

**The Sinner's Prayer:
A History of Confusion and a Gospel of Clarity
Romans 10:9-15**

INTRODUCTION: Where Did This Come From?

Most people today think salvation works like this:

1. Realize you're a sinner.
2. Say a prayer.
3. Now you're saved.

But let me ask you: Where is that in the Bible? I promise you that it's not there.

If you're trusting in a prayer you said, instead of the Savior who bled, then friend, you're trusting in the wrong thing. The Gospel isn't about what you say—it's about what Jesus did.

Today, we're going to:

- Lay out the true biblical plan of salvation.
- Expose the man-made invention called the Sinner's Prayer.
- Show why it has corrupted the Gospel for millions,
- Call God's people back to faith alone in Christ alone.

I. What the Bible Actually Says About Salvation

The Bible never tells you to ask Jesus to save you. It tells you to believe that He already died, was buried, and arose from the dead to pay for all your sins. Put your trust in Jesus only. We aren't to put our trust in a prayer that we say. "Was it a good enough prayer? What did I pray? I don't remember exactly what I prayed. Maybe I need to pray again."

But the Bible says nothing like that. We see all kinds of people saying all kinds of different things AFTER they believed, and those exact words didn't matter. They believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

""John 3:36

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.""

""Acts 16:30-31

And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.""

You cannot call these Scriptures a lie. There are hundreds within the Bible saying believing, faith, and trust in Jesus Christ is what saves someone. The moment of believing in Christ is the moment of salvation. Hath everlasting life.

You can't make additions to these Scriptures, or you are calling these Scriptures a lie. You can't say that you must confess with your mouth to be saved. The Bible is clear that you receive the righteousness of God at the moment you believe.

And let's say someone believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and God has given them the righteousness of God. Are they walking around with the righteousness of God but not yet saved because they didn't say anything out loud or the Sinner's Prayer? Come on, man. This is getting ridiculous.

II. The Contradiction in Modern Preaching

Listen, I never once believed saying a prayer would save someone. I have always believed, since I was saved, that it's faith alone in Jesus Christ. But, I was with people in Washington that are now saying you must ASK to be saved AFTER you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a contradiction with the Bible. And people are easily deceived.

I use a Sinner's Prayer now. But I never believed the prayer saved someone. So, recently, others such as a You Tube channel named "Sermon Trailers" made me think about this more. I never really stopped and thought about what was being done. I am thankful to that man for making me think about these things. But we go to the Bible ALWAYS for the truth.

And I'm changing how I do things at the end of the Gospel presentation. I simply went by what a group of people were doing because I trusted them. See, this is wrong. And we are not to have respect of persons. We need to make sure we don't go down the wrong path. These kinds of things are very dangerous.

Many preachers say salvation is by faith alone and then lead people in a prayer to be saved. I have done this many times. I have always believed salvation is by faith alone but asking Jesus to save you in prayer is adding confusion. I do believe they are already saved the moment they believed during the Gospel. I don't think it's evil to say, "Jesus, please save me."

I think it can be a good thing if someone hasn't yet believed. They can believe at any moment including the moment they say: "Jesus, please save me." But then saying those words do not save them. Faith saves them. The exact moment of faith saves them. It is not the prayer.

People will preach: "You can't work your way to heaven! Just believe in Jesus!" But then they say: "Now bow your head and ask Jesus to save you. If you won't do that, you aren't saved."

Again, I have never once believed that. Why? That's a contradiction within what they just said and with what the Bible says. I usually say, this prayer doesn't save you. It's believing that saves

you. I know I haven't always said that because we forget different things during the Gospel. Everyone does at times. But we have to get things right.

If believing is enough, then asking is unnecessary. But if asking is necessary, then you don't really believe it's by faith alone. And that's the truth. Because asking Jesus to save you is NOT EQUAL to believing in Jesus.

