

## **ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS #5**

### **I. Introduction**

Tonight I continue with our series on 'Ask for the Old Paths' from Jeremiah 6:16. This was God's prophetic word to His people when their country was in chaos. God says first fix the church then fix the nation.

So what's wrong with the church? We've strayed from the 'old paths'. We've adopted new ideas and techniques that have become 'sacred cows' that need to be slaughtered. Tonight I'll tackle big one....

### **"The Sinner's Prayer"**

**What is the 'Sinner's Prayer'?**

#### **Online Sources**

**Often, at the end of a worship service, in what is known as an altar call, a minister or other worship leader will invite those desiring to receive Christ, thus becoming born again by repeating after him or her the words of some form of a 'sinner's prayer'.**

#### **Wikipedia**

**The Sinner's Prayer (also called the Consecration Prayer or the Salvation Prayer) is an evangelical Christian term referring to any prayer prayed by individuals who feel convinced of the presence of sin in their lives and express a desire to form a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.**

There is no single, universally used 'sinner's prayer'; it can take many forms. But generally, it sounds like this one from the Pastor of America's largest church:

#### **Joel Osteen**

**We never like to close our broadcast without giving you the opportunity to make Jesus Lord of your life. Would you pray with me? Just say, 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. Come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Savior.' Friends, if you prayed that simple prayer, we believe you got born again!**

It is not uncommon in some churches to provide 'Sinner's Prayer' cards in the pew

### **Salvation Prayer Pew Card**

Lord Jesus, I come to you today. I am a sinner but you died for me.  
Jesus Christ, come into my life, be my Lord and Savior.  
Take control of my life from this day forward.  
Thank you for SAVING ME. Amen.  
Congratulations! Welcome to the Family of God!

Here's a little handout card some people leave in public places for evangelism

### **READ THE SINNER'S PRAYER AND BE SAVED**

"God, I'm pretty rotten. I don't want to go to hell. I want to go to heaven.  
So I invite Jesus into my heart. Thanks for that. Amen.  
(Underneath)  
Congratulations!  
Please email me your testimony.

Some of you here have sat through hundreds of services where so many 'sinner's prayers' have been said that you see nothing wrong with it. So it may shock you to hear what the late great Leonard Ravenhill said about it...

### **Leonard Ravenhill**

**The 'Sinner's Prayer' has sent more people to hell than all the bars in America.**

Evangelist Paul Washer said something very similar...

### **Paul Washer**

**"If there's anything I've declared war on it's the 'Sinner's Prayer'. It has sent more people to hell than anything else on the face of the earth.**

### **Paul Washer**

**The 'Sinner's Prayer' method of evangelism has done more to hurt this country than every heresy introduced by every cult combined.**

How has the 'Sinner's Prayer' sent ore people to hell than all the bars in America?  
How has it done more to hurt this country than heresy and cults?  
Here's what I believe...

### **The Bottom Line of This Message**

**Our modern methods of evangelism have filled our American churches with counterfeit converts resting in a false assurance of salvation because of faith in a prayer that has no basis in the Bible.**

The country is in a mess because the church is in a mess. We can't fix the country until we fix the church. To fix the church we have to pull no punches about what it means to really become a Christian. Many who profess the faith are false professors. Counterfeit Christians. So our country is in decline.

**James Montgomery Boice**

**“Why is today’s church so weak? Why are we able to claim so many church members and yet have less and less impact on our culture? Why are so many Christians indistinguishable from the world? Is it not that many are calling people Christians who are unregenerate? Is it not that many are settling for a “form of godliness, but denying its power”? (2 Timothy 3:5)**

The truth is our country is covered with Counterfeit Christianity.

**Matt Walsh, The Daily Wire**

**Over 80 percent of the people in this country claim to be Christian, but how many, in the end, will find out the hard way that their claims were false? Our culture seems perfectly designed to lead us into this sort of false faith because it’s dangerously easy to be considered “Christian” by popular standards.**

But ‘popular standards’ are not God’s standards! One popular standard that falls short of God’s standard is ‘The Sinner’s Prayer’. So what’s wrong with it?

### **6 Things That Are Wrong With The ‘Sinner’s Prayer?’**

- 1. It’s not in the Bible**
- 2. It reduces the Gospel to a one-time ‘decision’**
- 3. It promotes an ‘easy believism’**
- 4. It neglects the necessity of repentance**
- 5. It produces a false peace in those who believe it saved them**
- 6. It tempts the leader to sin by giving a false assurance of salvation**

## **II. What’s Wrong With the ‘Sinner’s Prayer?’**

## **A. First of all, it's not in the Bible!**

1. There is no scriptural support for it; there is no place in the Bible where one person leads another person to pray a prayer after them.

2. If this was a scriptural practice, wouldn't Jesus, or Peter, or Paul have used it? Somewhere?

a. I cannot find one single 'altar call' in the New Testament.

b. **There are so many things we say today that are not in the Bible.**

'Every head bowed, every eye closed, no one looking around'  
'If you want to receive Jesus slip up a hand' ('I see that hand!')

c. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where we are instructed to 'accept Christ' or 'ask Jesus to come into our heart' or to 'receive Jesus as our personal Savior'. These terms aren't there.

