

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 One)

by Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

The title above may shock some readers, but I hope it will stir many into examining their Bibles again to see if the claim is true. The Scriptures commend the Berean Jews as "noble," because they "searched the Scriptures daily [to see] whether those things were so" which were taught by the apostle Paul and Silas (Acts 17:11). The things spoken by Paul and Silas were controversial too, much like our statement that one **cannot** become a Christian by praying to God or Christ.

Many denominations who call themselves "Christian" teach that one **does** become a Christian by expressing faith in Christ through praying what they call "the sinner's prayer." Notice the following quote from a religious tract written by the popular crusade evangelist Billy Graham, entitled, "How To Become A Christian." Mr. Graham says that if you have faith in Christ:

"You can invite Jesus Christ into your life right now by praying to God something like the following. 'Dear Lord, I know that I am a sinner and that I need Your forgiveness. I believe that Christ died in my place to pay the penalty for my sin and that He rose from the dead. I now invite Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Savior. Thank you for making me Your child. Help me learn to please You in every part of my life.' "

Dear friends, that may sound good to you because you have heard something like that repeated so many times by so many religious people who are supposed to know what the Bible teaches. Religious tracts by the dozens and radio and TV preachers of nearly every kind encourage readers, listeners, and viewers to obey God by doing this. The truth is, there is **no command** for such in the New Testament, there is **no example**

of anyone ever becoming a Christian by doing such, and there is **no implication** that this is any part of God's plan of salvation. Please continue in this study and note the Biblical proof we offer for this assertion.

Sadly, the same claim made by Mr. Graham is made in other popular religious tracts such as "Isn't It Time For Jesus?", published by the Assemblies of God; "The Four Spiritual Laws," by Campus Crusade For Christ; and "God's Simple Plan of Salvation," by Ford Porter, just to name a few. Hundreds of millions of Porter's tract have been circulated by Baptists and dozens of other denominations, and no doubt many thousands have been led to believe that they were pleasing God by following Porter's instructions. He says,

"The first prayer for a sinner to pray is given in Luke 18:13: 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Now you are a sinner and surely you are sorry because of it. Right now, wherever you are, lift your heart to God in prayer. It does not take a long, loud prayer, for God is anxious to save you. Just say: 'Oh, God, I am a sinner, I am sorry, I repent; have mercy upon me, and save me for Jesus' sake.' Now just take Him at His word."

We may properly ask, "Just take God at **what word**?" Where does God tell an alien sinner, one who is not His child or a New Testament Christian, to pray to the Father or the Son in order to receive Christ and become a Christian? The answer is **nowhere**. Oh yes, Mr. Graham, Mr. Porter, and others use some Scripture to try to prove their contention that people truly receive Jesus by praying the sinner's prayer, but we shall show in this study that those Scriptures are used improperly. First, we will take up the Scriptures used in the tracts listed above and study their proper meaning. Second, we will examine the cases of

conversion in the book of Acts to see if anyone was ever **commanded** to pray the "sinner's prayer" or see if there is an **example** of anyone ever doing so. If the doctrine is taught in the Scriptures we should have no difficulty finding a command, example, or implication of it. Third, we will examine in the course of this study what the Scriptures do teach that an unconverted sinner must do in order to receive Christ and become a Christian.

No Scriptural Support For Praying The "Sinner's Prayer" In Order To Become A Christian

We certainly agree that in God's plan of salvation one must recognize that he/she is a sinner in need of God's grace and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1:7). One must also have faith in Christ (John 3:16; Acts 16:31) and repent of past sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30), as the tracts mentioned before set forth. However, the conclusion does not follow from agreeing to these passages of Scripture that one becomes a Christian and receives Christ by praying the sinner's prayer or anything like it. Let us look at the Scriptures which these tracts contend teach the sinner's prayer is necessary for salvation of the unconverted.