The people who are preaching that you must ask are also saying that you must use your mouth and ask. You have to verbally ask Jesus to save you. You can't just do it from within either is what they're saying. For example, one just said you must confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus to be saved. Then there's hundreds of Scriptures that are lies.

This is the more modern two-step gospel in many Baptist Churches:

1. Believe in Jesus
2. Then ASK Jesus to save you

""John 3:15-16

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.""

Listen, I am spending more time on this because I want you to see the deception of adding things to what Jesus clearly says over and over again.

Adding a prayer FOR SALVATION—even a well-meaning one—and telling people they must ask Jesus to be saved is adding confusion to the Gospel and leads people to trust the wrong thing. It does. You can see this. They confused me over and over again. I am still confused as to what they actually believe.

They say it's faith alone. And many say that in their Gospel presentation, but then they say you MUST ASK Jesus to save you. Many of the pastors in the New Independent Fundamental Baptist movement are saying this. Now I think it's most all of them. They are adding confusion to God's clear Gospel plan.

III. Where Did the Sinner's Prayer Come From?

Now, I want to focus on the origin of the Sinner's Prayer. Where did this come from? If it were a valid requirement for salvation, we should see it's origin or beginning within the Bible.

If the sinner's prayer is so essential, it should show up in:

- The teachings of Jesus
- The book of Acts
- The writings of Paul

- The early church fathers

""Acts 10:43-44

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.""

They believed—and were saved before saying a single word. This is the Holy Scriptures and ALL SCRIPTURE is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

Some of the pastors out there in the New IFB don't like me so they won't listen to me. But I am using the Scriptures for reproof and correction and instruction. God is right. You aren't.

Here's the truth. You won't find the Sinner's Prayer in the Bible. You won't find anyone saying, "Jesus, please save me now." You won't find a Sinner's Prayer in the early church.

You will only find faith in the finished work of Christ. Put your FAITH IN the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. Not ask. Not repeat after me. Not say a prayer to be saved. Not trusting in asking, prayer, or confession. If the Sinner's Prayer and asking Jesus to save you isn't in the Bible for salvation, then the origin of these things are not from God.

And if they aren't from God, who do you think they're from? Imagine how many people, so far, have went to hell because they thought the prayer saved them.

IV. The History of a Man-Made Invention: The Sinner's Prayer

The so-called "sinner's prayer" is not found anywhere in the Bible. It was never preached by Jesus, practiced by the apostles, or recorded in Acts when people got saved. Peter never once tells the people being saved to repeat a prayer with him. Jesus himself. Never once.

Yet today, it's often treated as the standard method of salvation. People will even call saved men and women reprobates who are headed for hell and pray for their death in hell because they say the Sinner's Prayer doesn't save anyone. How did that happen? What happened?

Let's walk through its development—and how this tradition grew into a worldwide practice.

1526 – William Tyndale

Listen to this that I found. "Tyndale believed salvation was by faith alone, but in the preface to his 1526 New Testament, he included a sample prayer of repentance to help readers express belief."

This is why you can't trust the Internet. That isn't in the preface to his New Testament. He didn't say to repeat a prayer. He never taught it was necessary for salvation. We don't see him saying that once. Tyndale emphasized belief in the heart, not repeating a formula.

1600s–1700s – John Bunyan & the Puritans

John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*) wrote about crying out to God, and Puritan writers often spoke of repentance and calling upon the Lord—but they always tied it to faith, not a repeat-after-me ritual.

Bunyan (*Grace Abounding*): "I fell at the feet of Christ, and with brokenness of heart cried out, 'Lord, save me! I am undone!'"

But these were personal cries of faith, not altar call scripts to get someone saved. Faith saves. He knew that and preached that. The crying out doesn't save. Faith saves. The crying out comes from faith, but it can also come from showmanship too.

1800s – Charles Finney and the “Anxious Bench”

Finney introduced emotional pressure tactics, asking people to sit on an “anxious bench” if they were under conviction. He then led them to publicly confess and pray, often equating this with conversion.

