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Prayer: Should Christians Pray For Sinners? Should Sinners Pray for Themselves?

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PRAYER



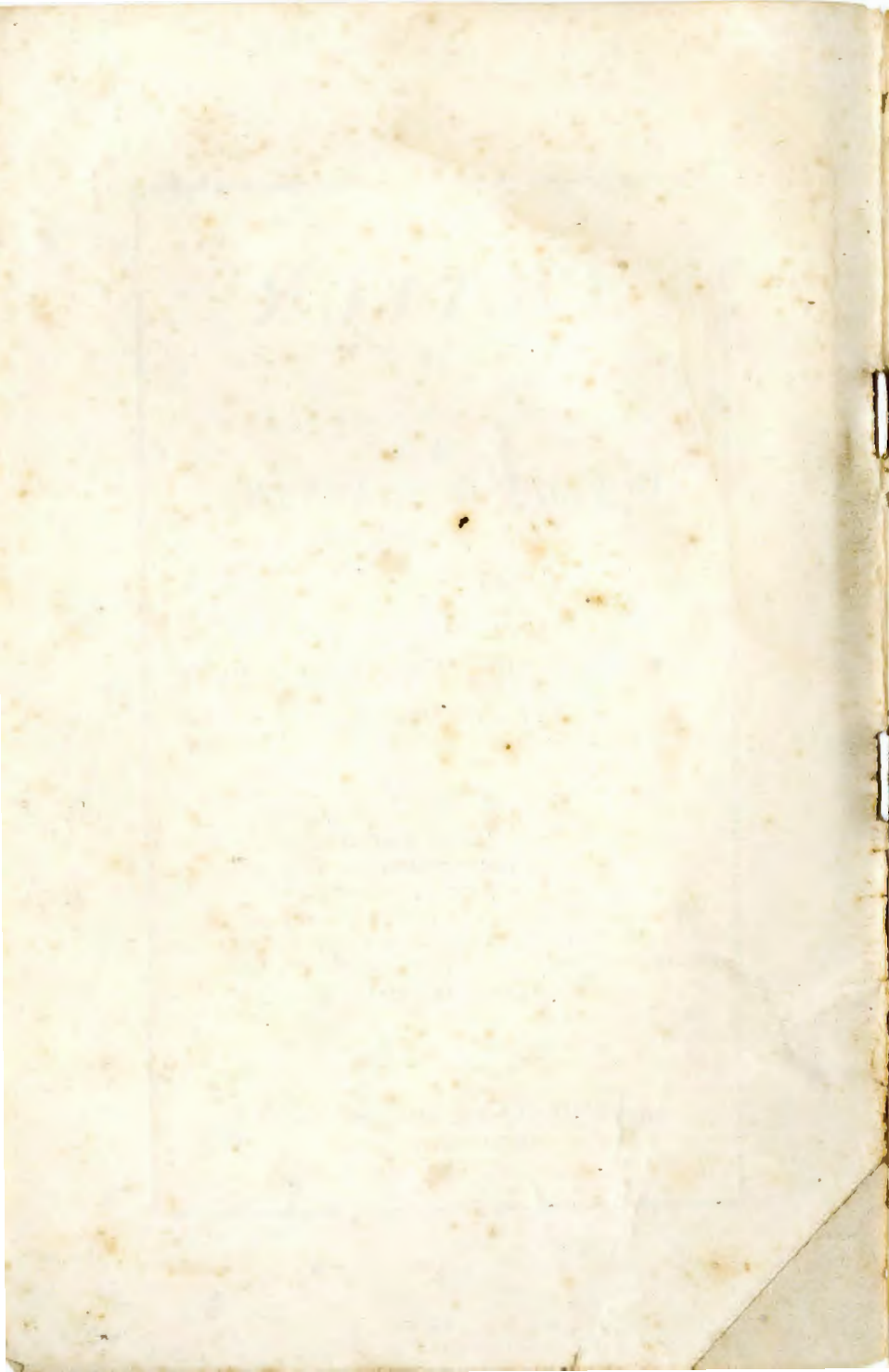
I.
SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY
FOR SINNERS?

II.
SHOULD SINNERS PRAY FOR
THEMSELVES?

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PRAYER

I.

SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY FOR SINNERS?

SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY?—This is the first question to settle. The Bible represents Christians as children of God, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8: 16), and as such it is their great and gracious privilege to approach God, through the medium of prayer, with the familiar words, “Our Father who art in heaven.” (Matt. 6: 9.) We should esteem this one of the greatest privileges ever granted to the children of men, and should constantly praise and magnify his holy name for such matchless love. The Apostle John, the “apostle of love,” touched the responsive chord in every true heart when he in rapture exclaimed: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God” (John 3: 1).

