

Philosophy of “THE SINNER’S PRAYER”

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Many evangelists and pastors have utilized “the sinner’s prayer” for many years. One may share the gospel with someone and then call them respond by praying the sinner’s prayer. This is the prayer that sinners pray which “seals the deal” and confirms someone to be a Christian. Or does it? It may shock some that the sinner’s prayer is nowhere found in the Scriptures and it is, in fact, a practice introduced very late in church history—and that amongst the Arminian movement. A number of reasons could be given as to why the sinner’s prayer is not the *best* way of calling people to salvation. In other words, it is the persuasion of CFBC that the sinner’s prayer is *not* a biblical element in evangelism and should therefore be discarded. The following reasons provide support for this statement.

1. The Sinner’s Prayer is Nowhere Attested in the Scripture

One may thoroughly peruse the entirety of Scripture only to find zero examples of the sinner’s prayer in the context of evangelism. Out of all the examples in the gospels of Jesus and the disciples preaching the gospel and in the book of Acts there is not one instance where Jesus or the disciples ever incorporate the sinner’s prayer—or anything that even closely resembles it—in their evangelizing of the unsaved.

2. The Sinner’s Prayer Can Give False Assurance to Nonbelievers

Some evangelists, after giving the gospel to an unsaved person, reassure that person that if they pray the sinner’s prayer they will be forgiven and can be part of the family of God. The problem is that nowhere in the Scriptures is salvation dependent on a prayer—much less the sinner’s prayer. Rather, salvation everywhere in the Scriptures is dependent on God’s sovereign working in the sinner’s heart and the irresistible drawing of the sinner unto Himself by means of repentance and saving faith. When an unbeliever prays the “sinner’s prayer,” he is often asked to sign a card that assures him of his eternal salvation. The problem is that this gives assurance to someone who may or may not be genuinely saved. Indeed, many people cling to this “act of prayer” as their conversion moment when, in fact, regeneration has nothing to do with a “sinner’s prayer.”

3. The Sinner’s Prayer Can Overlook Some Necessary Aspects of the Gospel

The sinner’s prayer is often associated with a particular method of evangelism. There are fights to instigate with such evangelism methods as: *evangelism explosion*, *the way of the master*, or the *Romans road*. All of these can be effective in proclaiming the gospel to people. But one only needs to look at the back of most tracts to find the sinner’s prayer. The problem is that many of these “methods” omit some necessary

aspects of the gospel. Such methods include the utter holiness and righteousness of God, the inability of man to come to God in and of his own freewill or strength, the extreme and eternal divine wrath that every sinner deserves because of his sin, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for his elect and the corollary propitiation of the Father's just fury, and the necessary demands for the repentant sinner to submit entirely and wholly to Jesus Christ as His slave which includes a fervent pursuit of holiness, repentance, discipleship, and evangelism. Most gospel tracts omit some or all of these important and core elements of the gospel.

4. The Sinner's Prayer Turns the Sovereignty of God's Sovereign Election on Its Head So that the Sinner Now Decides to Receive Jesus and Be Saved.

When the evangelist calls the unbeliever to pray the sinner's prayer in order to be saved this inevitably turns the sovereignty of God in salvation upon its head. Thus, when the sinner chooses to pray the sinner's prayer, he is, in effect, deciding to receive Jesus and be saved. This is wholly contrary to the Scriptures. We find that salvation is totally God's work from first to last. He is the one who sovereignly imparts salvation. God is not influenced by sinners nor can God be coerced into submitting to a sinner's "decision" to be saved or not. God is the one who grants faith and repentance to His elect. The sinner's prayer gives this weight of responsibility to the deadened sinner who is wholly unable to choose to believe Christ.

5. The Sinner's Prayer Can Trumpet a Means of Numbering Conversions—Whether They Be Genuine or Not.

Christians have no way of knowing the effects of evangelism. This knowledge resides only in the sovereign and all-wise mind of God. But when evangelists call sinners to pray the sinner's prayer, this often gives allowance for tallying how many conversions have taken place under that particular evangelist's ministry. We are not to be concerned for *who* is converted; we are to be concerned and wholly consumed with being faithful to the task that God has given to believers, namely, to faithfully proclaim the glories of Christ and call people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

6. The Sinner's Prayer Robs God of His Glory as It Places the Definitive Act in Salvation on the Sinner and His Prayer.

God is glorified when He sovereignly draws a rebellious sinner to Himself. The only one who deserves all glory and praise in conversion is God—and Him alone. When the act of praying the sinner's prayer becomes *the definitive act* in salvation it joins human responsibility to the salvation act. Thus, God draws sinners to Himself and overrides the human rebelliousness. This is what brings ultimate glory to God not the fact that a sinner prayed and chose Christ.

7. The Biblical Example is that Repentance and Faith is What Takes Place at Regeneration, Not a Prayer.

The Scriptures reveal that salvation is received by believing in Christ (Rom 10:9-10) and by repentance (Acts 2:38). Nowhere does the New Testament even hint at the notion of praying a prayer in order to be saved. The biblical example is that of a believer preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Spirit sovereignly regenerates the deadened sinner's heart so that he can then respond in repentance and true saving faith. This, then, will lead to a life of holiness, prayer, obedience, and maturity. But the biblical example is that prayer is not what triggers salvation.