

Is the Sinner's Prayer Necessary for Salvation?

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Have you heard of the “Sinner’s Prayer?” Perhaps you have been asked to recite it with someone so they might be saved? We are going to investigate the question, “Is the Sinner’s Prayer Necessary for Salvation?” Is it Scriptural to pray with the purpose of believing on Christ for salvation? Some are disturbed and

concerned about people “praying for their salvation” for they feel that prayer overshadows belief, that it is not necessary for salvation to occur, and that there is no definitive record of people praying for salvation in Scripture.

Over the years I have been asked: “Do you condone prayer as a necessary part of salvation?” Recently I received an email from someone who was viewing my internet Gospel tracts which were displayed online. His question was basically focused on this same matter: “Must you pray to be saved?”

Evangelist Larry Moyer shared this story:

“During an evangelistic outreach in Texas, when I invited those who wanted to trust Jesus Christ to talk with me, a teenager responded. I asked him, ‘Why did you respond?’ He answered, ‘I’ve come to realize that I need to be saved.’ I said to him, ‘Tell me a little bit about yourself.’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘when I was very small, I bowed my head and invited Christ into my heart. ‘So I said to him, ‘Now let me ask you something extremely important. Have you been trusting Christ or have you been trusting a prayer to save you?’ His reply was distressing. ‘I did not even know Christ died for me. I thought God liked that prayer so much that if you simply said that prayer, you’d go to heaven. I’ve never understood you have to trust Christ to save you.’ Giving people the kind of message that boy received can be damaging and misleading” (*Moyer, R. L.; 1997; Free and clear: understanding & communicating God’s offer of eternal life, p. 42, Kregel Publications*).

Of course, a prayer does not save anyone; belief in Christ is what saves. Believing is the necessary requirement for salvation (Jn. 6:47; Acts 16:31).

However, when you believe on Jesus you are connecting or communicating with Him and essentially concluding, “I believe in You Christ – Your death and resurrection to save me and give me eternal life.” You don’t remain dormant or passive in order to be saved (Rev. 22:17). There is a commitment of one’s faith alone to Christ alone which involves a clear sense of communication.

The Bible says, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:12-13). If you call upon someone, you are communicating with them, speaking to them, even as Israel will call upon Jehovah to save them in the future (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21).



1 Corinthians 1:2 also speaks of calling on Christ:

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

Robert Gromacki states:

“How does one become a saint? By calling upon the name of Christ. The Corinthians had done this, and so had believers in other localities. In fact, this is the simplest definition of the procedure to secure personal salvation (Acts 2:21; 9:14, 21; Rom. 10:13).”

To call on the Lord (Acts 7:59) would certainly have the connotation to pray while expressing belief in Christ for salvation. It may not be an *outward* verbal call but certainly an *inward* volitional call and the direction of one’s faith toward Christ and His salvation. The concept of calling indicates communicating our belief to Christ and His saving work. A Biblical belief always includes the appropriation of a person’s faith to Jesus Christ which includes a volitional response to Christ’s offer of salvation (John 3:18; Rom. 4:5).

Romans 10:14 goes on to say, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” In other words, it’s understood that no person can call upon Christ to be his Savior without believing for the two are inextricably bound

together as part of genuine belief. The person who believes calls and the person who calls believes.

Charles Spurgeon said:

“A man cannot call upon the name of the Lord, unless he trusts in that name. We must have reliance upon the name of Christ, or else we have not called aright.”

In essence, you cannot believe on Christ without communicating with Christ since He is the One doing the saving. Of course, there is no need for the sinner to pray and exact prayer (“the sinner’s prayer”) in order to be saved but a person must transfer his faith to Jesus Christ via communication with Him, acknowledging his sinfulness before God, his need for salvation, and desire to be saved.

There is a true story about the power of Gospel tracts. A man who was once scuba diving found a piece of paper in the sand at the bottom of the ocean. He brought it up to the surface and realized it was a Gospel tract. He read it and got saved right then and there by transferring his faith to Christ. He went around the world sharing his testimony declaring that "God literally chased me to the bottom of the ocean and saved my life!"