But it is not only our happy privilege to go to God in prayer; it is our sacred and solemn *duty* to do so. Paul says: “Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to youward” (I Thess. 5: 17, 18). God’s will is, then, that we pray, and that we pray “without ceasing.” Jesus, our perfect example and faultless model, our ideal pattern, prayed much while journeying through this “vale of tears.” And if Jesus, “who did no sin” (I Peter 2: 22), and at whose lowly birth angels sang, if

he felt it necessary to spend so much time in prayer, then surely we poor worms of the dust, "sinful though we be," should heed the divine injunction to "pray without ceasing." This much is settled, then. *It is both our privilege and our duty to pray.*

DOES GOD HEAR AND ANSWER PRAYER?

There is a sentiment in the world, even among religious people, that while God hears our prayers, *he does not answer them.* It is contended, however, that we are benefited by prayer through the reflexive influence on our lives—that *we are made better and happier because we pray.* But convince us that God does not answer our prayers, and you rob us of this reflexive benefit even. For no one would be made better or happier through prayer if he knew all the while that his prayer was in vain, *that God was not going to answer it.* But this question, like the former one, must be settled by the Word of God. What, then, does the Bible teach on the subject? Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, addressing his disciples, said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. 7: 7, 8). Of course this settles the question with all who have any respect for the authority of Jesus Christ. But the Savior continues: "Or what man is there of you whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (verses 9-11). Hence to question the fact of God's answering prayer is to question the

authority of Jesus. To deny that God answers prayer is to deny the plain statement of Jesus Christ, and this is nothing short of infidelity. But if further proof is desired, then read the following plain passages:

"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11: 24).

"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21: 22).

"If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14: 14).

These scriptures, with many others that might be quoted, teach us, unquestionably, that *God does answer prayer.*

WHY ARE ALL PRAYERS NOT ANSWERED?

This question demands our very serious consideration. Since God teaches us to pray, and promises to hear and answer our prayers, then why are so many prayers unanswered? The Apostle James throws some light on the subject when he says: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (James 4: 3). Now this suggests, at least, that we must ask "*aright,*" and not "*amiss,*" if we expect our prayers to be answered. In praying we must meet the conditions. God saves us on certain conditions, and he answers prayer on certain conditions. But if the conditions are not complied with, God does not save. So if the conditions are not met in prayer, then God does not answer. This is quite important and should not be overlooked. Let us note, then, some of the conditions of acceptable prayer.

1. WE MUST PRAY IN FAITH.—James says: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for

he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1: 6, 7). So the man who does not pray in faith need not expect his prayer to be answered. Jesus teaches as much when he says: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21: 22). This condition must not be overlooked. We must pray in faith, *believing that God will hear and answer.*

2. WE MUST PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS.—Another condition to be observed in our praying is to pray in the name of Jesus. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do. * * * If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14: 13, 14). This is a plain, positive statement from Jesus himself, and emphasizes the necessity of praying *in his name.* Furthermore, the Apostle Paul teaches: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3: 17). Hence all our "supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings" (I Tim. 2: 1) must be made in the name of Jesus Christ, if God is to be pleased and our prayers are to be answered.

3. WE MUST BE RIGHTEOUS.—God does not promise to answer just any one's prayer, but he does promise to answer the prayer of the righteous, when the other conditions are met. The Apostle Peter says: "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers" (I Peter 3: 12). But who are the "righteous"? The Apostle John answers in the following language: "My little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous" (I John 3: 7). But what is "righteous-

ness"? Let the Bible answer: "I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isa. 45: 19). So in order to be "righteous" we must do what God says, for what he speaks is righteousness—it is right. And this is absolutely necessary that our prayers may be answered. Again, David says: "All thy commandments are righteousness" (Psa. 119: 172), and John says: "Whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments" (I John 3: 22). So it is quite plain that we are to keep God's commandments, and therefore be "righteous," if we expect him to answer our prayers.

4. WE MUST PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL.—We must always respect God's will and God's way in everything. So it is absolutely necessary for us to pray according to God's will—in harmony with his will—if we expect our prayers to be answered. The Apostle John says: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (I John 5: 14). Even Jesus, although divine himself, respected his Father's will, saying: "Not my will, but thine be done" (Matt. 26: 39). Then, of course, since Jesus prayed with the condition, "Not my will, but thine be done," we, too, if we take Jesus as our example, our pattern in prayer, will always try to pray in harmony with the Father's will—according to his will, and not contrary to it. *And remember the Father's will is expressed in the Bible.*

5. WE MUST BE AT PEACE WITH THE BRETHREN.—No one is in a proper condition to go to God in prayer who does not endeavor to live in peace with the brethren. Jesus says: "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught

against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5: 23, 24). From this it appears that we can not approach God acceptably, with the assurance that he will hear us and answer us, unless we, at least, try to bring about a reconciliation between ourselves and any other brother who may have aught against us. This is a very serious matter; for there are many professed Christians who know that their brethren have something against them, and who continue to pray to God, without even attempting to adjust these matters. Such prayers are evidently not acceptable in God's sight, and of course will not be answered.

