

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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## You Cannot Become A Christian By Praying To God or Christ!

(Part Three)

### Examples of Conversions in the Book of Acts

by Ted J. Clarke

#### REVIEW

Two previous articles in January and February, 1995, discussed the "sinner's prayer" by looking at passages in Luke 18:13; John 1:12; Revelation 3:20; Romans 10:13 and other Scriptures. Our conclusions of those studies are that not one of these passages teaches that a person becomes a child of God by praying and asking Christ to come into one's heart, and, that the only one of these passages which mentions prayer is Luke 18:13, which teaches that both the publican and Pharisee in that section were already children of God. Therefore, none of those verses can possibly authorize saying the "sinner's prayer" in order to be saved.

Our previous articles also showed that there is **not a single command, not one example, nor any implication** that a person ever became a Christian by saying the "sinner's prayer." Still, that prayer is taught by dozens of denominations as God's way to be saved, even though it cannot be found in the New Testament! Why doesn't that bother the people who believe and practice this doctrine? Several have written to us regarding these current articles, some to uphold the "sinner's prayer" doctrine and some to ask us to take their names off our mailing list, **but not one person has provided us with the requested verse where this doctrine is taught by command, example, or implication!** Can you provide the missing Scripture? If not, will you continue to believe that it is true, or will you reject it, as you should, as belonging to the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9)?

#### CONVERSIONS IN ACTS

If the "sinner's prayer" is a part of God's plan for saving mankind, we ought to find it in the Book of Acts of Apostles, which is an inspired history of the apostles

going into all the world and preaching the saving gospel of Christ. Three cases of conversion in Acts have something to say about prayer, but you will search in vain for the "sinner's prayer," simply because it is not from God's inspired word.

Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26) - Last month's article noted that the passages on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (who became the apostle Paul) did not give any command, example, or implication of Paul praying the "sinner's prayer" in order to be saved when he obeyed the gospel. When God sent Ananias to Paul, he did not tell him to pray the "sinner's prayer," although Paul was praying in the city of Damascus (Acts 9:11). Rather, Ananias told a believing, penitent Paul to "call on the name of the Lord" by arising and being baptized "to wash away [his] sins" (Acts 9:18; 22:16). This is the same message Peter preached on Pentecost in Acts 2, when he said, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (verse 21), and then proceeded to tell them **how** to call on God's name through believing, repenting, and being baptized "for the remission of sins" (verses 36-38). If the "sinner's prayer" is God's way of salvation, why didn't Ananias and Peter tell Paul and the people on Pentecost to so pray? The answer is because it is not God's appointed way to save people, then or now!

Cornelius (Acts 10 & 11) - Cornelius was a man who "prayed to God always" and his prayers did have an effect on God telling him how to be saved (Acts 10:1-4), **but note that God did not save Cornelius through prayer!** God did tell Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter and that, "He will tell you what you must do" (verses 5-6). When Peter was explaining to Christian Jews what had happened at Cornelius' house, he told them that the angel told Cornelius that "Peter... will tell you words by which you and all your household will

be saved" (Acts 11:14). What words did Peter tell Cornelius? Did he ever mention that Cornelius should pray the "sinner's prayer"? **He did not!** What did Peter tell Cornelius and his family? He said in Acts 10:43 that "whoever believes in Him (Christ) will receive remission of sins," and in verse 48 "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Since Jesus Himself said in Mark 16:16, "He who believes **and is baptized** shall be saved," it should be understood that the "belief" Peter mentions in verse 43 includes baptism. "Believes" in Acts 10:43 is in the present tense and means "whoever keeps on believing in Him." If one is not baptized as Christ says to be, one does not continue to believe in Him. Jesus asks, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Also, remember that on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said to those who believed on Jesus as "Lord and Christ" that they must "repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:36-38). In Acts 11:18 the Jewish Christians to whom Peter was speaking also understood that "repentance" was a part of the gospel obedience of the Gentiles. So, what "words" did the apostle Peter preach to the household of Cornelius that they "must do"? He preached **faith** (Acts 10:43; **repentance** (Acts 11:18); and **baptism** (Acts 10:48). This is exactly the message that was taught in all cases of conversion by command, example, or implication. Cornelius "called upon the name of the Lord," not in any "sinner's prayer," but in obedience to the good news preached to him about Christ in believing, repenting, and being baptized. There is no "sinner's prayer" in this case of conversion.

Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) - One final case of conversion in Acts mentions prayer. When Paul and his companions arrived at Philippi in Macedonia, they found some Jewish women meeting by a "riverside, where prayer was customarily made" (Acts 16:13). Paul preached to the women there and the text says that "a certain woman

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named Lydia heard us [and] the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (verse 14).

What did Lydia do? She gave "heed to the things spoken by Paul." To what did she give "heed"? Verse 15 says "she and her household were baptized." There is not a word stated nor implied that indicated that Lydia was told to or needed to pray the "sinner's prayer," even though they were at a place where prayer was customarily made. It is true that the text doesn't mention that she and her household believed and repented either, but since these things were necessary in other cases of conversion, we know that they were necessary here, too (Acts 2:36-38; 10:43, 48; 11:18). God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35) and His gospel plan of salvation is the same for all men, Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:16-17). Why is **baptism** mentioned? Because it is the culminating or final act which puts us **into Christ**, where we receive forgiveness of sins and become God's children, Christians (see Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 3:21). The "sinner's prayer" is not in this case of conversion, nor any other. Therefore, it cannot be implied that it is necessary to anyone's salvation, regardless of how many men teach it. "Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). Neither is there a command, direct statement, or example for the "sinner's prayer" anywhere in the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

**CONCLUSION**

Dear friends, if you are reading these

articles and can prove that I am wrong, I ask you to please produce the verse of Scripture to show the "sinner's prayer" to be God's way to save in Christ. If you cannot do so, will you consider that you are wrong in your understanding of how God saves? Will you not do what the Bible teaches one must do to be saved, and teach others the same truth? These articles have clearly demonstrated that faith, repentance, and baptism are **all equally essential to be saved**. Please read the verses presented and note this to be true. Now, where can you find the verse(s) which supports the "sinner's prayer" as essential to salvation? I do not believe you can find any support for it.

The authority of God's word is final and Christ's words will judge us at the last day (John 12:48-50; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). If you have not done **what** God has said, **like** God said to do it, and **for the reason(s)** God said, you are not saved and are not prepared to meet the Lord in that judgment. That is not what I say by my own authority, but by the word of God (1 Peter 4:11).

According to the Scriptures given in these three articles in this series, if you thought you were saved by saying the "sinner's prayer," you are mistaken and still in your sins. You have done nothing more than obeyed a commandment of men. Please do not be too proud to admit that. The good news is that it is not too late to correct your error. You can confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, repenting of your past sins (whether religious error or moral sin), and be baptized (immersed) in water in order to have your sins washed away by the blood of Christ and to put Him on by that same act of baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27). This is God's way of salvation and we have provided the Scriptures to verify it.

We will be most happy to discuss your needs of salvation with you or answer any questions you may have about your own needs or the contents of these articles. We also encourage you to contact the Church of Christ nearest you for your immediate obedience to the gospel or further assistance in studying these matters. For those who remain in disagreement with these articles and the Scriptures we have used, all we can do is to ask that you sincerely search the Scriptures as to whether these things are so (Acts 17:11). We remain ready to discuss and defend these Biblical matters before any individual or group, ready to give an answer to every man that

asketh a reason for the hope we have, yet with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15). Christians, we can and must contend for the faith which was once for all time delivered unto us (Jude 3).

Those who are already truly Christians, by obeying the gospel as we have shown above, do have the privilege of receiving continuing forgiveness of sins by prayer. Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-9 are Scriptures that are spoken to Christians, giving them this great avenue of cleansing. However, no one was ever told to **become** a Christian by prayer in any New Testament writing. Think on these things.

**DOCTRINE BASHING**

by Owen D. Olbricht

Some people are not content just to reject the truth. They go beyond that and speak evil concerning the truth.

