

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"*
Psalm 119:104

June 24, 2018

The Sinner's Prayer

by Frank Himmel

What must I do to be saved? is the most essential question one could ask. The Bible answer is to believe in Jesus (Acts 16:31). And how is such saving faith expressed? Increasingly, people are relying on the sinner's prayer as the basis of accepting Jesus' offer of salvation. Here is the late Billy Graham's example, from his book *How to Be Born Again* (169).

O God, I acknowledge that I have sinned against You. I am sorry for my sins. I am willing to turn from my sins. I openly receive and acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Savior. I confess Him as Lord. From this moment on I want to live for Him and serve Him. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Is this what the Bible teaches?



Notable Absences

Bible readers surely must notice the absence of such a prayer in the New Testament.

It is absent in Jesus' instructions to the apostles about what to preach. Neither Matthew (29:18-20) nor Mark (16:15-16) nor Luke (24:47)

record Jesus saying a single word about prayer when He commissioned them to go preach the gospel.

It is absent in the apostles' preaching. Acts 2 records the first time the gospel was preached to Jews, and Acts 10 records the first time it was preached to Gentiles. Neither audience was taught to pray such a prayer as part of their response to the gospel.

It is absent in the examples of conversion. The book of Acts includes a number of accounts of people becoming Christians. Do you realize that there is not one mention of the sinner's prayer anywhere in the book? That is incredible if it is the proper means of expressing saving faith.

Suggested Proofs

The conspicuous absence of references to the sinner's prayer in these passages where we would most expect them is surely troubling. Now consider three texts that are suggested as proofs.

Luke 18:9-14. This is Jesus' contrasting story about a Pharisee and a tax collector who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed to himself. The tax collector prayed, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Jesus said the latter went to his house justified.

Is this an example of the sinner's prayer of accepting Jesus? Not at all! First, the purpose of the parable was to teach about self-righteousness (v. 9), not to outline the specific process of our salvation. Second, these men both lived in an era before the gospel went into ▶

effect. Third, notice again what is absent: Christ is not mentioned in either prayer, and nothing either man did was in response to Christ. Therefore, this cannot be the sinner’s prayer of accepting Christ! It does illustrate the contrition God requires as a condition of forgiveness.

Ephesians 3:17. Max Lucado in his book *3:16* cites this verse as the means of answering the gospel invitation. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Lucado opts for the very loose rendering, “Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite Him in” [MSG]).

The sinner’s prayer is not in this text, either. First, this is part of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian Christians, not those out of Christ. Second, even if we grant a poor “translation” and ignore the context, the verse does not say how to “invite Him in.” Prayer, as the means, must be assumed.

Romans 10:13. Paul, citing the Old Testament prophet Joel, wrote, “for ‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

Calling on the name of the Lord is a somewhat indefinite expression. It may refer to prayer (e.g., Psalm 116:4) or to worship more broadly (e.g., Genesis 12:8) or to turning to God (e.g., Isaiah 55:6-7) or to serving Him (e.g., Acts 9:14).

Once again, this text does not specify prayer as the means of calling on the Lord’s name. That is assumed. If anything, the context may point to a confession of

“Do Not Be Afraid”

by Frank Himmel

One night Jesus observed His disciples “straining at the oars” because the wind was against them. He came to them, walking on the sea. They were terrified. He responded, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid” (Mark 6:50). The wind stopped.

We have those moments, too, when we are straining due to life’s challenges. Jesus is not going to physically walk to us, but His message is the same: “It is I; do not be afraid.” Keep your heart trusting in Him, your eyes focused on Him, and your feet moving toward Him. He will see you through your trial, too. ■

our faith (vv. 9-10). Ananias taught Paul that baptism is the means. He told Paul [known at the time as Saul], who had been praying, “Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16b). That is the same thing that Peter, also citing Joel 2:32, told his audience on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21, 38; cf. 1 Pet. 3:21).

Conclusion

The sentiment of the sinner’s prayer is certainly right—seeking forgiveness in Christ—but the means is wrong. It is not the gospel plan of salvation. Jesus saves those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Have you called on His name in baptism? ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Chris Brooks	Josh Baucom
SONG LEADER	Bruce Williams	Albert Harrison Sr
OPENING PRAYER	Carlos Garcia	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Steven Turner	
CUP	Josh Baucom	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Bruce Hollander	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Mark Clifton
CLOSING PRAYER	Adam Gibson	Daven Daniel