6. WE MUST HAVE THE SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS.—Unless we are always willing and ready to forgive others we need not approach the "Throne of Grace" in prayer, expecting God to hear and answer us. For the unforgiving soul can not pray acceptably to God. Jesus says: "And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one, that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11: 25). And again he says: "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6: 15). This forever settles it, then. Unless we can forgive others we can not be forgiven, and of course can not pray to God acceptably. This, too, is a serious matter, when we remember that many professed Christians seem *unwilling* to forgive others.

The conditions to be met, then, are these. We must pray in *faith* and in the *name of Jesus*. We must be *righteous* and strive to be at peace with the brethren. We must pray according to God's

will and be willing at all times to forgive others. And surely if we meet these conditions God will be pleased to hear and answer our prayers, for David has said: "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa. 84: 11).

SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY FOR SINNERS?

All we know about God, Christ and the plan of salvation, *including prayer*, is just what the Bible says—*this and nothing more*. What, then does the Bible teach on this very important question, "Should Christians pray for sinners?" We should be perfectly willing for the Bible to speak to us on this question, as well as on all others. Hence to the Word of the Lord for the answer. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Church at Rome in the long ago, used this language: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved" (Rom. 10: 1). These Israelites for whom Paul was praying had rejected Jesus Christ (Rom. 9: 30-33), and were therefore sinners, of course. But Paul was praying for them, and so it is right to pray for sinners, *if an inspired example is worth anything*. Notice, too, that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for sinners—for those who stoned him to death—saying: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7: 60). So if it was right for Stephen to pray for sinners, as it evidently was, then certainly it is right for Christians today to pray for sinners. *If not, then why not?* Furthermore: Jesus, whose life we are to imitate (in whose footsteps we are bidden to walk) prayed for sinners, even for those who nailed him to the cross and who cursed him as he died, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). Then, to be sure, since Jesus, "the sinless Son of God," prayed for

sinners, it is evidently right for all Christians to pray for sinners, too. But more still. Jesus not only set the example, *but he positively enjoined it upon his disciples.* He said to them: "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5: 44). This, then, is settled, if the Word of God can settle anything. *The Bible being true, we should pray for sinners.*

WHEN WILL GOD ANSWER OUR PRAYERS?

We have now learned that it is scriptural, and therefore right, for Christians to pray, and to pray for sinners. We have also learned that God will hear and answer our prayers if we will meet the conditions. Now suppose we pray in faith, and in the name of Jesus; that we are endeavoring to be righteous by keeping God's commandments, and are striving to be at peace with the brethren. Suppose we pray according to the Father's will, and that we are at all times ready to forgive others. With these conditions met on our part, suppose we pray for God to save a sinner. *When will God answer this prayer?* Will such a prayer be pleasing to God? It certainly will, since "the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov. 15: 8), and since he "would have all men to be saved" (I Tim. 2: 4). *But when will such a prayer be answered?* The importance of this question can hardly be over-estimated, in view of the confusion that exists in the world with reference to conversion. Therefore let us carefully consider it in the light of Divine Revelation.

When God establishes a law, by complying with which we may obtain a certain blessing, it is folly to ask him for the blessing until we comply with the demands of the law. This principle holds good both in Nature and in Grace. For instance, God has given us the laws of nature

through which we have our daily bread. Nature's law says: "Till the soil, sow the seed, and cultivate the crop," etc. Now suppose we ignore this law and ask God to give us our daily bread independent of it. Suppose we ask God for a warm breakfast, fresh from his storehouse of abundant blessings, remembering that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1: 17). Now, will God hear and answer such a prayer? Yes, *he could do it, but no one believes he will.* But why not? Evidently not because he does not want us to have these blessings, for he does. Then why will God not answer such a prayer, since he wants us to have these temporal blessings? *Because God has a way of giving these blessings; namely, through the laws of nature* (which are his laws, of course), and these laws must be respected before the blessings are received. Every one understands this, and while we pray for our bread, and thank God for it when we receive it, still we all understand that it must come through complying with the laws of Nature. Now this principle is just as true in the Kingdom of Grace as it is in the Kingdom of Nature. When God gives a law, and promises to bless us when we comply with it, then, to be sure, we must meet the demands of that law before we can reasonably expect God to grant the blessing. This principle is quite forcefully set forth in the case of Moses praying for his sister. (Num. 12: 1-13.) Moses had married an Ethiopian woman, and Aaron and Miriam being displeased, spake against him, even suggesting that Moses was taking too much authority as the prophet of God. When Jehovah heard it he came down in a cloud and communed with Aaron and Miriam, and when he withdrew from them, "Miriam was leprous, as white as