Finney would urge: "Come forward and give your heart to Christ. Say to Him, 'I will, I do give my heart to Thee.'"

This blended faith with public performance, subtly changing the focus. So we see that focus shifting from faith to public confessions and performances. We can't go the same way. But we still don't see this repeat after me prayer recorded yet.

Late 1800s – D.L. Moody & R.A. Torrey

Moody used inquiry rooms where counselors led seekers in model prayers. R.A. Torrey even published sample prayers in his books.

Torrey (*How to Work for Christ*): “Dear Jesus, I come to You. I confess that I am a sinner. I believe You died for me. I now accept You as my Savior. Amen.”

This was the beginning of “repeat after me” evangelism, but still not universal.

But this is similar to what I've seen before and what I continued at times. Listen to what D.L. Moody said in a sermon: "Some people think they must go and pray a long time before they can be saved. But you must believe. It is not your prayers, it is not your tears, it is not your feelings—it is your believing."

But then he'd lead people in a **model prayer**, making it unclear whether the **prayer** or the **faith** was what saved them. This is confusion that entered. Did it happen with him first? The research that I did on the internet is saying it is. And I am talking about a repeat after me prayer.

Torrey taught that salvation came through **believing on Jesus Christ**, but he also heavily emphasized:

- **Saying the sinner's prayer**
- **"Receiving Christ" through a decision**
- **Public confession as necessary evidence**

From his book *"How to Bring Men to Christ"*:

"The way to receive Him is stated very plainly in John 1:12... 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'"

But he consistently followed this with:

"Now, my friend, will you receive Him? If you will, say this prayer..."

In effect, Torrey **equated "receiving" with praying a prayer** and **blurred the simplicity of believing**.

Both Moody and Torrey **used the language of faith**, but neither consistently taught **faith alone without human action or expression** like: Coming forward, Public confession, Saying a prayer, Surrendering.

And both helped lay the groundwork for the **modern confusion** around the sinner's prayer. Personally, I don't want to continue in this confusion AT ALL. I was led that way-the wrong way by the NIFB who just continued a tradition, and instead I need to do my absolute best to stick to the Bible. I made a mistake. I am just a man. But I need to do better.

I remember thinking, "Well, this can't hurt to ask Jesus to save you." We need to be very clear that once someone believes they are saved. We cannot create confusion for the person.

We go by the Bible here and not traditions of men. And that's what the Sinner's Prayer happens to be.

So, this happened in the late 1800's. Now we see this continuing into the early 1900's. You see this start in the United States as, supposedly, there are no other instances of this in other languages. That's amazing.

American evangelists started using this. No other records of this being used anywhere else throughout the world. Now, this is the Internet. So it might not be correct.

Early 1900s – Billy Sunday

Billy Sunday brought revivalist theatrics to American Christianity. He urged people to come forward and be saved, often with short prayers shouted out loud.

Example: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner, and save me for Jesus’ sake.” He equated emotion and response with salvation.

Yes, the publican in Luke 18:13 says: "Lord, be merciful unto me a sinner." This is a good thing to pray to God, but again, the faith is what saves. Not the prayer. Not emotions. Not a response like going to the altar at the end of the service. Not coming forward.

Mid-1900s – Billy Graham & Campus Crusade for Christ

This is where the modern sinner’s prayer exploded.

Billy Graham’s crusades featured a standard salvation prayer at the end of each message. Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright wrote the famous “Four Spiritual Laws” tract, ending with a scripted prayer.

Billy Graham-style prayer: "Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior."

Bill Bright’s Sinner’s Prayer: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord."

By the 1970s, this was the dominant method of evangelism in Baptist, evangelical, and non-denominational churches.

Summary: A Subtle but Damaging Shift

What started as individual prayers of faith became a formula, and that formula became a requirement in many churches.

But the Bible says it's believing in the Lord Jesus Christ that saves. Not “say this prayer” or “ask Jesus into your heart”—but believe IN Jesus.