Calling (Rom. 1:13), believing (Jn. 3:16), receiving (Jn. 1:12), coming (Matt. 11:28) drinking (John 4:14), and eating (Jn. 6:57) are all synonyms and different ways to express the appropriation of a person’s faith to Christ. They speak of an inward commitment of one’s faith, soul, and destiny to Jesus Christ alone (His death, resurrection, and promise of eternal life). Belief does not have to be an *outward* audible or verbal commitment but an *inward* commitment of one’s faith to the Lord Jesus Christ “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10). But faith essentially involves actively and decisively communicating with God through reliance or belief in His Son to be one’s Savior (Gal. 3:26).

Unbelief is staying disconnected from Christ. Belief is connecting oneself to Christ when responding to Him, reaching out to Him as the only way of salvation (Jn. 14:6). “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and



faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). This indicates that there is a response that is directed toward God the Father and Jesus Christ for the salvation of the soul. An individual’s repentance and faith are activated through acknowledgment of their sinfulness and need for salvation which can only occur when a person communicates with God. Expressing faith in Christ is a decision and direct response to His person and saving work (Rom. 1:16).

The sinner will conclude: “I repent”; “I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”; “I accept”; “I will take or receive of Your offer of salvation.” Essentially, this is communicating with God or addressing God for our salvation. This is because we are repenting before God and believing on Jesus Christ to be our Savior. Repentance and belief cannot occur without communication. We are not sterile and unresponsive to God when it comes to our salvation. Hence, there is a prayer connection with Jesus Christ via repentance and faith.

When you rely on someone you are committing yourself to that person to do what he says. The expression of faith (a commitment of one’s soul and destiny to Christ) is summed up in Paul’s words: “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). You cannot commit your faith, soul, and destiny to Christ without making the point to communicate with Him. We entrust our very soul to the only One who can save us.

Call it prayer, communicating with Christ, calling upon Christ; it all boils down to the same thing – faith. It’s not a faith that stands on the sidelines, but an active and definite faith placed in Christ. True faith always reaches out to rest upon some object. If we go to a doctor, we must rest our faith in him. If we go to a lawyer, we must put our case in his hands. This is what we must do with Christ. We fully trust or rely on Christ to be our Savior which requires a personal response on our part.



Signature

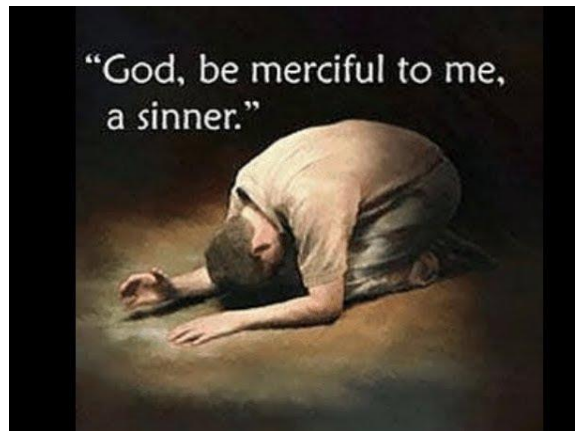
True saving faith always ends in personal commitment of one’s faith alone to Christ alone. Sales people understand this principle. After the presentation is made, at some point people have to sign on the dotted line. If they say, “I know that’s a good

product,” you haven’t made a sale. If they say, “I believe I need that,” they are closer, but you still haven’t made a sale. But when they say, “Where do I sign?” you’ve just closed the deal. Saving faith understands the Gospel, believes the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), and then commits to the Gospel as the only hope of salvation. It reaches out and trusts Christ as Savior which involves communicating with Christ.

Luke 23:42 speaks of saving faith:

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Luke 18:13 also reveals the nature of genuine faith: “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.”



This is a prayer! In fact, these verses illustrate that when a person believes they are communicating with Christ. This means addressing the Lord in prayer can be an expression of our faith (belief), but the act of praying itself does not guarantee salvation. There is no magical formula one must pray for salvation; the core belief in Jesus is what matters. That being said, belief is expressed through dependence (trust) in Christ which involves essentially addressing Christ in some simple manner so He might become one’s personal Savior.