Porter's tract gives Luke 18:13 as "[t]he first payer for a sinner to pray, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" However, Luke 18:9-14 is not teaching how we become Christians. Verse 9 says that Jesus gave the parable to correct "certain [people] which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Both the Pharisee and the publican (tax collector) in this parable were Jews, already children of God under the law of Moses. This is obvious from the fact that they both "went up to the temple to pray" (verse 10). The publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," was offered because he knew he was still sinful, even as a child of God. The Pharisee, also a child of God as a Jew, did not recognize his sinfulness, but trusted his own self-righteousness and despised others because he thought he was better than they were (verses 9-13). This para-

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ble deals with men's relationship to God who were already His children, **not what one must do to become a child of God.** Remember too that these men were under the law of Moses, not the New Covenant of Christ. It is true that **Christians** must pray to God and confess sins to have continuing forgiveness (1 John 1:7-10; Acts 8:22 [Simon had become a Christian earlier in Acts 8:12-13; cf. Mark 16:16]), **but it is not taught in these passages that one becomes a Christian** (child of God) **by praying the sinner's prayer.** Luke 18:13 is abused when it is used to teach that doctrine.

In Billy Graham's tract he uses **John 1:12** in an attempt to prove that one receives Christ by prayer, but the verse teaches no such thing. Read it: "But as many as received him (Christ), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." First, there is not a word in the verse about prayer. Second, those who received Him were those who believed on His name. This faith did not make them sons of God, but gave them the power (right) to become sons of God by a new birth mentioned in verse 14 and explained later in John 3:3-5. Note that receiving Christ is not explained in either place as praying the sinner's prayer. The "receiving" of Christ in John 1:12 is by believing on His name and that faith gives us the power to become children of God through Christ. The way we do that is explained elsewhere, but men are never said to

become children of God by prayer. The U.S. Constitution gives aliens the power to become citizens if they will receive (believe) it and follow its instructions. The same sort of thing is true with believing (receiving) Christ under the terms of His New Testament, whether we are Jews or Gentiles (Galatians 3:26-28). Christ nowhere tells anyone to pray the sinner's prayer in order to become a child of God through His name, nor does any New Testament writer.

Revelation 3:20 is another passage noted in the tracts above in an attempt to support men being converted to Christ by praying the sinner's prayer. Again, please notice that prayer is not mentioned in the verse or the context in which it is located. Also note that in Revelation, chapters 1-3, Jesus is not speaking to non-Christians about how to become Christians. He is speaking to those in the **seven churches of Asia** (Revelation 1:10-11; 3-14). Those to whom Christ spoke in Revelation 3:20 were already Christians, but they had become unfaithful (verses 14-19). To these Christians the Lord pleaded for open hearts, as He promised, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The "any man" in the verse is limited to those in the church, especially since verse 22 affirms Jesus was speaking by the Spirit "unto the churches." There is nothing in this verse that could be properly construed that the Lord was telling unconverted sinners to invite Him into their lives by saying the sinner's prayer! To do so is to twist and torture the Scriptures to the destruction of souls (2 Peter 3:16).

Prayer for the forgiveness of sins is the privilege of Christians, those already in Christ, not those who need to put Him on. Erring Christians are to repent of sins, confess them, and pray to God for forgiveness (Revelation 3:19; 1 John 1:7-10; Acts 8:22), **but that is not how one who is unconverted becomes a Christian!** Those who are outside of Christ are told to believe in Him (Acts 16:31); repent of past sins (Acts 2:38); publicly confess His name as Lord (Romans 10:9-10); and be baptized into Him to put him on (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). No such verses can be found which tell the unconverted to pray the sinner's prayer to have Jesus come into their hearts. If you believe otherwise, please point out

where the Scriptures command it, give an example of it, or imply the necessity of it. I will be happy to receive your correction if I am in error.

[Part 2 of this study will deal with the use of Romans 10:13 and similar verses which speak of "calling on the name of the Lord" to be saved. We will show in detail that this phrase cannot mean to pray the sinner's prayer, and also take a positive look at what it means when the Bible says, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."]

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HAVE YOU SEEN A MIRACLE?

by Allen Webster

A miracle is "an interference with nature by a supernatural power" (C.S. Lewis). A miracle is not surviving a near calamity, something complicated, newly discovered or not fully understood. A child operates a model train track. Normally, he uses a control box, but occasionally he picks up a box car and moves it. God normally operates in nature according to His natural laws, but at times, has stepped in and set laws aside in accomplishing His purpose.

There are three positions affirmed regarding miracles: (1) They never happened (modernists); (2) They happened in Bible times, but do not happen presently; (3) They have happened and are happening. "Do I believe in miracles?" Yes. "Do I believe they happen today?" No. Every miracle the Bible records happened. Those speculated today are not to be believed.

