WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE SINNER’S PRAYER?

Introduction:
A. The Are MANY Sincere Seekers!
   1. There were sincere seekers of the First Century who are recorded in the New Testament:
      b. Saul of Tarsus.

   2. There are SO MANY today who are sincerely seeking as well.

B. Many Of You Will Not Relate To That Phrase “Sinner’s Prayer”.

C. Yet, SO MANY In The Religious World Hear This Phrase Constantly.

D. Let’s Investigate What It Is And What Is Wrong With It.

I. What Is The Sinner’s Prayer?
   A. This Is A Popular Practice In Protestant Denominational Churches.
      1. They often use it at the end of a “revival” service or at the end of a TV or Radio sermon.

      2. It is also seen at the end of many tracts they produce.

      3. They are convincing sinners to seek to “get saved.”

      4. It is also called the “Consecration Prayer” or the “Salvation Prayer.”

      5. Protestant denominations affirm that the “sinner’s prayer” is expressing a desire to begin a personal relationship with God. They claim this is the moment of one’s salvation.
B. Origins Of The “Sinner’s Prayer.”  
1. Where Did the “Sinner’s Prayer” Originate?

2. Many believe it originated in the early days of the Protestant Reformation Movement.
   a. It is often thought that the “Sinner’s Prayer” was a reaction to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by meritorious works.
   b. Protestants promoted a completely opposite doctrine -- salvation by grace alone!
      1. Jacobus Faber (1450-1536), a Frenchman who was a Catholic, wrote a commentary on the epistles of Paul in 1512. (That was 5 years before Luther left the Catholic Church). He argued that justification is obtained through faith without works.

2. Luther, a German, declared that salvation is on the basis of “faith alone.”
   a. He produced his own translation of the Bible where he added “only” to Rom. 3:28 “therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith only!”
   b. The word “only” is not in the Greek texts; Luther inserted it because of his opposition to Catholicism’s emphasis on “salvation by meritorious works.
   c. Luther even rejected the book of James as an inspired book because of the emphasis of James 2 that faith is evidenced or proven BY WORKS. He called it “a right strawy epistle.”

3. However, some historical students believe they have found evidence of the “Sinner’s Prayer” in the 12th Century.

3. Present-day proponents:
   a. Denominational churches.
   b. Mega-evangelists like Billy Graham.
   c. Campus Crusade for Christ.
   d. Televangelists and radio preachers -- just lay your hand on the radio and ask Jesus to come into your heart.

4. Samples of the “Sinner’s Prayer:”
   a. **Billy Graham** -- “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 turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name.”
   b. **Campus Crusade** -- “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. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.”
c. Max Lucado -- (Preacher at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, TX)

1. Radio program “Upwards” December 1996:
   a. “The Holy spirit is informing you of something that you have never really heard before-and that is, God is ready to be your Father…..All you have to do is call him Father. Just call him Father. Just turn your heart to him even right now as I am speaking. Call him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don’t you do that?”
   b. “Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.
   c. Announcer: “And friend, if you prayed along with Max Lucado just now, here on UPWARDS, we want to welcome you into the family of God. We hope you will contact us and share your personal testimony. If you are already a believer, we thank you for praying for these new brothers and sisters in Christ.”
   d. Announcer: “Now Max Lucado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer.’
   e. Max Lucado: “Today is the first day you’ve ever prayed a prayer like that…..I want to encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don’t want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.”

2. In The Grip of Grace.
   a. P. 50 “Baptism is a symbol; it does not impart salvation.”
   b. P. 115 “Please understand that it is not the act that saves us!” (baptism)
   d. “Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner and that I deserve to go to hell. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins. I do now receive him as my Lord and personal Savior. I promise to serve you to the best of my ability. Please save me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

C. Scriptures That Are Used To Defend The “Sinner’s Prayer!”

1. Ac. 2:21 “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.”
   a. This is one of the proof texts to uphold the “sinner’s prayer.”
   b. Yet, look at passages in the SAME BOOK that tell sinners how to be saved!
   1. Ac. 2:38 “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
2. Ac. 22:16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”
   a. HERE is Divine Commentary on “calling on the name of the Lord.”
   b. It is NOT a plea; it is not a prayer; it is submitting to Christ and obedience to His commands to have salvation!

