

# THE SO-CALLED “SINNER’S PRAYER” VERSUS THE SINNER’S FAITH

## AN UNABRIDGED LETTER TO AN HONEST INQUIRER PREFACE

Thirty-three years ago, my wife, Ruth, and I began to support a young ministerial native of the Philippines, Raul Serenio. He attended college and seminary in the Philippines, graduated, and after marriage, preparatory trials, and testings, God began a church through his evangelistic efforts in Davao City. Bible Truth Inspirational Ministries began to help support Raul’s ministry to become full time in 2004. With this support came regular reports on the activities and progress in Raul’s ministry and church.

Because of Bible Truth’s publication ministry, we began to send Raul our literature with others such as Mount Zion’s fine literature ministry out of Pensacola, Florida. With these sovereign grace ministries, together with the reports given of Raul’s evangelism practices, it became evident that there was some honest misunderstanding of God’s way of seeking the lost for Christ through the Gospel of grace.

This led to many difficult e-mails and questions from this author concerning Raul’s beliefs; and after much interchange, Raul e-mailed me four questions concerning evangelizing the Elect, and its necessity; as well as concerns of God’s fairness in the eternal condemnation of the non-elect. We immediately began writing an answer to his inquiry. That original fifteen-page letter was published in booklet form, [An Explanation of Election and Evangelism](#), and is presently available.

Within about one week of sending that letter in response to Raul’s four questions, we received Raul’s response to our answers that contained another question on the so-called “sinner’s prayer.” We immediately answered it with what constitutes this publication. We included this answer in our previous publication, but desired to publish it also in this separate booklet.

For clarity we include his entire paragraph, as originally written with his question that was near the end of a lengthy e-mail .

**"I remember your teaching about 'easy believism' don't worry I am aware of it. I do believe that when elect person will do the prayer of acceptance will help him to know the Lord personally and bring him to repentance of his sin, What do you think and suggestion regarding a sinner's prayer?"**

What follows is our answer to this question, which was sent by e-mail the day after we received it. We have edited it slightly from the original since it was hastily written. But we have maintained its structure and basic content as originally written to Raul.

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"SINNER'S PRAYER"  
VERSUS  
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AN UNABRIDGED LETTER  
TO AN HONEST INQUIRER

**THE QUESTION:** What do you think and suggest regarding a sinner's prayer?

**THE ANSWER:** Concerning the so-called "sinner's prayer": I can find no Biblical reference to any common prayer that could be designated "the sinner's prayer." There are many examples of such pleadings with God or Christ.

*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.*  
*Luke 18:13*

This publican prayed a single prayer of acknowledged guilt in himself and acknowledged holiness in God, with a complete absence of self-worth and a faith in God's sacrificial provision for his sin (i.e. *merciful* [Gk.] is a reference to the mercy seat in the yearly sacrificial atonement for Israel's sin). Certainly, you would not suggest that because Jesus declared this publican justified (v14) when looking down and smiting the breast, that both these acts are part of acquiring salvation? So neither could his prayer be so designated. Jesus is not instructing us that we have to, or even instructing us that we should, pray as the publican prayed in order to be justified or saved. Certainly, to acknowledge one's guilt and God's holiness and one's complete worthlessness and God's provision in His bloody sacrifice for one's sin, is necessary in salvation, but just how each sinner acknowledges those things, and just how many other acknowledgements should become a part of a sinner's initial expressions of personal faith, only God knows. But only one's faith is involved in justification, *Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.* (Romans 3:28)

## JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION ARE BY FAITH ALONE

And the reason for the Scriptures' silence, and Christ's silence in His personal ministry too, about any so-called "sinner's prayer" is because justification, salvation, and deliverance from one's sin and death is only by faith alone. The sinner's faith might be expressed in one of a thousand different ways in prayer, and perhaps not at all in prayer, in accord with his need or his feelings, or his particular guilt and conviction. But for every sinner faith is not just a part of the instrumentality of salvation, but is the solitary and unaccompanied method of salvation, not prayer! Faith cannot be seen or heard or programmed, or used as a boastful mechanism for self-pride or boastful claims of merit through achievement. Prayer is an act or work that man does as pleasing God, and seeking from God. Therefore, God in His wisdom gave no record of any "sinner's prayer" as the acceptable way to be saved. Just think, Raul, if the Scriptures gave a certain prayer, or even some sort of guideline for any "sinner's prayer unto salvation," then it would become a kind of meritorious work and achievement that would then become salvation by works (prayer) instead of salvation by faith alone. Indeed, any supposed salvation from rehearsing any "sinner's prayer" will eventually be manifestly proven false.

For these and many other reasons, both the Old and New Testaments declare in most certain terms that salvation is only possible for those who do nothing but look to God's mercy.

### SALVATION COMES BY ONLY A LOOK.

*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.                      Isaiah 45:22.*

A *look* is not a prayer; it is not any kind of prayer, but is simply a look—a consideration, a regard, a perception—, a look to the One Who apart from Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sin remains invisible. This saving *look* might eventuate into a prayer of verbal acknowledgement, or may not, but the salvation of sinners is through faith alone,

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*  
*John 6:47*

*He that believeth* is not instead worded, "he that prayeth"; but to *believe on* is to trust in, to cling to, to rely upon, for sin's removal and everlasting life's installation.