The History of the Sinner's Prayer

The sinner’s prayer is not evil by itself. Many truly saved people have prayed when they believed. The danger is when the prayer replaces faith—when people trust what they said instead of what Jesus did. We have to draw a line in the sand there.

Biblical salvation is not found in a phrase you repeat, but in a Savior you trust.

V. Why the Sinner's Prayer Is Dangerous

""Galatians 1:6-7

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.""

1. It's Another Gospel – Adding a prayer to faith alone turns the true Gospel into a false Gospel. This is serious. If you tell someone they must ask, you call the Scriptures a lie. Very dangerous.

""John 6:47

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

2. It Gives False Assurance – People trust a prayer they said instead of Christ Himself.

""1 John 5:13

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.""

3. It Causes Spiritual Doubt – People pray over and over, trying to 'do it right.' But salvation is about believing, not reciting the perfect words.

Here's an exact quote from a Pastor who I thought once preached believing alone saves you, but now I believe he is preaching that you must say a prayer and ask Jesus to save you. Here's what he said exactly:

"I prayed and asked Christ to save me more than once just to be safe. Even though I know it only takes one time. I've done it a few times just to be safe." Then he says: "I believe I got saved when I was six years old. I believe I understood everything and I prayed. But you know, a few years later, I wondered like, did I understand everything when I was six. And I just dropped to my knees and said Hey, just in case, Lord, you know what? I just am going to confess to you right now that I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for my sins and rose again. I'm fully trusting what he did to save me and nothing else. And you know, please save me right now. I did that a few times growing up just to be covered. Just to be safe because you know, you don't want to play with it."

But that is playing with it. Does that mean he thinks asking to save is what saves? When he asks and doesn't believe that it's only what Jesus did, not his asking, Jesus doesn't hear. It's believing ONLY that saves you. Does he trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ? It at least brings doubt because of what he says.

I always thought he did believe in Jesus alone, but only he knows. It's not asking that saves you. There's probably hundreds of thousands of people over the last 200 years that wondered if they said the Sinner's Prayer correctly.

VI. What Does “Call Upon the Name of the Lord” Really Mean?

""Romans 10:13-15

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 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? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!""

Calling is the expression of belief—it's not a separate step. When you believe, you're already calling on Him with your heart. Why are you believing IN Jesus? You are believing in Jesus to save you?

It's rather simple. Everyone seems to always stop at verse 13. But it all goes together. And yes, I believe this is talking about salvation because of the context of the chapter and especially because of verse 15. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace."

But look at verse 14 closely. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" They believe, and they are saved. They believe first before they call. Once they believe they are saved.

If someone believes on Jesus Christ in their heart—that is the call for salvation. They are believing in Jesus for salvation. They are trusting Him from within. A definition of call on or call upon is to make a request to someone in an earnest or urgent matter. God hears everything you are believing. As you are believing in Jesus, you are believing in Him for salvation.

When someone speaks after they have believed in the Bible, the Bible is showing us that they have believed when they speak. The speaking isn't saving them at all. Martha says, "Yea, Lord, I believe." She already believed before she spoke. She was saved and had called upon the Lord just prior to her confessing Jesus with her mouth. She was saved and then confessed Jesus.

But she didn't say a Sinner's Prayer. She was speaking to Jesus. Are we calling that a prayer now? The closest thing to a Sinner's Prayer is "Lord be merciful unto me a sinner." But those words didn't save the Publican. His faith saved him. The woman at the well didn't ask Jesus to save her soul from death and hell. She was asking for water so she didn't have to come back to that well for water.

When someone depends on Jesus alone to be saved, they are calling upon him for salvation. That's why they are believing in him.

It's silly to act like someone who has believed in Jesus but hasn't opened their mouth yet isn't saved. It's some weird in between place where they are righteous for heaven but can't enter heaven until they speak the right words.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is not equal to the Sinner's Prayer or asking with your mouth for Jesus to save you. Don't twist Scriptures and add something to salvation when hundreds of verses says you are saved by faith alone.