Those who are familiar with Biblical teaching are not surprised when this happens for they are familiar with the prophecy of Peter concerning such practices. He wrote, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies... and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned" (2 Pet. 2:1, 2).

The Expression "maligned" (NAS), "evil spoken of" (KJV), and "disrepute" (NIV) is the Greek *blasphemo* which could have been translated "blasphemed" (NKJV). Peter was prophesying that people would seek to cause others to think evil of the truth, i.e., they would blaspheme the truth.

Those who would do this would not necessarily be those who were outside the Christian community. Peter wrote that they would be "among you." This corresponds with what Paul stated would happen: "...and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

Destructive teachings from among those who are brethren who should be upholding the truth is to be expected; not desired, but expected. More damage can be done by these who have the confidence of brethren than by those who are outside by those who are considered enemies.

It is easier to let our guard down when we are among those we trust than when among those we distrust; however, we must realize that the enemy can be within as well as without.

The false teachers Peter said would arise are those who would blaspheme the truth. The truth is the teaching that has come through Jesus (John 1:14, 17; 14:6). Anyone who scoffs at, pokes fun at, belittles, derides, or demeans the teaching of Jesus and the holy apostles are blaspheming the truth.

Those who so scoff at these teaching usually do so, not because of careful textual study or sound scholarship, but usually present their humor and scorn because of personal prejudice. They are good at getting people to laugh at their ridicule and innuendoes but are not solid in their approach to scripture.

These are those who because they are "...untaught and unstable distort...the scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16). Although such men are influential and prominent with many people because of their entertaining abilities, they are not popular with God. Concerning them Peter wrote, "...their destruction is not asleep." (2 Pet. 2:3).

Paul wrote that if men, angels, or anyone would preach another teaching, they are accursed (Gal. 1:8, 9). He went on to write, "For am I now seeking to the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

The responsibility of every Christian is to search the scriptures to learn if what he hears is according to the truth (Acts 17:11). Paul put it this way, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night I did not cease to admonish each one with tears" (Acts 20:31).

Every Christian should be alert. Blasphemy of the truth should cause consternation in the hearts of faithful Christians who are seeking to follow the truth. Doctrine bashing should be "out" and following the truth of Christ should be "in." As the tears of Paul fell when he realized the truth would be perverted, so also our tears should fall because the doctrine of Jesus Christ is being bashed by those who are within, by those who should be preaching the truth instead of making fun of brethren who are faithfully seeking to follow the truth that is in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:21).

Doctrine bashing has no place among the followers of Jesus Christ.

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*"Wise men are not always silent -  
but they know when to be."*

## THE SON OF GOD

by Bruce Stalting

In Jn. 20:30-31 we read, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 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." We see here that the purpose of the Gospel accounts was to prove the deity of Jesus. Space will not permit us to study all of the material contained in the the Gospels. However, we will set forth four facts about Jesus which should prove the deity of Jesus to any reasonable mind.

First, we read in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God." Later in this same chapter John states in verse 14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." If the Word was God and Jesus was the Word then, it follows that Jesus was God. This verse shows that Jesus possesses the eternal nature of God.

Second, Jesus possessed divine characteristics which could not be attributed to mere human. Such attributes would include omnipotence. This is demonstrated in his power to raise Lazarus from the dead as we read in Jn. 11:1. Also, Jesus was omniscient. This fact is shown in Jesus' ability to know the hearts of men (Jn. 2:23-25) and He knew the past of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:16-18).

Third, Jesus accepted divine titles which was improper for ordinary mortals. In Jn. 10:30, Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." Speaking of Jesus in Phil 2:6, Paul said, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

Fourth, Rom. 1:4 teaches that Jesus was, "...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Jesus perfect sinless life proves His deity. In Heb. 4:15, we read that Jesus was "...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Rom 1:4 also, teaches that Jesus fulfillment of all the Messianic prophesy, His remarkable miracles, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead all declare His deity.

