



Sinner's Prayer Discovered

Preacher's Pen by Gene McCoy

A salvation scheme that has become very popular in so-called evangelical denominations is actually a message of salvation through faith in man. Faith is an active response to a command or promise. No one who leads people in what is called "The Sinner's Prayer" can direct you to God's command to pray such a prayer. Neither can he provide a promise from God that He will save one who prays such a prayer. They cannot even find one instance in the Bible where anyone was saved by this practice. It is the creation of men. Promoting the practice, therefore, is promoting a plan of salvation through faith in man, not faith in God.

Consider, however, a prayer that results in salvation when the one praying it is sincere. It is the prayer Jesus provided as a model for us and is recorded in Luke 11:2-4. The fact that it is not exactly the same as that recorded by Matthew (6:9-13) indicates that it was not to be recited as a mantra. The variance of wording and even content suggests that it is the meaning of the prayer that is to be incorporated into our prayers. When we actually pray that prayer instead of merely reciting or repeating words, salvation results.

"Father, hallowed be Your name."

Salvation must begin with humble recognition that God is sovereign and alone has the gift of salvation and the authority to bestow it upon lowly and undeserving sinful servants. Matthew further identifies our Father as He "who is in heaven," indicating He is high and holy. As such, He is worthy of worship, reverence and adoration. Rightly understood, this phrase is prayed from a prone position, our heart bowed low and our arms lifted in surrender. Salvation begins with surrender in the most vulnerable position.

"Your kingdom come."

This is at once a prayer of personal dedication and a global petition. Matthew's record expands upon this phrase by adding, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Salvation is granted to those only who submit to God's rule and enlist for service. People are quick to claim Jesus as Savior but are comparatively slow to respond to Him as Lord. To be saved, however, one must willingly submit to God's will as subjects of His kingdom, over which He rules from the heavenly throne.

To pray that His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven is to pray that people would serve and obey Him as readily as do the angels

in heaven. When the King instructs us to repent, we repent. When He instructs us to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sin, we quickly and gladly do so. When He instructs us to confess His name before men, we faithfully carry it out. Our obedience of faith verifies that His kingdom has come.

"Give us each day our daily bread."

This expression of constant dependence is critical to not only receiving but also in retaining salvation. Just as we trust God to provide what is needed for daily physical sustenance, so must we nurture similar dependence upon His provision for our continuing spiritual sustenance. This is not to question God's faithfulness. Neither is it to doubt His promises for our security. It is, rather, affirmation that we depend upon God's grace every day. As the hymn lyric says, "I need Thy presence every passing hour." ["Abide With Me"] The sinner's salvation requires daily dependence upon God.

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

This expresses our commitment to live like Jesus. As He forgave us, we will forgive others. It is at once an acknowledgement of need for forgiveness and our expression of indebtedness to God for the forgiveness we have received—indebtedness that motivates us to forgive others.

A tone of repentance permeates this part of the prayer. We recognize that a change in our thoughts, motives and actions is necessary as a proper response to His gracious forgiveness.

"And lead us not into temptation."

Seeking salvation must be accompanied by the desire and determination to lead a holy life — separated from the world and dedicated to serving God. The daily prayer of the saved is that the Lord will continue to give strength to overcome temptation as we confess our need for divine guidance and help.

Lest anyone misunderstand, remember that it isn't the recitation or repetition of the words in this prayer that saves us, but rather its practical application in daily attitude and expression. The one who prays this prayer with understanding and conviction will respond in faith to the command and promise of God by repenting of sin and being immersed into Jesus for the purpose of receiving the gift of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Titus 3:4-7). 