



What is the Biblical Basis for the Sinner's Prayer?

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17 (The Message of Christ)

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38 (The Message of Peter)

"So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

Acts 26:19-20 (The Message of Paul)

*Not just regular church meetings, but entire evangelistic crusades have operated on the principle that all that's needed to win someone to Christ is to get them to pray a "sinner's prayer". But it's disturbing to find no example of this anywhere in Scripture. Jesus never leads anyone in such a prayer; none of the apostles ever leads anyone in such a prayer; there is no example of such a prayer in the Bible. Instead their message always ties belief in Christ to repentance of sin and making a differentiation between those who **hear** the Word from those who **do** the Word.*

There has always been a section of the Sermon on the Mount which I admit has disturbed me...

"What is the Biblical Basis for the Sinner's Prayer?", Page 1 of 1

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](#). Used by Permission. All other content, materials, etc. on this site are Copyright ©2003—©2008 by [Walk with the Word](#). Permission for personal and/or not-for-profit use freely granted. Any questions or comments concerning [Walk with the Word](#) should be directed to Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

Matthew 7:21-23

Here are people who don't just merely acknowledge Christ, who aren't limited to just believing in His name, but are actually performing signs and wonders in His name! And why are they ultimately designated false believers who will not experience salvation even though they believe in Jesus enough to invoke His name? They “*practice lawlessness*”, another way of saying that they've never fully rejected sin. To “*practice*” something in biblical terms isn't describing a temporary misstep or backsliding, but the choice to allow a sinful lifestyle to reside side-by-side with your so-called Christianity. In other words, they really didn't cease sinning even though they knew and professed the name of Christ.

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
John 3:16*

*Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”
John 6:28-29*

I can understand how looking at these verses in isolation can lead one to conclude all you need to do is say you believe. The problem is that we've allowed the world to alter the precise meaning of the Bible's definition of “believe”. Over and over the standard proving the presence of true, biblical belief is not confessing with one's lips but living from a changed heart.

“What is the Biblical Basis for the Sinner's Prayer?”, Page 2 of 2

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](#). Used by Permission. All other content, materials, etc. on this site are Copyright ©2003—©2008 by [Walk with the Word](#). Permission for personal and/or not-for-profit use freely granted. Any questions or comments concerning [Walk with the Word](#) should be directed to Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org

And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

Mark 7:6

Now I just didn't wake up this morning and put this all together on my own. In fact, a phrase was coined quite long ago to describe this phenomena: "cheap grace". It describes the false belief that anyone who merely prays the "sinner's prayer" is forever saved regardless of the fact that there is no discernible difference in the way they live their life after praying the prayer than before. Living in an age of "cheap grace" is another way of stating that the true Gospel of repentance from sin has been replaced by a false gospel tolerating sin. I have no doubt that the "sinner's prayer" can be a starting point, but the keyword therein is "starting"; it's supposed to represent a milestone marking when we **began** to forsake the sins and desires of our old life in exchange for God's Word and ways alone.

No, the reason I'm bringing up the subject now is due to a recent experience. Imagine several thousand Christians all lined up outside a sports stadium waiting to get into a "Christian" event. These are all people who not only claim to believe in the name of Christ, but in fact they've showed up specifically to hear prophecies uttered in the name of Christ and to see miracles performed in Christ's name. And a pastor speaks to them from the sidewalk as they wait to get in, proclaiming the Gospel message to not merely believe in the name of Christ but to follow through with repentance of sin. Why was the nearly universal reaction of this so-called "Christian" crowd to shout down the pastor, to mock him, to react so derisively towards him? How could those who claim to "believe" in Christ so violently reject the basic Gospel message of Christ to repent from sin?

A big part of the answer is that so many of the churches to which these people belong subscribe to the notion of "cheap grace" rather than striving for true biblical discipleship which holds each individual accountable where the issue of sin is concerned. It's not merely that

"What is the Biblical Basis for the Sinner's Prayer?", Page 3 of 3

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](#). Used by Permission. All other content, materials, etc. on this site are Copyright ©2003—©2008 by [Walk with the Word](#). Permission for personal and/or not-for-profit use freely granted. Any questions or comments concerning [Walk with the Word](#) should be directed to Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org

the whole Word of God is no longer preached in many churches, but that sin is also no longer confronted. Salvation has been redefined to resemble one's "vote" rather than one's lifestyle. Christ is "voted" upon in favor by the lips, but His Word not actually put into practice from the heart.

To be sure, there are many overtly false personalities and movements out there today. There are entire websites and books which have documented the unbiblical activities of the likes of Todd Bentley, Benny Hinn, the Apostolic Reformation, and on and on with those claiming the title of "prophet" or "apostle" and falsely prophesying or performing signs in the name of Christ. These are dangerous in their own right and should be avoided. But there's an even more subtle-yet-dangerous movement out there promoting "cheap grace", the most lethal being Rick Warren and his *Purpose Driven* theology. He's a "nice guy" with a "nice message" who has "good intentions" and tries to make the Gospel "relevant", yet what he ultimately promotes is a false gospel which erodes the place of sin to the point that it's allowed to continue side-by-side with one's so-called "belief". Sadly, he is just the current point man for "cheap grace", building upon all those who've come before him over the past 50 years.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:8-10

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

1 John 2:4-6

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:15

"What is the Biblical Basis for the Sinner's Prayer?", Page 4 of 4

*“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.
John 15:10*

Not every single thing written in the Bible is actually a “commandment”. There are different words which describe the various aspects of God’s Word such as “commandment”, “precept”, “judgment”, “testimony”, and so forth. They all refer to a specific aspect of God’s Law. In the Bible, a “commandment” is something one is contractually bound to do to keep the covenant they’ve made. The “Ten Commandments” were the core of what Hebrew scholars recognized as 613 commandments required to keep the covenant relationship expressed in the Old Testament. (This is why it’s significant when Christ says where the new covenant is concerned He gives us a “new commandment” to love one another.) But the greater point I’m making is that **BOTH** the old and new covenants expressed in the Bible require obedience to God’s Word, not merely confessing a name with one’s lips. The test of a true believer is the same in both the Old and New Testaments: Are they proving what they believe by how they behave?

It’s worth noting that twice in the midst of the book of Revelation that it is noted that the proper response God is looking for in reaction to all the signs and wonders of judgment He is rendering in the Last Days is repentance. After all the seals have been broken and the sixth of seven trumpets sounds it states...

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent** of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they **did not repent** of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.
Revelation 9:20-21*

Repentance doesn’t come after even harsher judgments...

*Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they **did not repent** so as to give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they **did not repent** of their deeds.*

Revelation 16:9-11

It's not an issue of "belief" as the world defines it, but as defined by God to be something visibly and tangibly provable by the degree to which we put God's Word into practice and forsake a lifestyle of sin in favor of His Word and ways alone.

In His Love,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org