snow." Now it was the law when any one was even suspected of having leprosy to shut them out of the camp for at least seven days. (Lev. 13.) But when Moses saw his own sister afflicted with this loathsome disease, he seems to have forgotten, *for the time*, the law, and prays from the depth of his sympathetic soul: "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." It was Miriam, no doubt, who watched over Moses when his mother placed him in the "ark of bulrushes" among the flags on the historic river Nile. It was she, too, who suggested to Pharaoh's daughter that a Hebrew nurse should be secured, and then hurried away and brought Moses' own mother for the nurse. Of course Moses was exceedingly anxious that his sister be healed, and so he prays: "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." Now, if God should heal Miriam *now*, and thus answer Moses' prayer, he would ignore his own law and violate his own will. The law says she must be shut out of the camp, for she is a leper. Certainly God will not "heal her now." But listen to the record: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again." In other words, *let her comply with the demands of the law regulating leprosy*. Now, since God would not set aside his law to answer Moses' prayer, even though it was an earnest, fervent prayer, of course he will not set aside his law to answer any one's prayer. Yet how often have we heard prayers like this: "Save them, Lord, and save them now—*right now*," as if the sinner had absolutely nothing to do but to *sit still and receive salvation*.

But is there a law with which the sinner must comply in order to be saved? *There most certainly is*. In the "Great Commission" Jesus requires the sinner to *be taught, to believe, to repent and*

to be baptized—all in order to be saved. (Matt. 28: 18-20; Mark 16: 15, 16; Luke 24: 46,47.) To obey these commands is to "obey the Gospel," *in part at least*. And the Apostle Paul declares that Jesus will take vengeance on those who "obey not the gospel" (II Thess 1: 7-9). So the sinner must obey the Gospel—"the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 2)—in order to be saved. *Now this is God's will and we must respect it when we pray, of course*. It is absolutely presumptuous to ask God to save the sinner before he does what God says he must do to be saved. It is equivalent to saying: "Not thy will, but mine be done." The Apostle Paul, writing to the Roman brethren about their salvation, said: "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6: 17, 18). Since sinners had to obey "that form of doctrine" in the days of Paul in order to be made free from sin, it is certain that they must obey it now to be made free from sin. And to ask God to save them before they obey this "form of doctrine" is to ask him to ignore his law—to *set aside his law*. We might just as well ask God to give us our daily bread while *we refuse or neglect* to comply with the laws of Nature. One is just as absurd as the other.

But I am here reminded that Jesus prayed for his murderers, who, of course, were sinners, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Certainly we should pray for sinners, for Jesus did. And furthermore, he taught his disciples to pray for them. But should we ask God to save them *before they do what God requires them to do in order to be saved?* Notice

that Jesus does not say, "Father, forgive them *now, right now.*" This would have ignored God's law and will in the matter, while Jesus prayed in harmony with God's will, of course. This prayer of Jesus for his murderers was evidently an acceptable one, for Jesus certainly meets every condition. He was wholly righteous and always kept his Father's commandments. He always pleased God, and was willing at all times to forgive others. He prayed in faith, of course, and prayed for the right thing—the salvation of sinners. But of course Jesus prayed according to God's will, *and God's will is that the sinner obey the Gospel to be saved.* Now will God hear and answer this prayer? If not, then we might as well never pray again. Surely this prayer was answered just as Jesus intended it should be, for evidently Jesus did not want God to ignore the conditions of salvation in order to answer his prayer.

WHEN WAS JESUS' PRAYER ANSWERED?

If we can discover the scriptural answer to this question it will shed much light on the all-important subject of conversion. Let us, therefore, give it our serious consideration. Again let us remember that Jesus did not pray, "Father, forgive them *now, right now.*" If God had forgiven them *right then* it would have been salvation without *faith, repentance* or *baptism*, while God's will requires all these. Jesus evidently did not want God to save them independent of these conditions, *independent of their obedience to the Gospel.* For the Apostle Paul declares that Jesus is going to take vengeance on "them that obey not the gospel" (II Thess. 1: 8). What Jesus evidently desired was that God should forgive them, *as he forgives all sinners*, when they comply with the conditions of salvation as expressed in the