2. Romans 10:12-17 “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’ 14How 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? 15And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’ 16But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ 17So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
   a. Emphases of the text:
      1. In Romans, Paul has emphasized that both Gentiles AND Jews who are old enough to make choices have disobeyed God, are sinners, and need justification -- There is NO distinction!
      2. God will richly bless those who call upon Him!
      3. Only those who “call upon the Lord” will be saved!
      4. People must HEAR, come to BELIEVE in Him, and then they will CALL UPON Him!
   b. This is another of the proof texts to uphold the “sinner’s prayer.”
   c. Yet, look at passages in the SAME BOOK that tell sinners how to be saved!
      1. Rom. 6:3,4 “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
      2. The Holy Spirit affirmed through Paul and Paul and the Romans had gotten into Christ at baptism, and that they had newness of life AFTER baptism!

3. Ac. 22:16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”
   a. You know what is REALLY interesting about this passage?
   b. Observations:
      1. Saul was on the road to Damascus to arrest, imprison, and bring capital punishment charges against Christians.
      2. The Lord blinded him and spoke to him.
      3. The Lord sent him into the city with this charge: “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Ac. 9:6
      4. For 3 days Saul was blind; he did not eat or drink! Ac. 9:9
5. The Lord told Ananias to go to the street named Straight Street to the house of Judas and find Saul. Ac. 9:10,11
6. What was Saul doing? “for behold, he is praying!” Ac. 9:11
  c. What is astounding in all of what Paul had done so far, he was absolutely convinced that he was doing the right thing! Ac. 23:1 “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”
  d. Yet, when Ananias came to Judas’ house, he commanded this penitent believer to “arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord!”

D. Concerns Expressed By Religious Leaders Whose Religions Have Taught The “Sinner’s Prayer.”
   1. That concept is not in the Scriptures -- David Platt, a Southern Baptist minister in Birmingham, AL:
      a. “Many assume they are saved simply because of a prayer they prayed. It’s not that praying a prayer in and of itself is bad -- but the question in John 2-3 is what kind of faith are we calling people to?”
      b. Speaking at the Verge Church Leaders’ Conference he said the emphasis on the Sinner’s Prayer is ‘unbiblical and damning.’
      c. “I’m convinced that many people in our churches are simply missing the life of Christ, and a lot of it has to do with what we’ve sold them as the gospel, i.e. pray this prayer, accept Jesus into your heart, invite Christ into your life. Should it not concern us that there is no such superstitious prayer in the New Testament? Should it not concern us that the Bible never uses the phrase, ‘accept Jesus into your heart’ or ‘invite Christ into your life’? It’s not the gospel we see being preached, it’s modern evangelism built on sinking sand. And it runs the risk of disillusioning millions of souls.”
      d. “He says he is concerned that some people ‘say they believe in Jesus, …say they have accepted Jesus, …say that they have received Jesus, but they are not saved and will not enter the kingdom of heaven’. While he affirmed that people calling out to God with repentant faith is fundamental to attaining eternal life (salvation), he said his comments about the ‘sinner's prayer’ have been deeply motivated ‘by a concern for authentic conversions’.”
      e. Yet, he still advocated the acceptability of the “Sinner’s Prayer”: “My comments about the ‘Sinner’s prayer’ have been deeply motivated by a concern for authentic conversion and regenerate church membership. Do I believe it is ‘wrong’ for someone to pray a ‘prayer of salvation’? Certainly not. Calling out to God in prayer with repentant faith is fundamental to being saved…. (I) urge us, as we go to all people among all nations with the good news of God’s love, to be both evangelistically zealous and bibically clear at the same time, Mt. 28:18-20)
2. Christianity Today said: “Many believers fail to mature as Christians after their supposed conversion using the ‘Sinner’s Prayer.’ Anyone can, and most Americans do, ‘believe’ in Jesus rather than some alternative savior. Anyone can, and many Americans sometimes do, say a prayer asking Jesus to save them. But not many embark on a life fully devoted to the love of God, the love of neighbor, the moral practice of God's will, and radical, costly discipleship.”

