

But consider another case of conversion. This time we have Philip meeting a man from Ethiopia out in the desert. The Ethiopian had been all the way to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home, he was reading from Isaiah 53. When Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian invited Philip to teach him. As Philip explained the Scripture to him, teaching him about Jesus, the record says, *“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest, And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing”* (Acts 8:36-39).

You will note that nothing was said about prayer. Why? Because this man was not a child of God. First, he needed to obey the Lord, that he might be saved, putting him in a relationship in which he could pray to God as a son to his Father.

In John 9 we have the story of a man who had been blind from birth and how Jesus miraculously

gave him his sight. Later this same man said, *“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth”* (John 9:31). In other words, this Scripture is plainly stating, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that **prayer does not save one** or make him a child of God, but rather one becomes a Christian by doing the will of God.

Do you remember the conversion of Saul of Tarsus? After Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he went into the city and was there for three days, fasting and **praying**. When Ananias came to him he said, *“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16). Even Saul was not saved by praying! Christ said, instead, that one must **believe** and **be baptized** to be **saved**. That is the only plan for salvation given in the New Testament.

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# The Sinner's Prayer

J.C. Choate



## The Sinner's Prayer

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Many of the preachers of our day have promoted what they call "The Sinner's Prayer". At the close of their sermons they invite those who are not saved to come forward. Those who do so are then asked to repeat after them a prayer that goes something like this: **"Father in heaven, I come before you as a sinner, believing that your Son, Jesus, died on the cross to save me from my sins. I ask you now to forgive me of my sins and accept me as your child. In the name of Christ I ask this. Amen."** The preacher then announces that those who said the sinner's prayer have been forgiven of their sins and are now children of God.

There is just one thing wrong with the procedure I have described: the Scriptures nowhere talk about "the sinner's prayer", and the Lord has not promised to save anyone from his sins through the process of saying such a prayer. This is a prayer — and a doctrine — that has originated with man alone, and those who say such a prayer are deceived into thinking that they have been saved. They are not only *not* saved, but because they have been *deceived* into thinking they are saved, they themselves remain

lost and they influence others to follow their example, saying the same prayer and thereby remaining in their lost condition as well.

Read through the book of Acts and study carefully the 11 stories of conversion that are told there. Is there even one situation where the sinner was asked to say "The Sinner's Prayer"? You will not find such a thing mentioned in a single case!

Let us look, together, at some of these conversion accounts. On the first Pentecost (a Jewish feast day that brought Jews together in Jerusalem from all over the world) after the resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles were in Jerusalem, awaiting the promised coming of the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). On receiving that power, they began to preach to the audience in their own languages, evidence that God was working through the Apostles. They explained that the prophecies of the Old Testament were being fulfilled: that Christ had lived among men doing good, that with wicked hands He had been crucified, that He had been resurrected from the grave, and that He had returned to the Father in heaven to sit down at the right hand of God, to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

Many of the listeners were cut to the heart, becoming believers in Jesus as the Christ. They asked, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*

Now what did Peter and the Apostles tell them? "Just believe and you are saved!" or "Repeat after us 'The Sinner's Prayer'?" No, we don't read such answers! What does the Scripture say? *"Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**"* (Acts 2:38). Then we read, *"Then they that **gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls**"* (Acts 2:41). And finally we read, *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:47).

Now you will notice that nothing was said about prayer until **after** they had been baptized! Then as **children of God**, the Scripture says that *"they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42).

Before these people became children of God **they were not in a relationship with God, so they could not properly pray!** In other words, God was not their Father and they were not His children! But after they had **obeyed** the Lord, and had been **born anew** through a penitent heart in the waters of baptism, then they could pray, and they did pray.