Gospel—when they shall have “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17, 18). But when did God answer this prayer? *He did not answer it right then*, for some fifty days after Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them,” we find the prayer still unanswered. But how do we know it is still unanswered? Because we find that God still holds the sin against them. Of course if God had forgiven them he would not again charge them with the murder of Jesus. On the other hand, if we find that God does charge them with the sin of crucifying Jesus, we will know positively that he has not forgiven the sin. But what does the record show? *It shows conclusively that God still holds the murderers of Jesus guilty.* On the memorable day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter, speaking as the Spirit of God directed him—*speaking to the very people who murdered Jesus*, and for whom Jesus had prayed fifty days before—said to *these very people*: “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Here God, through the Apostle Peter and the Holy Spirit, charges these Israelites with the murder of Jesus, saying, “*whom ye crucified.*” It would be absolutely cruel if they are already forgiven to still throw it into their teeth that they had crucified Jesus. Certainly they have not been forgiven yet, *and they are quite aware of it, too*, for they immediately cry out: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” This does not sound like the rejoicing of souls that are forgiven, but rather like the wail of those who have been convicted of sin. Hence they ask: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They now realize the heinousness of their crime, the sinfulness of their sin, and ask what to do in order to be forgiven. Jesus had

prayed for them fifty days before, but of course he prayed that God would forgive them when they complied with the law of pardon, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus," when they "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine." Now they are believers. They have been made to realize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter had preached that to them, and proved it by the Scriptures. So they ask what to do to be saved. "And Peter said unto them, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Notice that they were believers when they asked *what to do*. Peter told these *believers* to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Hence it is plain that the murderers of Jesus, *for whom he prayed*, were required to *believe, repent and to be baptized*—all in order to be saved. Well, what did they do about it? "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). Here we find Jesus' prayer answered. At least some of those for whom he prayed have complied with the law of pardon, have "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine." They have believed, repented and been baptized, and have thus been added to the Church of the Lord. God did not set aside his law and violate his own will in order to answer Jesus' prayer; but he saved them, just like he saves all sinners, *when they met the conditions*.

Now in view of this let us ask, *When will God hear and answer our prayers in behalf of sinners?* The Bible teaches us to pray, and to pray for sinners. It teaches us that God will hear and answer our prayers if we will meet the conditions. But

when will he answer our prayers in behalf of the sinner? In the light of Jesus' prayer for sinners and God's answer thereto, we are forced to the conclusion that God will not answer our prayer for a sinner until the sinner has been led to obey the Gospel, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus;" until he has been led to "obey from the heart that form of doctrine." "Being then made free from sin," he becomes a child of God, an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ.

And, brethren, when we pray for sinners, remember that we should also endeavor to lead them to comply with God's law of pardon, *that they may be saved according to God's will*. "Not my will, but thine be done," should be the spirit of every prayer. And now, Father, to thy will, thy way and thy word may we ever be wholly resigned in all things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

II.

SHOULD SINNERS PRAY FOR THEMSELVES?

In general there are but two classes of people in the world—*sinners* and *Christians*; children of God and those who are not children of God. Or to express it differently, there are only two kingdoms in which men may serve—either the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. There are only two ways to travel—the strait and narrow way and the broad way. Now if we are children of God, Christians; if we are in the Kingdom of God, in the strait and narrow way, then, *as we have already learned*, we have a perfect right to pray. In fact, *it is our duty to do so*. And even though we may be wayward children—*erring Christians*, as was Simon (Acts 8: 14-24)—still we have a right to approach God in prayer, if we are willing to turn away from our wrongs and endeavor to live right. But even the erring Christian who will not repent of his sins, can not approach God acceptably in prayer; for “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah; but the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15: 8). But

SHOULD SINNERS PRAY FOR THEMSELVES?

Should people who are not “children of God,” who are not Christians—people who are in the broad way, in Satan’s kingdom—*should such people pray?* Should such people call God their

father? Is God the spiritual father of any except his own children? And if people are not children of God, if they are not Christians, then is God their father? And if God is not their father, should they pray, "Our Father who art in heaven"? Can they reasonably and consistently do so as long as they *refuse or neglect* to be adopted into God's family?

But let us re-state the principle laid down in the former sermon, as follows: *When God establishes a law through which he proposes to furnish certain blessings, it is folly to ask for the blessings while neglecting the demands of the law.* For instance, God proposes to furnish us certain temporal blessings through the laws of Nature. But it is worse than folly to ask God for these blessings while we refuse or neglect to meet the demands of Nature's law. This we are all agreed upon. And it is just as true in Grace as it is in Nature. We have seen this principle manifested in the case of Moses praying for his sister. (Num. 12: 1-15.) God does not set aside his law and violate his own will to answer the earnest prayer of such a man as Moses even. Of course he will not do so to answer the prayer of any sinner. For "he that turneth his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28: 9). God has established a law—"the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 2)—the gospel of our salvation, and he promises salvation to every one who will obey it. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16: 15, 16). Now if the sinner turns his ear away from this law, *and prays for salvation independent of it*, his prayer will be an abomination to Jehovah,
But

FOR WHAT CAN A SINNER PRAY?

Is there anything the sinner needs in order to be saved that God has not either already given him or told him how to obtain it? Of course the sinner can not reasonably ask for something he already possesses. Nor can he consistently ask God to give him the blessings which God has promised on certain conditions *while he refuses or neglects to meet the conditions*. Jesus says: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (LUKE 6: 46). Hence let us press the question, For what can a sinner reasonably and consistently pray?

