not living under the laws given by Moses to the children of Israel. Jesus during his lifetime did live under that covenant. He lived by it perfectly. As the lamb of God, He had, and said He had, authority on earth to forgive sin (Matthew 9:6). This is like any living person who has made a will in preparation of his death. While living he could dispense with his property, or estate as he chooses to do so. Once the death of the will maker occurs, what is written in the will must determine how the estate is handled.

Jesus was a man of prayer (Matthew 13:4). He taught much about prayer (Matthew 6:5ff). At the request of his disciples, he taught them how to pray (Matthew 6:9).

Jesus was a teacher come from God. His primary witness was to the house of Israel. He referred to them as the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 10:6 & 15:24). Sinful though they were, they were in a covenant relationship with God, and were governed by that covenant (Luke 2:39; John 18:31).

It is necessary to search beyond the Old Testament for the sinners prayer. Confession of sins by one not yet in covenant relationship with God cannot be found. God is not yet his Father.

We live under what is often called “the great commission” given unto the apostles of Jesus, following his resurrection and before his ascension to the right hand of His Father. The apostles were to bear witness of the resurrection. They were to preach the Gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ. They were to “make disciples;” baptize them in the name of (authority) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The disciple was to be taught to “observe” all things Jesus commanded them.

The robber on the cross with Jesus is often used as an example of salvation. We are not saved the way he was! Jesus was not dead but still alive on the cross. He had not risen from the dead. He had not ascended to his priesthood at the Father’s side. Note what Paul said about who will be saved: “*because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*” (Romans 10:9). This confession of lips is not the sinners prayer to God. It is the public confession before MEN (see Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8) Jesus is the one confessing

them before the angels and His Father in HEAVEN.

There is no question that faith in Jesus as Lord is required. That faith requires obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without it no man can be pleasing to the Father of Jesus Christ.

Where is the sinners prayer for God to forgive the sins of the alien sinner?

Where can a written example of such be found from Acts through the book of Revelation?

The Book of Acts is sometimes call the Book of Conversions. It is the record of the Apostles of Jesus fulfilling the great commission. Luke, the writer, uses the word pray, prayer, prayers 35 times for various reasons. Not one time is the *alien* sinner, who has heard the testimony of the Gospel preacher, told to pray the “sinners prayer” for his salvation to God.

There is one time that the Apostles Peter tells a recent believer to pray that God will forgive him the “thought” of his heart. That thought was that he could purchase the gift that the apostle had with money. Luke does not record that he did so, only that he requested Peter to pray for him. Can anyone pray God forgive the sinner. Can the sinner be forgiven in that way—without any action taken by the sinner him or herself? The Gospel is God’s power unto salvation of the sinner. Look at its power on the day of Pentecost as it was preached by Peter with the rest of the apostles.

Acts chapter 2 gives the fulfilling of Jesus promise to the apostles to endue them with power from on high, i.e. the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided Peter in showing the fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Joel. He then gave witness to Jesus being raised from the dead, of which

they were witness. He quoted David of the Old Testament as evidence to the truth of it (the resurrection). He then showed that David testified to the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God.

Peter makes this statement which brings a response from his hearers: “ Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Upon being convicted of their sin by the Holy Spirit’s message through Peter. They cried, “Men and brethren WHAT SHALL WE DO?” What did the Holy Spirit tell them to do? Say the sinners prayer?

Be it understood that what they were told to do is what the Holy Spirit tells all sinners to do for the forgiveness of their sins. The Apostle’s message is the Holy Spirit’s message; it is the message of Jesus Christ—it is God’s message, when obeyed has power to save the lost sinner.

Apostle Peter, what did you (in words of the Holy Spirit) tell them to do?

**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him. (Acts 2:38-39)**

The preaching of the Apostle Peter had already convicted them of the truth of the Gospel – Jesus is both Lord and Christ. They believed what Peter preached. Do you believe the truth Peter preached? What are you going to do? Say the sinners prayer, like so many teach today? Not if you are going to follow Jesus and do what the Holy Spirit says to do. You will do the same

as those did who received Peter's word. Your action will be based upon Scripture, sound and sure will be the result of the promise of God. Scripture makes one wise unto salvation which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)

Repent of the sins of your life. The Greek word for repent is: <**metanoeo**  
*met-an -o-eh' -o*>

Thayer, a Greek scholar, gives this meaning:

**1) to change one's mind, i.e. to repent**

**2) to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins**

Peter's message did not end with repent. The message was repent AND be baptized. Why baptism? What does baptism do? Notice that repent is joined with baptized by the conjunction AND. Why do so many accept the necessity of repentance for salvation but reject the necessity of baptism (immersion)?