To call upon the name of the Lord means to appeal to Jesus Christ in full faith—trusting Him alone to save you. It is an inward act of the heart, not an outward ritual. I want to give you a couple of examples to help you understand this better.

1. The Drowning Man & the Lifeguard

A man is drowning. He flails all over the place. He's choking. He's sinking. He can't speak. Suddenly, he sees a lifeguard. He doesn't know the lifeguard's name. He doesn't yell a perfect sentence. He just looks—and trusts—and stops trying to save himself.

The moment he gives up saving himself and rests in the rescuer's ability to save him, he's "calling" on him—even without words. That's what's happening. He's putting his trust in that lifeguard to be saved from physical death.

You don't need perfect words to call on Jesus. It's not about asking. It's about trusting.

2. The Terminal Patient & the Cure

A man with a terminal illness learns of one cure. It's controversial. Others mock it. But he believes it works and takes it.

He didn't call the doctor. He didn't write a letter. He believed in the cure and received it.

That **act of trusting the cure** is his call. He didn't say, "Please cure, save me." He's trusting in that cure to save him. He's calling upon that cure to save him.

To **call on the Lord is to accept Him as your only cure**, believing He's enough.

3. The Airport Example – Trusting the Plane

You board a plane. You don't scream, "I believe in this pilot!" You don't recite a paragraph of belief. You **sit down**.

The very act of sitting, of putting your trust in the aircraft and the pilot, is calling on them to get you home. And that pilot knows you are calling on him or her to get you home.

Calling on the Lord is not yelling into heaven—it's sitting in His grace, resting in His promise to save you and knowing God hears your thoughts and knows who you are calling upon for salvation.

A few sincere words such as "Lord, remember me" are only the outward evidence of faith that is already within the heart.

Calling upon the name of the Lord isn't about wording—it's about who you're depending on. Just like someone grabbing a lifeline, trusting the cure, or trusting the pilot and the plane you are on. **It's believing from the heart—and that's what saves.**

VII. The Bible's Way: Believe and Be Saved

""**Acts 13:39**

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.""

""**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.""

Not by asking. Not by repeating. By believing. By faith. By trust. It's all Jesus or nothing. It is not a prayer. Do not believe in a prayer to save you. Don't replace Jesus with a prayer.

VIII. So What Should We Do Instead?

Don't lead people to say a prayer to be saved. Ask: 'Do you believe Jesus died, was buried, and rose again to pay for all your sins? Do you believe Jesus can save you right now?'

If they say yes, then you can say, 'According to the Bible, you are saved. You have received everlasting life.'

Let any prayer be a response of thanksgiving—not a requirement for salvation. "Jesus, thank you for saving me."

CONCLUSION: Which Righteousness Are You Wearing?

When you stand before God, you'll be wearing either:

1. Your own righteousness (filthy rags), or
2. Christ's righteousness (spotless and perfect)

You receive that robe not by asking—but by believing.

Call to Action

If you've been trusting a prayer, it's time to trust Christ alone. I said a prayer, but I wasn't trusting in that prayer to save me. I knew it was by believing in Jesus Christ.

TRUE WORDS

Baptist Church

Revelation 21:5

Sunday Evening

08 June 2025

I remember the moment I finally understood and believed. I was reading 1 John 5:10-13. I had heard the Gospel a few times. I was reading back through the Gospel verses. And then I finally understand and believed that Jesus saves me forever. I can't lose everlasting life. I believed on the name of the Son of God. From within, when I believed, I called upon the name of the Lord.

And then I went and got Pam, my wife, who I love so much. And she was saved too as I explained it all to her. And she believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Saved forever.

"Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

And then we went and checked with Callie. She was already saved because of her home schooling with Abeka. And then we checked with Taylor and she was already saved too. Emma was too young at the time.

Let's stop trusting formulas, the Sinner's Prayer, and continue to preach the Gospel of faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.