

What's Wrong With The Sinner's Prayer?



“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” - Luke 18:13

There's nothing wrong with the ABOVE prayer. No one told the man to say it. No one told him that **by saying it** he would receive salvation or anything from God. God had apparently already humbled this man and shown him his sinful state and his need for God's mercy. But what about the typical “sinner's prayer” that many lost souls are urged to pray **in order to become** saved. Take this prayer for example that can be found on the back page of millions of tracts handed out by a certain tract ministry:

Dear God, I am a sinner and need forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ shed his precious blood and died for my sin. I am willing to turn from sin. I now invite Christ to come into my heart and live as my personal Savior.

The person who prays that prayer is told that if they prayed it and really mean it, then they are saved. But does salvation really work that way?

“For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” [1 Samuel 16:7]

How can any human being make some dogmatic statement about the condition of any person's soul? Anybody can repeat any words they want without any permanent change of their heart. Salvation requires an act of God:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” [Ezekiel 36:26]

God the Holy Spirit must convict a person of their sin and their need of salvation - FROM HELL - from the eternal punishment they deserve for their sins, and not for the purpose or intention of prosperity or personal gain. Also, you can “believe” what you want about Jesus but that does not make you saved:

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” [James 2:19]

What you believe about Jesus is certainly **an indication of whether or not you are saved** but **it doesn't make you saved**.

A dog may bark a lot, but barking does not make him a dog. God made him a dog. Likewise if a person goes around saying they believe they are Napoleon Bonaparte, that does not make them Napoleon, it just indicates that they think they are Napoleon. The point being that we don't obtain salvation by doing anything including by saying anything. There is no magical incantation or prayer a person can recite to become saved. We all are entirely at the mercy of God and lost and damned until and unless He decides - simply according to His good pleasure - that He is going to save us.

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" [Ephesians 1:4-5]

And then the responsibility is upon God to send a preacher (or multiple preachers) of the Gospel to the sinner He is going to save.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And **how shall they preach, except they be sent?" [Romans 10:13-15]**

Did you notice something in the above passage from Romans chapter 10? It says you have to **believe** in the Lord **before** you can **call** upon the Lord. And only God can enable the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the unbelievers to believe.

"Salvation is of the Lord" [Jonah 2:9]

Lastly, we wish to point out that in the sinner's prayer, the sinner is told to "invite" Christ into their heart. However, Jesus Christ is not at the mercy of the sinner waiting to be invited in. **The sinner is at the mercy of Christ.**

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" [Titus 3:5]