This article is not based on what someone feels, what has always been taught, or what one wishes were the case. Simply, this is a study of what the Bible teaches about the duration of the miraculous age.

THERE IS NO PURPOSE FOR MIRACLES TODAY. Miracles served three purposes. One, to start each dispensation — Patriarchal (Gen. 1:1-27; Psa. 33:6,9; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5-7); Mosaic (Ex. 7, 12, 19; Deut. 17:6; Heb. 10:28, 29); Christian (Mk. 16:20; Lk. 24:47-49; Acts 11:15). Two, to confirm a speaker had God's approval: Moses (Ex. 4:1-8, 29, 30); Jesus (Mt. 11:2-5; Jn. 20:30, 31); Apostles (Mk. 16:17-20). Since they had no completed Bible, the Lord promised special power (Lk. 24:46-48; Acts 1:5, 8). Three, to reveal to a messenger unknown truth: Apostles (preaching) (Jn.

14:26; 16:13); New Testament (NT) writers (1 Cor. 2:10-13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). The Spirit revealed to them what they could not and did not know, and guarded them from error in writing what they had witnessed or otherwise knew.

The purpose of miracles was never to relieve the suffering of all those who were hurting or to keep Christians from persecution (cf. Heb. 11:34-40). While on earth Christ did not raise all the dead, give sight to all the blind, hearing to all the deaf, or health to all the diseased (cf. Jn. 5:2-4). Jesus did not deliver John from prison or death (Mt. 11:7-11; Jn. 10:41) and Paul did not heal Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23) or Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). Rather, they performed a relatively small number of miracles to give credence to their preaching (cf. Jn. 3:2).

None of the three purposes of miracles is needed today. (1) The Christian Dispensation has long been started. (2) The word has been confirmed (Heb. 2:3). Must Jesus return and raise Lazarus from the dead again in order for us to believe that He is God's Son? No! Once a court proves a man innocent of a charge, must it convene and reconfirm his innocence every year? No, that has already been settled. We now have the evidence in writing (Jn. 20:30, 31). It is settled. Faith comes by hearing (Rm. 10:17), not seeing. The written word supplies the man of God completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). If a person is not convinced by the Bible, he would not be convinced if one should rise from the dead (Lk. 16:19-31). (3) The New Testament is completed and no new revelation will be given (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Jude 3).

THERE IS NO POWER AVAILABLE FOR MIRACLES TODAY. No one questions that God has the power to work miracles Today. The question is not "Can He?", but "Does He?" Miraculous power was bestowed upon men in New Testament times through two means: baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, 43) and laying on of the Apostle's hands (Acts 8:14-18; 19:1-7). There are only two examples of Holy Spirit baptism in the NT (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44; cf. 11:18). The last occurrence was about A.D. 41. Twenty-three years later Paul wrote that there "is [present tense] one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). About the same time Peter taught that it was water baptism (1 Pet. 3:20, 21). None today receive Spirit baptism.

The apostles were the only ones in the Jerusalem church who could work miracles, until they imparted the power to the seven deacons (Acts 2:43; 5:12; cf. Acts 6). Then Stephen and Philip, two of the seven, performed miracles (Acts 6:8; 8:6). It is evident, however, that Philip could not impart miraculous power to others (Acts 8:12, 14-21).

All the apostles have died. Therefore, it is impossible for them to give power to anyone through the laying on of hands. None today receive power from an apostle. Thus, no one has power today to work miracles since God does not give such power directly in the New Testament Age.

THERE IS NO PROOF OF MIRACLES TODAY. That miracles were performed in NT times is not questioned (Acts 4:16), or questionable. They could drink deadly poison and cast out devils (Mk. 16:17, 18). Peter and Paul raised the dead (Acts 9:40, 41; 20:9-12). A deadly viper bit Paul on the hand, but he felt no harm (Acts 28:5).

Where is the evidence of real miracles today? If a person claims to have Holy Spirit baptism, he too should be able to do all these miracles. If he cannot do them, he does not have it. We want to see one raised from the dead or an amputee's hand replaced. We care little for internal "ailments" or psychosomatic illnesses "cured" by an emotional massage. These prove nothing.

The Bible warns of counterfeit "miracles" (2 Thes. 2:8-10; Rev. 16:13, 14). It is sad that some have been deceived and others would rather believe a lie than the truth (2 Thes. 2:11, 12). When feelings differ from what the book says, we must go by the Book. Feelings can be wrong (Jer. 17:9; Acts 23:1). Let's all unite upon what the Bible teaches.