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR LIGHT?—Of course the sinner needs light, and especially if he is praying to be saved. When Saul was down praying in Damascus, in the long ago, he needed light. So the Lord sent a messenger to give him light. (Acts 9: 1-19.) And the sinner now needs the same light, *the light that comes through God's Word*. David said: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. * * * The entrance of thy word giveth light" (Psa! 119: 105, 130). God has in his goodness given us his Word as a "lamp unto our feet," to guide us from this world to the better world. God's Word will enlighten the sinner on the subject of his salvation—teaching him exactly how to be saved. As well ask God for physical light independent of the sun as to pray for spiritual light independent of the Bible. God has set the sun in the heavens to give us light. If we close our eyes to its light and ask for light independent of it, *our prayer is an abomination to God*. So God has placed his Word in the world as the medium of spiritual light, and he who closes his eyes and stops his ears to God's Word and prays for light independ-

ent of it is an abomination to Jehovah. If the sinner wants light let him open his eyes to the teaching of God's Word—let him read and study the Bible, for "the entrance of thy word giveth light."

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GRACE?—All sinners are dependent on the grace of God for salvation. "For by grace have ye been saved," says Paul (Eph. 2:8). But does the sinner's salvation depend on his praying for this grace? Certainly not, for the same Apostle Paul tells us that "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11). Since the grace of God has already appeared—*even the grace that brings salvation to all men*—of course the sinner need not pray for it. What he needs to do is to appropriate this grace to himself by complying with the conditions of salvation that are taught in this system of grace; for remember this grace *teaches*. (Titus 2:11, 12.) Of course grace teaches through the "word of his grace" (Acts 20:32). Let the sinner heed the teaching of "the word of his grace" and this will lead him into salvation, *without his praying for grace*.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR FAITH?—Faith is one of the indispensable conditions of salvation, without which no one can hope to be saved. Paul said: "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to him" (Heb. 11:6). And again: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). So of course the sinner must have faith or he is eternally doomed. But how can the sinner have faith? *There is just one way*. He must take God at his word, believing just what he says because he says it; for Paul says: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). If it be objected that this is

"*historical faith*," the answer is that it is also "*saving faith*," for John says: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John 20: 31). So if the sinner wants faith let him read God's Word and believe it, and if he wants to be saved let him do what grace through God's Word teaches him to do in order to be saved. *This will surely result in his salvation.*

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR RELIGION?—It is absolutely necessary for the sinner to become religious in order to be saved. No irreligious man can be saved, of course. So it is exceedingly important to know just how the sinner is to become religious. Many seem to think religion is something the sinner should pray for and "*get*" in answer to his prayer. But the Apostle James, speaking of religion, says: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1: 27). Now it is evident at a glance that the sinner can not reasonably and rationally ask God for this "*pure religion*," this "*undefiled religion*," because this is something we must *do*. It is the life God demands us to live. The sinner should become a Christian, a child of God, by obedience to the Gospel—"the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus"—and then practice this "*pure religion*" by visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and keeping himself unspotted from the world.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR A PURE HEART?
—Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5: 8). No one will ever see God in peace without a pure heart. So

of course the sinner will never see God in peace unless his heart is purified. But how is the sinner to possess this pure heart that he may be blessed, and at last see God in peace? This is the question. Shall he pray for it? If not, how can he have it? The Apostle Peter, in the long ago, talking about both Jews and Gentiles, said: God "hath put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). So the sinner, *be he Jew or Gentile*, must have his heart purified by faith. But let no sinner conclude that his heart is purified by *faith only*." It must be "*obedient faith*," for the Apostle Peter again says: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22). Here the "*soul*" and "*heart*" are used interchangeably, and Peter declares that the soul, or the heart, is purified by *obeying the truth*, which is God's Word. (John 17:17.) So the sinner, instead of praying for a pure heart, should obey the truth, the Word of God, *and thus purify his heart by faith*.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR THE NEW BIRTH?—Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). In the fifth verse Jesus says further that no one can enter the kingdom of God without the new birth. So, of course, the sinner must have the new birth or he is everlastingly doomed. But how is it to be brought about? Is it the sinner's privilege and duty to pray for the new birth? If not, how can he have it? Peter says: "Being born again"—*how*, Peter? Listen: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word