3. All of these are 'new paths', man-made inventions of modern evangelism not found in the scriptures.

### **David Platt**

**Should it concern us that the Bible never calls us to 'ask Jesus into our hearts' or to 'accept Christ' as our personal Savior? Should it concern us that the 'Sinner's Prayer' is not in the Bible and yet that is exactly what we have sold to so many as salvation?**

## **B. Second, It Reduces the Gospel to a One-Time Decision**

1. The 'Sinner's Prayer' reduces salvation to the idea that if, at some moment in our lives, we made a simple 'decision for Christ', and that one decision was all we needed to do to be saved for all eternity. If this was a movie, I'd call it...

**"Honey, I shrunk the Gospel!"**

2. Of course there IS a decision to be made regarding salvation! But we make decisions every day that we go back on!

**Paul Washer**

In modern day evangelism, the precious doctrine of regeneration has been reduced to nothing more than a decision to raise one's hand, walk an aisle, or pray a 'Sinner's Prayer'. As a result, the majority of Americans believe that they have been 'born again', even though their thoughts, words, and deeds are a contradiction to the nature and the will of God.

**Paul Washer**

Millions of people in this country, whose lives have never been changed, believe themselves saved because we have so reduced the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that it means nothing more than a simple decision that will only take 5 minutes of your time.

**C. Third: It Promotes the Concept of "Easy Believism"**

**John McArthur**

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope for sinners...by separating faith from faithfulness....an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners.

**J.I. Packer**

"Bare assent to the Gospel, divorced from a transforming commitment to the living Christ, is by biblical standards less than faith, and less than saving. Professions of this kind can only secure false conversions.

1. The modern mega-church ministers make salvation simply a matter of a decision and a 'belief'. But there is a belief in God that does not save you.

**James 2:19-20**

**You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe that. But do you know O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?**

a. Satan and the demons believe in God and in Jesus; but it won't save them!

2. Saving faith is the kind of faith that produces good works!

**Martin Luther**

**“We are saved by faith alone; but the faith that saves is never alone.”**

**Martin Luther**

3. Yet how many millions have prayed the ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ and gone on to live sinful lives?

**J.D. Greear**

**Surveys show that more than 50% of people in the United States have prayed the ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ and think they’re going to heaven because of it, even though there is no detectable difference between their lifestyles from those outside of the church.**

**J.D. Greear**

**On this issue—the most important issue on earth—we have to be absolutely clear. We need to preach salvation by repentance before God and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

4. How many millions once prayed the sinner’s prayer but now never darken the door of a church?

a. Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian; but real Christians go to a local church! Telling me you’re a Christian without a Church is like telling me you’re in the NFL but you’re not a team!

b. Billy Graham, God rest his soul, is one of my heroes; but he employed the sinner’s prayer in all his crusades. With what result? He did an extensive follow-up study on those who came to one of his altar calls:

**They found that less than 1 in 10 converts from the Billy Graham crusades could be found in a church 5 years later!**

c. Over 90% of his converts didn’t ‘continue in the faith’!

5. The Apostle John tells us why:

**1 John 2:19**

**They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**

a. He's not talking about changing churches, he's talking about those who leave because they were never saved in the first place.

**1 John 2:19 NLT**

**These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.**

6. The 'Sinner's Prayer' puts the emphasis on the moment; it leaves the seeker with the impression that it's a 'one and done' deal; pray the prayer once and that's all you need to do. But Jesus said...

**Mark 13:13**

**And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.**

7. Don't we owe it to the candidate to warn them about this?

**D. Fourth: It Neglects the Necessity of Repentance**

**Howard Green**

**"The emphasis in many churches today is on life-enhancement and not eternal salvation. The message of repentance is largely ignored and has been replaced by a different gospel that doesn't change anything at the soul level."**

1. Proponents of the 'Sinner's Prayer' disconnect repentance from faith. But there is no such thing as saving faith without repentance! Notice how Jesus connected repentance and faith...

**Mark 1:15**

**The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; Repent and believe the Gospel.**

a. This was the Apostle Paul's preaching pattern in the Book of Acts:

**Acts 20:20-21**

**I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.**

b. We taught a series on ‘The 7 Foundations of the Christian Faith’; notice the first 2...