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"...choose you this day whom ye will serve..." (Joshua 24:15)

by Ron Wilson

The story of the "Young Prophet" is recorded in 1 Kings 13. This man of God was led astray by another man of God. There is nothing in the context to suggest the old prophet was a false prophet. If he had been, the man of God would have ignored him; he had already rejected a king with the same request. It is highly unfortunate that men some-

times pledge allegiance to a well known personality and wind up on the wrong side. Some people seem to be eternally forgetful that we are not to be attached to any man; our loyalty is to God. A well known singer once led some of God's children into charismatic chaos. They forgot the lesson of the young prophet. We should not be "drawing straws" to line up with one man or another. Brooms are made for sweeping. The Bible tells us how to "Line up." Scripture unequivocally teaches that even popular people can be wrong. "Come now and let us reason together." The reasoning process involves an honest examination of evidence by the light of Holy Writ.

In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul prefaces his chastisement over lining up with men by, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 9). Fellowship is mutual interest and activity in the things of GOD. Lining up with men negates our fellowship with God. Those who follow a prestigious spokesman into liberal lawlessness forget the admonition, "Is Christ divided?" How can we so emphatically urge this lesson upon others but develop laryngitis when our own circle is called into question? How can we reason so well in applying lessons to the nameless but take a different perspective when names are supplied?

Instead of antagonisms we should applaud faithful gospel preachers who often lay their reputations and careers on the chopping blocks when taking a public stand on God's side regardless of the greatness or number of folks on the other side. Moreover, we should not hinder but rather hold up the hands of earnest elders who also are thrust into the limelight for being on God's side. "Come now and let us reason together." We constantly accept God's challenge and exhaustively examine every jot and tittle of HIS Word. Can we afford to be so carefully careless when the word of a MAN is challenged? On whose side are we?

"...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15).

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To work out life's problems, we need to add love, subtract hate, multiply good and divide between truth and error.

DO WE STILL NEED THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GOSPEL?

by Dennis Gullledge

The fundamentals of anything have to do with that which is of central importance. The fundamentals are basic and foundational. Even though the gospel of Christ is "the faith," and as such is "one," it is both fundamental and advanced (Jude 3; 2 Peter 3:16).

There are what we call "fundamental sermons." These lessons are usually based on the basics of Christianity: faith, baptism, the church, obedience, etc. Any preacher recognizes the fact that when he preaches a fundamental sermon he is treading familiar ground with many brethren. He knows that he is not dealing with something new to many people, but he simply asks you to remember that there once was a time when we did not know these things, due to the lack of opportunity.

It is with great sadness that we realize that many pulpits are all but silent on the fundamentals of the gospel in these modern days. Why? Do we feel that we have graduated to greater things? Do we think it an inconvenience to retrace our thoughts to those areas of Bible knowledge, hopefully, already explored? Have we convinced ourselves that we are better served with a "feel good about yourself," "love yourself," diet in the pulpit?

I have never read a better defense of the need for preaching of the gospel fundamentals than that which N. B. Hardeman included in the preface to volume one of his *Tabernacle Sermons*. In the language of another author he said, "I fear that some are drifting away from the old landmarks that so clearly characterized the restoration movement in its earlier days. Some of the old themes that used to be handled with telling effect by the pioneers are now seldom preached from some pulpits. It is, however, a noticeable fact that when first principles are shunned, evangelistic results are correspondingly meager. The men who are eminently successful in bringing souls to Christ are the men who preach a full gospel. Its facts, commands, and promises are all declared. Show me the man who eliminates first principles from his preaching, and I will show you one who has eliminated the baptistry from his church, so far as it is of any practical service - nay, I will

show you a man who is in doubt as to whether the disciples have any distinctive message for the world."

That statement was taken by brother Hardeman and applied to his day in 1922. We can still apply it to our day, with only slight revision. Whereas "some pulpits" were void of the fundamentals then, now many are void of such. And it is amazingly prophetic that those who have abandoned first principles are correspondingly in doubt as to whether we have a distinctive message for the world. The Lord's church has always had a distinctive message for the world. The fundamentals never fail to make that distinction clear.

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You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments when you have really lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.

Henry Drummond

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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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