What if Peter had said, "*shout AND jump every one of you for the remission of sins . . .*" Would it be alright to shout but not jump? Would you have met the requirement of the Holy Spirit if you just jumped? Would God forgive your sin if you did not accept all the message?

Can you not see the application to the commands of the Apostle Peter to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins? It should be noted also that it was not a matter of choice, i.e. if some of you want to—it was "every one of you." God's requirements are the same for all. He is not a God of partiality that says I will save some of you after this manner and some of you after another manner.

Those who repent and are baptized have the forgiveness of sin. Peter's word assures that the result will be the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is God's promise to them, to their children and all that are "afar off." Wherever the same gospel is proclaimed, in place or in time, and people respond to God's call to repent and be baptized, they have the forgiveness of their sin. They are a saved people.

What was the response of those who received the words of Peter?

**So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:30)**

When were they added? Before or after baptism? What does "added" mean? Added to what or whom? It means that they were added to the Lord's spiritual body, the church. Those saved individuals, sins now forgiven, souls purified by obeying the truth, have been purchased by the precious blood of the Lamb of God. The Lord has added them to his church. They are the church. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47).

The alien sinner is not added to the church by prayer. Where does the teachings of Jesus say, "*go look for a pastor or Christian and ask for baptism as a public expression of your faith?*"

Some dispute the meaning of the Greek word "eis" (for) in Acts 2:38, stating that it means *because of the remission of sins*. A parallel passage of Scripture will suffice to show the fallacy of that reasoning.

***"for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."***

**(Matthew 26:28)**

This same expression “*for the forgiveness of sins,*” shows the purpose why Jesus poured out His blood and the purpose of baptism. Jesus did not shed His blood AFTER sin was forgiven, but BEFORE sins could be forgiven. Baptism is not AFTER sins are forgiven but BEFORE sins are forgiven. Dare anyone say that the blood of Jesus was unnecessary for the forgiveness of sins. You can trust the words of God’s Holy Spirit.

Friend, if you were baptized for the wrong reason, you are still unforgiven. One should understand that repentance and baptism is FOR the remission of sins. Prayer is one of the privileges of a CHILD OF GOD..

**“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”.**

**(Galatians 3:25-27)**

You become a child of God, through faith, in baptism. If you are not IN Christ; you are OUT of Christ. The only way you can PUT ON Christ is to be baptized INTO Christ. It is not a work of merit, but “faith in the working of God” (Colossians 2:12).

The child of God has the obligation to repent and confess to God for any sins he commits as His child.

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)**

John is writing to Christians. This is not said of the alien sinner. The sinner who is seeking God may pray to Him. God may in His providence choose to bring the sinner and the preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ together that the sinner may hear the message of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Some examples in Scripture are Saul (later apostle Paul), and the Roman centurion, Cornelius.

**And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, *he is praying,*" (Acts 9:11)**

Did the prayer of Saul save him? Listen to Paul's own account of his conversion.

**"And now why do you wait? Rise and *be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord.*"**  
**(Acts 22:16)**

Saul (Paul), was still in his sins until baptized, according to Paul's own statement.

**At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and *prayed constantly to God.* (Acts 10:1-2)**

Was Cornelius saved by his constant prayers to God? Read the rest of the story in Acts chapter 10. The Apostle Peter was sent to Cornelius to tell

him and all his household what to do. Here is what Cornelius told Peter.

**“Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” (Acts 10:33)**

Peter preached the Gospel about Jesus to this household of Cornelius, although he was a Gentile. God on this occasion gave them the Holy Spirit to show Peter and those Jews who came with him that God accepts Gentiles into the faith.

Peter’s response as to what they were to do is found in verses 47-48 of Acts chapter 10.

**“Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.**

Baptism was commanded because **God commanded it**. It is essential to the forgiveness of sin. Baptism is part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you are going to teach others Jesus, you must teach obedience to the commands of God.(2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). Baptism, just like repentance, is a demand of FAITH, not a work of MERIT.

**“And now why do you wait? Rise and *be baptized*, calling on the name of the Lord.” Do what the apostle Paul did!**

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