F. One Reason Some Christians Have A Problem With Songs Like “Have A Little Talk With Jesus” Is That Denominational People Would See That As Just Say The Sinner’s Prayer And You Are Instantly Saved.
1. However, we may sing that as Christians talking to the Father.
2. We may ask Him for mercy and forgiveness!

II. Comparing The “Sinner’s Prayer” With The Bible.
A. Saying “Lord, Lord” Does NOT Provide Salvation!
1. Saying “Lord, Lord” Is Not Enough

2. Scripture elsewhere makes it very clear that the mere act of “calling” out the Lord’s name, in an attempt to access divine mercy, in the absence of obedience, is an exercise in futility.

3. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” [present tense -- persistently does] the will of my Father who is in heaven” Mt. 7:21-23

4. Lk. 6:46 “But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?”
   a. This reminds me of what the Lord said to Saul of Tarsus: “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”
   b. “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Ac. 26:9
   c. Jesus says to Saul, “Stop fighting against belief in Me! Stop resisting Me!”
   d. Saul’s prayers did not save him!
   e. He prayed for three days after arriving in the city of Damascus, yet his sins were not “washed away” until he was immersed in water in obedience to the divine command (Acts 9:11; 22:16). If there ever was
a case of the “sinner’s prayer” being exercised, surely this was it; yet it was for naught.

B. There Is NO Example Where A Sinner In Scriptures Was Instructed To “Pray To Be Saved!”
   1. Unbelievers were pointed to Jesus and urged to believe in Him! Ac. 16:31
   2. Believers were commanded to “Repent and be baptized!” Ac. 2:38
   3. Penitent believers were told to “Be Baptized!” Ac. 22:16

C. THE Event That Provides Salvation Is Baptism!
   1. Mk. 16:15,16
   2. Gal. 3:27 That is when you put on Christ! “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
   3. That is when a sinner enters His spiritual Body! I Cor. 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”
   4. God’s plan was to save sinner by the waters of baptism! I Pet. 3:20-22 “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”
   5. Baptism Is An Absolute IMPERATIVE -- It Is Completely Essential To Salvation!

D. Commands In Scripture To “Believe” Or To “Have Faith” Are A Form Of Speech Called A Synecdoche -- The Word “Believe” Or “Have Faith” Describe Obedience To Christ -- Doing Everything He Has Commanded!

E. Discuss The Difference In Confessing Faith And Confessing Sins.
   1. Sinners seeking salvation are to confess their faith in Jesus.
      a. Rom. 10:10 “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”
      b. Ac. 8:36,37 “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ 37Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart,
you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

2. Christians who sin are to confess their sins.
   a. I Jn. 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
   b. Js. 5:16 “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”
   c. Prayer is the privilege and blessing for the Child of God.
      1. Jn. 9:31 “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.”
      2. I Pet. 3:12 “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”
      3. Prayer is for Christians, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.” Mt. 6:9

   d. Sinners who pray to God for forgiveness are Christians, NOT THE LOST WHO ARE SEEKING SALVATION!

Conclusion:
   A. Like Paul, There Are Many Sincere People In The World!

   B. You Cannot Be Saved By Sincerity Alone; You Cannot Be Saved By Faith Alone; You Cannot Be Saved By Saying The “Sinner’s Prayer!”

   C. Submit To The Christ; Obey His Will; Then He Will Save You!