God requires that we “come” (a metaphor or figure of speech for faith) to Christ for salvation (Jn. 6:37; Rev. 22:17). Do you come to a person without communicating with them? No! So there is a sense that the act of believing or faith in Christ involves some kind of communication (“I

believe”; “Yes, I will take eternal life”; “I will trust in Jesus to be my Savior”; “From this point forward I’m depending on You to be my Savior, etc.).

Isaiah 1:18

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

“Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and pow’r.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all.”

You cannot “come” (Jn. 6:35, 37) without acknowledging that you are a sinner in need of salvation. So coming to Christ or faith in Christ involves an intelligent response to the message of salvation (“come unto the knowledge of the truth” - 1 Tim. 2:4) and commitment of one’s faith or belief to Christ (John 3:15-18). In other words, a response is required that connects the sinner to Christ and ultimately Christ to the sinner. “Yes, I’m a sinner, Yes, I believe on Christ, Yes I need eternal life.” This is essentially addressing God. How can you be saved without addressing Jesus Christ in belief? It’s impossible. Belief in Christ involves communicating with Him as you place your trust in His saving work. No communication – no belief.

John 4:10 reveals something interesting on this topic of prayer and asking: “Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”

The woman at the well was told by Jesus to ask for the free gift of eternal life. John 4:15 shows there is a correlation between asking and believing Christ for eternal life: “The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”

Sir, give me this water

John 4:15

This is asking! Yes, it's praying. It's communicating with Christ. But it's ultimately believing! Christ's point was that He had what this woman needed if she would only receive it. She had to appropriate His offer by faith, and this involved simply asking God for this free gift. So a decision must be made; the gift of eternal life and salvation must be appropriated. And here is the obvious point. How can you trust someone to save you without conversing with them? "Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30) is one illustration.

There is a movement of a person's will toward Christ in conversion ("turned to God from idols" - 1 Thess. 1:8) which can only be expressed through addressing God. Again, no person is saved by simply praying a prayer, on the other hand, no person is saved by being passive and unresponsive to God's initiatives and failing to directly address God for his need of salvation.

Of course, many have been saved throughout the years while praying a "sinner's prayer" for the simple reason that they expressed personal faith in Christ while addressing the Savior, committing their faith alone to Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Again, addressing God through prayer to receive God's free gift of salvation is not foreign to Scripture (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2).

When a person calls upon the Lord, they are addressing Him, communicating with Him, as they personally rely upon Christ to save them. Through prayer an individual can transfer his faith to the Savior. The prayer does not save him but his faith in Christ does. This is what needs to be made clear to those who desire salvation. As they pray, they are to put their trust in the Savior (not their prayer). Prayer is only a means to an end. It allows a poor lost sinner to express his faith in Christ for salvation. However, recited creeds and prayers do not save anyone; Christ saves them. Their faith must be rooted in Christ and not after the traditions of men (Mk. 7:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:18).

I believe!

Let's finish our study with a simple fact. Everyone who has ever been saved has *internally* and at times *verbally* expressed faith in Christ through directing their faith (belief) toward Him for the salvation of their soul ("with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" – 1 Cor. 1:2). Label it what you may, personal prayer or communication with the Savior; one thing is certain, the simplest acknowledgment ("Lord, I believe"), be it verbally or nonverbally, is necessary for the salvation of the sinner. A person cannot cast his trust upon Christ and be saved without communicating his desire and decision to do so. When a sinner states, "I believe" he is communicating with the Lord and is immediately transferred from the realm of spiritual death to spiritual life (Jn. 5:24). In reality, whether inwardly or verbally, belief is communicating with Jesus Christ as we transfer our faith to Him and His saving work on our behalf. Without connecting to Christ, we remain disconnected from the vine (Jn. 15:1-3).

Like wires connected together which transfer electricity to its intended destination, so contact or communication with the Lord, expressing one's personal belief in Christ ("I believe"), brings the sinner into a justified standing before God (Rom. 3:28; 5:1). Faith makes the contact between God and man, and this can only occur when the sinner takes time to talk or communicate with the Lord. Are you wired to Jesus?



As the songwriter said:

“I once was lost in sin but Jesus took me in
And then a little light from heaven filled my soul.
It bathed my heart in love and wrote my name above
And just a little talk with Jesus made me whole.”