

Where is the Sinner's Prayer?

Jason P. Hilburn

EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION IN THE BOOK OF ACTS					
CONVERSION ACCOUNT	BELIEVE	REPENT	CONFESS CHRIST	BE BAPTIZED	AFTER WATER BAPTISM
3000 saved (Acts 2)	Believed (v37)	Repented (v37, 38)		Baptized (v38-41)	Remission of sins (v38)
Samaritans (Acts 8)	Believed (v12)			Baptized (v12)	
Simon (Acts 8)	Believed (v13)			Baptized (v13)	
Ethiopian (Acts 8)	Believed (v37)		Confessed (v37)	Baptized (v38)	Rejoiced (v39)
Saul (Acts 9, 22)				Baptized (9:18)	Sins washed away (22:16)
Cornelius (Acts 10, 11)	Believed (10:43)	Repented (11:18)		Baptized (10:48)	Accepted by God (10:35)
Lydia (Acts 16)				Baptized (v15)	Was judged to be faithful (v15)
Jailer (Acts 16)	Believed (v31, 34)			Baptized (v33)	Rejoiced (v34)
Corinthians (Acts 18)	Believed (v8)			Baptized (v8)	Baptized into the body of the saved (1 Cor. 12:13)
Ephesians (Acts 19)	Believed (v4)	Repented (v4)		Baptized (v5)	Sanctified and cleansed (Eph. 5:26)
One must hear the Word of God (Romans 10:17)	One must believe in Christ (John 8:24)	One must repent of sins (Acts 17:30)	One must confess Christ (Matthew 10:32)	One must be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27)	In order to be saved (Hebrews 5:9)
The Great Commission	<i>"...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them..."</i> (Matthew 28:19 ASV) <i>"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..."</i> (Mark 16:16)				

Do you see a pattern in this chart regarding water baptism? Today millions of people are being told that they do not have to be baptized to be saved. They are told that they can merely pray "the sinner's prayer." The book of Acts has been rightfully called the "book of conversions," yet we do not read of any conversions to Christ which involved a command to pray! As a matter of fact, nowhere in the Bible do we read of any alien sinner living under the New Testament who was commanded to

pray for salvation! Although God knew that Saul and Cornelius were praying to Him before baptism, those prayers did not save them, because that was not what God commanded people to do to become Christians (Acts 9:6; 10:6,35,48; 22:16).

Many preachers cite First John 1:9 as the sinner's prayer: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* However, they ignore the fact that these words were not written to alien sinners, but to Christians! Notice what John goes on to write: *"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake"* (I John 2:12). Prayer is the avenue of forgiveness for Christians (those who have already been Scripturally baptized). An example of this is found in Acts 8. When Simon the sorcerer sinned after baptism, as a child of God he was told to pray (Acts 8:22-24). He was not told to pray first, and then be baptized! (cf. Acts 8:12-13).

Some cite the confession of Romans 10:9-10, as if that is a prayer, but that is not a prayer to God—it is a confession of one's faith in Christ to men! It is the confession Jesus mentioned as one of the essential steps for salvation (Matt. 10:32); the confession of the Truth upon which the church was built (Matt. 16:16); the confession early Christians made to men before being baptized to wash away their sins (Acts 8:37-39). It is the good confession that Timothy made before many witnesses (I Tim. 6:12-13). It is also the same kind of confession that many Jews were unwilling to make (John 12:42-43), and that seems to be why Paul emphasizes this particular part of the plan of salvation in Romans 10:9-10. Paul had a lot to say about the Jews in this context (cf. 10:1-8,18-21).

The belief and confession of Romans 10:10 are both *"unto"* (towards) salvation, as is repentance (Acts 11:18). The table above makes that clear. They are steps toward salvation, but one is not actually in Christ until he has been *"baptized into Christ"* for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36-38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; II Tim. 2:10; I Pet. 3:21). One calls on (invokes) the name (authority) of the Lord by being baptized in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord (Rom. 10:13; Acts 2:21,38; 22:16). Knowing that repentance is essential, why is it not mentioned in Romans 10? (Acts 17:30-31; II Cor. 7:10). It is not mentioned, but it is implied, just as baptism is clearly implied. The Bible often uses a figure of speech called a synecdoche, in which a concise statement is used to represent something more complex.

Being baptized can also be described as obeying the Gospel, which Paul mentioned in this context (Rom. 10:16). The fundamental facts of the Gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4). To obey the Gospel is to obey the death, burial, and resurrection in baptism (Paul had already explained this in Romans 6). After baptism into Christ, one must still continue to believe and confess Him before men to remain saved, and one should remember that Romans 10 was written to baptized Christians who needed to continue doing such things to be saved (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 9:20). To summarize, Romans 10:9-10 is not a reference to prayer, and one is not in Christ until he is *"baptized into Christ"* for salvation after his repentance and confession of faith made before men. Calling on the name of the Lord and obeying the Gospel are descriptions of Scriptural baptism. Paul wrote Romans, and Peter warned that some of Paul's writings are more difficult, having been twisted by some to their own destruction (II Pet. 3:15-18). To take Romans 10:9-10 and exclude other inspired requirements for salvation would not be rightly dividing God's Word (II Tim. 2:15); and those who do not believe God when He says that water baptism saves are not people of faith (cf. I Pet. 3:21; Rom. 10:17).

Please notice the following Scriptures, which teach that prayer is a blessing for those God calls "righteous":

"The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:29).

"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9).

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

"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; stated by an uninspired man, but obviously based on Old Testament teachings like those above).

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Pet. 3:12).

Prayer is a spiritual blessing, and *"all spiritual blessings"* are for those *"in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3). One enters *"into Christ"* when he becomes a child of God by being *"baptized into Christ"*: *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26-27). Baptism is the new birth--it is when one is *"born of water and of the Spirit"* (John 3:5; 6:63; James 1:18; I Peter 1:23). He is raised from the grave of baptism to *"walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:3-4), having had the washing of water for regeneration (rebirth--Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:25-26). When a person is *"baptized into Christ"* he is *"a new creature,"* a new person, a newborn person (II Cor. 5:17).

Once we have become God's children through baptism, the sins that separated us from God have been washed away (Acts 22:16). Therefore we can boldly approach God's throne saying, *"Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name..."* (Eph. 3:12-14; Heb. 4:16; Matt. 6:9). However, no person has ever become a child of God by praying a prayer. If one has been immersed while believing he was already saved beforehand, he should seriously consider being immersed exactly as the Bible says—*"for the forgiveness of sins"* to be saved (Acts 2:38; cf. 22:16; 19:1-5; I Pet. 3:21), after he has repented and confessed his faith in Christ before men (Acts 8:37; 17:30).