**Hebrews 6:1-2**

**Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...**

2. Historical Christianity never separates saving faith from repentance.

**St. Augustine (in the 4<sup>th</sup> century)**

**“No one can begin a new life unless he repent of the old.”**

**Thomas Watson (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century)**

**“Two great graces essential to a saint in this life are repentance and faith. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven.”**

**Charles Spurgeon (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century)**

**Faith and repentance are inseparable.**

**A.W. Pink (in the 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

**“A sinner cannot truly believe until he repents. Repentance does not save; yet no sinner ever was or will be saved without it. None but Christ saves, but an impenitent heart cannot receive Him.”**

a. My spiritual father Derek Prince summed it up:

**Derek Prince**

**“The New Testament is unanimous on this one point: true repentance must always go before true faith. Without true repentance there can never be true faith.”**



3. The 'Sinner's Prayer' is presumptuous in assuming the candidate has both; truly repented and

**Have you truly believed? Not unless you have truly repented.  
Have you truly repented? Not unless your life has truly changed.**

**Adrian Rogers**

**"In my estimation, you've never been saved if you've not changed your mind about sin."**

**E. Fifth: It Produces a False Peace in Those Who Believe This Prayer Saved Them**

**James Montgomery Boice**

**The greatest weakness of evangelical Christianity in America...a tragic error...is the idea that one can be a Christian without being a follower of Jesus Christ.**

**It reduces the Gospel to the mere fact of Christ's having died for sinners, requires of sinners only that they acknowledge this by the barest mental assent, and then assures them of eternal security when they may very well not be born again.**

**James Montgomery Boice**

**This view bends faith beyond recognition...and promises a false peace to thousands who have given verbal assent to this reductionist Christianity but are not truly in God's family.**

1. it's sad for me to say that I've met many in the church who cannot be corrected about their sinful state because they once prayed a 'Sinner's Prayer'.

- a. They go to church but they live with their girlfriend.
- b. They go to church but they're addicted to pornography
- c. But the can't be convicted of sins that will send them to hell.

**Greg Koukl, Monergism.com**

**I fear we've inoculated a whole generation of people who got a partial injection of Christianity and are now resistant to the real thing. They prayed the sinner's**

prayer, got their 'fire insurance', and then disappeared, never to be seen again. When confronted with the Gospel anew they shrug, 'Been there, done that. Now leave me alone. I have a life to live.'

**Greg Koukl**

The focus of evangelism should never be about praying the prayer, but about following Jesus. When we emphasize *deciding* for Christ instead of *living* for Him, we often get spiritual miscarriages instead of spiritual births. Our sense of safety can't come from simply saying a magic prayer.

2. Peace from a 'Sinner's Prayer' is a false peace.

#### **F. Sixth: It Tempts Leaders To Sin By Giving a False Assurance of Salvation**

1. My first red flag about the 'Sinner's Prayer' came in the late 1970's. Testimony about 'Snake'. I knew it was off.

2. To this day, I cringe when ministers tell people they are saved when they have no way of knowing. Back to our sample of the 'Sinner's Prayer'...

**Joel Osteen**

**Would you pray with me? Just say, 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. Come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Savior.' Friends, if you prayed that simple prayer, we believe you got born again!**

3. Friends, never trust your salvation to the fact that you once prayed a 'Sinner's Prayer' or made a decision at some point in your life to believe in Christ. Never trust any minister who assures you of your salvation because you repeated some words he asked you to pray! That's above his pay grade!

**Dr. Bill Rhetts**

**No one can tell me that I am saved; they can only tell me how to become saved. They can only share the Gospel and point me to the Savior. You can only discern a person's conversion to Christ by their fruits, repentance, and a changed life; but through a test of time.**

**Cheryl Ann Rickards, P.H.D.**

**There is a problem in contemporary ministry of prematurely declaring someone to be saved on the basis of an affirmation made at an altar call, which may have been the result of high-pressure evangelism. We experience assurance of our conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit, not the decree of the minister.**

4. So with all due respect to my brother Pastors, let me remind you of warning from Charles Spurgeon, the 'Prince of Preachers':

#### **Charles Spurgeon**

**Do not suppose that the Gospel is magnified or God glorified by going to the worldlings and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply accepting Christ as their Savior, while they are wedded to their idols, and their hearts are still in love with sin. If I do so I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.**

5. This what many ministers do today in the name of 'niceness'.

#### **C.S. Lewis**

**Given the society's extensive appeal for a nicer message, many preachers act like a lazy athlete who seeks to lower the height of the barriers on the racetrack so that he can jump them. They reduce the demands of the Gospel so they don't have to increase the ministerial effort. However, no matter how much you try to cover up the truth, truth is persistent and refuses to be silent.**

### **III. Conclusion:**

#### **A. Review: The Sinner's Prayer is a Sacred Cow in Need of Killing**

1. It's done a lot of damage.

#### **Leonard Ravenhill**

**The 'Sinner's Prayer' has sent more people to hell than all the bars in America.**

2. We went over at least 6 things wrong with it.

#### **6 Things That Are Wrong With The 'Sinner's Prayer'**

3. We can't fix the nation until we fix the church; and it begins with the 'front door' of evangelism.

### **The Bottom Line of This Message**

**We need to repent of our modern methods of evangelism that have filled our American churches with counterfeit converts resting in a false assurance of salvation because of faith in a prayer that has no basis in the Bible.**

4. We need to get back to the Bible and follow the clear command of the Apostle Paul...

### **2 Corinthians 13:5 NLT**

**Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is in you. If not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.**

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **TITLE**