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## THE RESTORATION PLEA - IS IT VALID?

by B. J. Clarke

The above question requires some preliminary explanation and definition. First, what is the restoration plea? The restoration plea is simply the desire to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). To use a more familiar slogan, the plea for restoration is a plea to "speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent and to call Bible things by Bible names and to do Bible things in Bible ways." It is the aim of restoration to restore the ancient order of New Testament Christianity. Those who are committed to restoring New Testament Christianity regard the New Testament as the sole standard and final arbiter in religious matters. Thus, all creeds, dogmas, disciplines, manuals, catechisms and policies of men are cast aside and replaced with the legislation from the sole head and chief monarch of the church, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18; 5:23). His legislation is found only within the sacred pages of holy writ. The faith has "once for all been delivered" (Jude 3) and Jesus will judge humanity based on the words that he hath spoken (John 12:48; Heb. 1:1,2). Our task is to motivate men to hearken unto Jesus and the apostles through whom he spoke (Matt. 17:5; Acts 3:22; John 16:12-15; 1 Cor. 2:9-16). If we could accomplish such a task, religious division as it exists today would vanish away and the restoration of primitive Christianity would be realized.

Notwithstanding the ridicule hurled at the restoration plea by those in denominational and even brotherhood circles, the plea itself is biblical and valid. Several examples of the restoration principle are found in Scripture. Space allows us to examine only two. As a young king, Josiah set in motion a restoration movement. When he was twenty years old he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places where idol gods were worshipped. Jehovah's commandment to worship him and him alone (Ex. 20:3-5) had been ignored and abandoned by God's people. Josiah sought to restore the practice of monotheistic worship and removed the altars, images and groves. He even went so far as to burn the bones of the priests upon their altars (2 Chr. 34:3-7). After accomplishing this task he immediately sought to restore the house of God to its rightful state. In the midst of these repairs a book of the law of the Lord given by

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Moses was found (2 Chr. 34:14). Saphan the scribe took the book and read it before the king. Upon hearing it, the king rent his clothes and said, "great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book" (2 Chr. 34:19-21). So determined was Josiah to restore the practice of God's laws, he called all the people together and read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Immediately following this reading he publicly pledged to perform all the words of the covenant that were written in the book. Josiah asked all who were present to take the same stand. This commitment to restoration was not just a passing fancy. Josiah was not only interested in eliminating evil practices from among God's people, but he was also concerned with restoring practices that God had required which had long been forgotten. Thus, when Josiah learned from reading the book of the law of the Lord that a passover was to be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month, he immediately restored that practice. Scripture tells us that this particular passover had not been kept since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings preceding Josiah had ever kept it. But in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this passover was kept (2 Chr. 35:1, 17-19). A similar example of this restoration principle is recorded in *Nehemiah 8:1-18*. Upon hearing the words of the law read and explained, the people discovered that God expected them to dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. This commandment had not been observed since the days of Joshua! Yet, the people immediately restored this practice.

These two examples demonstrate not only the validity of restoration, but also its necessity. When God's way has been abandoned it is our duty to return it. Please observe the reverence of these people for God's word. They had more respect for God's word than they did for their family members who had neglected it in the years before them. Also note that Josiah was not an originator of the command to keep the passover. The command had long been in existence before Josiah was ever born. Thus, he was not an originator but a restorer. Similarly, when men like Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone and countless others in the early 1800s began to go to the book of the law of Christ and discover practices that they should eliminate and others that they should begin keeping, they were not originators

but restorers. The people in Josiah's day did not keep the passover merely because Josiah told them to. They realized that Josiah was pointing them back to the authority of Scripture to keep such a passover. Likewise, there is not one doctrine that I believe because of Alexander Campbell or any other restoration pioneer. I lovingly challenge anyone to point to even one doctrine taught by faithful churches of Christ that has as its sole authority Alexander Campbell. Campbell sought to point men back to the book of the law of the Lord as the authority for all matters of faith and practice.

The two examples cited in this article show that the desire to return to the book of inspiration for guidance in restoring the practice of God's law is both valid and necessary. Both those in Josiah's and Ezra's day were concerned about following the divine pattern as revealed in God's word. We must seek to create within the hearts of modern man today the burning desire to go back to the book of the perfect law of liberty and to use it and it alone as the standard for all that we do religiously.

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### GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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