of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:23). Peter had just said in the previous verse that they had purified their hearts, or souls, by obeying the truth, and then says, "*being born again*" by obeying the truth, of course, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God." So it is perfectly clear that one is "born again," "born of the water and the Spirit," when he obeys the truth, the Word of the living God. So, of course, the sinner can not pray for the new birth, since this is brought about by *his obedience to the truth*.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GOD'S SAVING POWER?—To be sure, if the sinner is ever saved it must be through *God's saving power*, for no other power can save him. But what is God's saving power? Let the Apostle Paul answer: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). Now this helps us to answer the question, Should sinners pray for God's saving power? We have learned that "*God's saving power*" is in the Gospel, and the Gospel is revealed in the Bible. But how does the Gospel save? Evidently men are saved by the Gospel *when they obey it*, for Paul declares that Jesus is going to take "vengeance on them who know not God, and who obey not the gospel" (II Thess. 1:7-9). So the sinner must believe and obey the Gospel in order to be saved—*not pray for God's saving power*.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GOD TO BE WILLING TO SAVE HIM?—It is manifestly certain that God will save no man until he is willing to save him, and of course will not save the sinner until he is willing to save him. Shall we conclude, therefore, that the sinner should pray and beg

God to be willing to save him? Certainly not; for the very good reason that "the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God is already willing to save the sinner, and has manifested his willingness in sending Jesus into the world "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). So, of course, the sinner can not consistently pray for God to be willing to save him *when God is both willing and anxious*, and when he has demonstrated his willingness to the extent that he sent Jesus to suffer, bleed and die on the cross that the sinner might be saved. What the sinner needs is to be perfectly *willing himself* to do just what God requires him to do in order to be saved. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GOD TO LOVE HIM?—Unless God loves the sinner he is not going to save him, to be sure. No one can be saved without God's love. But is it necessary for the sinner to pray for God to love him? Why, the sinner should know that God loves him whether he prays or not. Paul says: "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). God loved these Roman Christians, then, "while they were yet sinners." And since God is no respecter of persons, he loves all sinners, of course. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Why, then, should the sinner pray and beg God to love him when Inspiration declares that God already loves him? What the sinner needs is to *love God*. And "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (I John 5:3):

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GOD TO BE RECONCILED TO HIM?—Reconciliation is absolutely necessary to the salvation of every sinner. *No reconciliation, no salvation*, is the invariable rule. But who should be reconciled, God or the sinner? Evidently God does not need to be reconciled. He has not wandered away. But the sinner is separated from God on account of his sins. "Your sins have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 59: 2). The sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins" and he needs to be reconciled to God, and not God to the sinner. Paul says God "reconciled us to himself through Christ." And again, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," and still further he says, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5: 18-20). What the sinner needs is to *obey* "the word of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5: 19), and this will bring him back to God in the forgiveness of his sins.

SHOULD THE SINNER PRAY FOR GOD TO ACCEPT HIM?—The sinner's present and eternal welfare depends on his inducing God to accept him. Unless God is moved to accept him he is hopelessly doomed. What, then, should the sinner do to induce God to accept him? Should he pray to God and plead with him to accept him? If not, then what should he do? The Apostle Peter, in the long ago, said to Cornelius and his friends: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him" (Acts 10: 34, 35). Hence it is clear that the sinner, *instead of praying for God to accept him as he is*, should "fear God and work righteousness." If he will do this Peter says God will accept him. To "fear God" is to recognize him as a God who

will punish sinners if they do not turn away from their sins. And to "work righteousness" is to keep God's commandments (Psa. 119:172)—to *do just what God requires*, for "I, Jehovah, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isa. 45:19). If the sinner will fear God and keep his commandments God will be pleased to accept him. But if he will not, *then his prayer is an abomination to God.*

Now, in view of the foregoing, can any one suggest a *single thing* for which the sinner can reasonably and rationally pray? Surely he can not consistently pray for *light*, for *grace* or for *faith*. He can not pray for *religion* or for a *pure heart*. And it is equally clear that he can not consistently pray for the *new birth* or for *God's saving power*. Neither can he pray for *God to be willing to save him* or for *God to love him*. Nor can he reasonably pray for *God to be reconciled to him* or to *accept him*. In the light of the foregoing such a prayer would be *ridiculous and absurd*. Let the sinner come to the Bible for his light. Let him believe it and obey it, and trust God for all that he promises. *This is safe, and infallibly safe.*

SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

SIMON'S CASE.—An objection to the foregoing it is sometimes insisted that, since Peter instructed Simon to pray (Acts 8:22), it is right to instruct sinners to pray now. But we must make a distinction between the sinner *in the church* and the sinner *out of the church*, or an erring child of God and the sinner who has never been adopted into God's family. Jesus says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). And the Bible positively states that Simon believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13).