### CALLING ON THE LORD IS A WORK OF FAITH

As I see the Scripture, there is no "sinner's prayer." And if someone leads another sinner to pray a certain "prayer" in order to be saved, just what prayer is the correct one for that one particular sinner in the sight of God? Even the reference in *Romans 10:13*, *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*, is very general, and it only acknowledges one way that faith might be expressed. The very next verse, *Romans 10:14*, explains,

*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?*

Paul makes sure that we understand that the *calling on the name of the Lord*, is the result of faith and not the means to secure salvation in itself alone. But the particulars of just what *calling on the name of the Lord* is will be moderately different in each sinner's case. Every sinner is different and distinct, with a personality that God deals with differently. What sin and guilt will need to be confessed, and in what way will that be done? And what peculiar circumstances in that particular sinner's life need to be rehearsed before God, if at all? Could God have devised some "one prayer fits all" "sinner's prayer"? No! Only *by grace through faith* alone is a sinner saved, and because it is *by grace*, then it must be *through faith* alone, because "by faith alone" is the only means to salvation that in itself (i.e. in the faith itself) there is an absence of human merit *in* the believing sinner's faith. But there is a corresponding and contrasting presence of free and altogether Sovereign favor from God to the believing sinner; *therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace* *Romans 4:16*.

GOSPEL PREACHING MUST EMPHASIZE THAT  
SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE

Therefore, we conclude from the clear teaching of Scripture, that the true Gospel presentation is not, "Jesus died for sinners who pray 'the sinner's prayer'"; but rather is, "Jesus died for sinners who believe who He is, what He did, and that He died for them." It is always the Scriptural example and exhortation to *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31)*. It is always faith in, believing in, trusting in, and looking to, Jesus' sacrifice for deliverance from sin and its curses. The blessed Scripture in *Ephesians 2:8-9*, is not "For by grace are ye saved through prayer, which is of your selves, it is a gift of yours to God, even of works of prayer, of which every man should boast." But it is,

*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that [faith] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works [which includes the work of prayer], lest any man should boast.*

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

This is a difficult thing I must say, but say it I must. Any gospel preaching that includes any work (and prayer is a work of man to God) is preaching another gospel rather than the one of the Scriptures. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is "good news" because it is of God's work and man's faith in His work, and no human works whatever. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of faith only, faith without accompaniment, faith without works, faith without prayer, faith alone to the exclusion of everything and anything else! Even the reception of Jesus Christ as Savior is really just the expression of a faith in Him alone,

*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,*

*John 1:12*

What John does with the addition, *even to them that believe on his name*, is clarify that it is faith exclusively that precludes receiving Jesus as Savior. And that it is by faith alone that one becomes a *son of God*. In fact, throughout John's Book of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it is faith alone that is emphasized over and over as the only means of having eternal life through Christ. We find this emphasis on faith to

the exclusion of anything else in *John 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 4:24, 30, 48, 53; 5:24, 46-47; etc., etc., etc.*; and finally and conclusively in John’s inspired purpose for his Gospel account,

*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*  
*John 20:31*

We have God to thank for His grace and mercy that it does not read, “and that praying ye might have life through His name.” Then we might not pray the correct and acceptable prayer. In other words, our work of prayer might be imperfectly spoken because we are imperfect sinners.

### THE GOSPEL OF FAITH ALONE<sup>1</sup>

It is faith, and not prayer, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about; therefore it is faith that must be preached as the way to receive Jesus Christ and the free pardon of sin, and not prayer at all! And that is because faith is what must come first before any real prayer to God and Christ. Therefore, we as preachers of the true spiritual Gospel must preach, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* We must be careful to install into every sinner that only his faith in Christ is what is acceptable to God, and no work—not even prayer to God through Christ—can save him. He must be told and be convinced by the Holy Spirit of God that just his faith in Jesus’ finished work as the Real God and Savior will save him. It is for these reasons that I detest the idea of any “sinner’s prayer” as any good or acceptable method of anyone being saved.

Through the years, I have met several professed Christians, who because they had prayed the “sinner’s prayer,” they were now “saved.” In nearly every case, when someone identified their salvation with the “sinner’s prayer,” they were sooner or later proven to me to be a professor of religion and not a possessor of Christ at all. **They were trusting in an entitlement that their action of prayer earned for them instead of trusting in what Christ’s death earned for them.**

<sup>1</sup> See our publication, [The Precious Grace of Justification by Faith Alone](#) that deals with this Bible truth.

Mama Ruth was so pleased that you e-mailed us of your encouragement from our letter. May God bless you with a deeper understanding of those very "theories and doctrinal stands" in which erroneously you are not too interested, but will one day become very interesting to you when you are confronted with a God and Savior Whom you do not know so well as you should. And that ignorance will be only because you considered the "theories and doctrinal stands" as uninteresting and as unimportant. Doctrine is what makes Christians, and then makes them grow into maturity. And what may seem to be "theories" to you now, will then prove to be Theology—The Knowledge of God—about which you may sorrowfully grieve that you failed to seek to know better the God and Savior that you sought to serve, not to mention the failure to teach His children how they were saved and about the God and Savior Who saved them.

Looking forward to your next e-mail,  
Daddy Douglas.

P. S. I am thinking of making the letter sent to you one of our publications. I would edit it somewhat, but leave it basically as written in the form of a letter. I trust that this will not offend you, and that it will meet with your approval. I believe that it could be useful to others as well, according as Christ would direct. May His will be done.  
Amen.