So, according to Jesus and the Bible, Simon was saved—he was a church member. Why, then, did Peter tell him to pray? Simon, *after becoming a Christian*, had sinned. He had *thought and proposed* to buy the power to bestow spiritual gifts with money. This was a serious offense. Peter answered: “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter” (*the matter of bestowing spiritual gifts*), “for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” Peter did not say that Simon’s heart had *never* been right. But it was not *right at this time*, because it was wicked to think and to propose to buy the power of God with money. Hence Peter said: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee” (Acts 8: 18-22). So the case of Simon does not serve as an objection, since he is not the *kind of sinner* we are discussing. Christians who sin (and who are therefore sinners in this sense) have a perfect right to pray, of course. But where did any inspired man ever instruct a sinner *out of the church—one who has never been born into the family of God—to pray?*

THE PUBLICAN’S CASE.—Will the reader please turn to Luke 18: 9-13 and read the account of the publican’s prayer? Notice that it is a parable (verse 9) spoken to and for those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. Second, the language, “Two men went up to the temple to pray” (verse 10), shows that they (the pharisee and publican) were both Jews, *at least in religion*, and therefore children of God under the Old Covenant. And in the third place, this occurred under the law, and not under grace, and hence is not applicable to the sinner to-day—*under the New Covenant*, under the system of Grace. There

is not a single instance during the Christian age where any sinner *out of the church* was ever, by *divine authority*, taught to pray. We read of many sinners being converted, and of their being told what to do to be saved. *But not one time are they instructed to pray.* This within itself is quite significant.

CORNELIUS' CASE.—Another objector reminds us that Cornelius prayed, and that God heard his prayer, *and that before he was baptized.* "Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name . . . a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10: 1, 2). Cornelius was not a *sinner out of the church*, but rather a "*devout man*" *out of the church.* Cornelius was a worshiper of God according to the Old Covenant, evidently. But he had never accepted Jesus Christ and been made a child of God by faith and obedience to Christ. He had doubtless never heard of Jesus, but was worshipping God according to the principles of the old law. Cornelius had not obeyed the Gospel—"the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus"—for evidently the Gospel had never been preached unto him. So it was necessary for Peter, or some one, to preach Christ to him that he might accept Christ as he had already accepted God. But this prayer of this "*devout man,*" who "*feared God with all his house, and prayed to God always,*" can not be taken as an example for the sinner's praying before *he enters into covenant relation with God,* for evidently Cornelius was *related to God as a child to a father according to the Old Covenant.* But he needed to become a child of God *according to the New Covenant.*

SAUL'S CASE.—And still another objector in-

sists that Saul of Tarsus prayed before he was baptized, and therefore while he was a sinner. (Acts 9:11.) This case demands our serious consideration, because Saul was a *sinner out of the church*—a sinner who had never been born again, and who was not, therefore a child of God. He was a sinner who had very zealously persecuted the Church of God, even to the extent of killing Christians. What, then, shall we say of his prayer? Let the reader now turn and read the three accounts of Saul's conversion as given in the following scriptures: Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:1-18. Notice that Jesus said to Saul: "But arise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Or, as it is given in Acts 22:10: "Arise and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things that are appointed for thee to do." Now the record tells us that Saul arose and went into the city—the city of Damascus. Here Jesus said it would be told him what he "*must do*." So we shall expect some one to come to Saul and tell him what he "*must do*." Now listen: "There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias," and the Lord sent this disciple, Ananias, to tell Saul what he "*must do*." (Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-15.) Remember Jesus said to Saul, "It shall be told thee what thou must do," and Ananias now comes, *as Jesus' messenger*, to tell him *what to do*. Now, reader, study the three accounts of Saul's conversion as given above, and see just what Ananias told Saul *to do*. And does the record show that he was told to pray? *It certainly does not*. Then *that is not what Saul "must do"* to be saved. "But the record says Saul was praying," objects some one. Yes, *but who told him to pray?* Did Jesus, Ananias or any one else instruct him to pray? The record fails to show it.

Ananias was sent to tell Saul what he "must do," and if he must pray, then Ananias should have said, "Brother Saul, pray on until you make peace with your God," or similar words. But what did Ananias do? He said to Saul: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22: 16). Ananias actually interrupted Saul's prayer by commanding him to arise and be baptized. "But why did Saul pray?" The Bible does not say why Saul was praying, and therefore we can not say. Presumably he was like thousands of others since that day—he did not know anything else to do, for at that time he had not been told what he "must do." But when Ananias told him what he "must do," he at once "arose and was baptized" (Acts 9: 18).

Notice that while Saul prayed, in the first place, he was not *told* to pray; and in the second place, *that he was not saved until he completed his obedience to the Gospel*. For Jesus had said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16: 16). Saul had already believed and repented, but he had not been baptized. So when Ananias told him to "arise and be baptized," he immediately "arose and was baptized." Would that all preachers and teachers would follow this example, and, *like Ananias*, tell sinners who are down praying to "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sin, calling on his name." But, sinner friend, let me ask you this one serious question, and will you ponder it in your heart? Listen: Did you ever hear a preacher who instructs sinners to pray for salvation, or to come forward to be baptized for—did you ever hear one of these preachers tell sinners, in the language of Inspiration, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name"? Many a sinner has

lingered long at the altar, and some have become disheartened and discouraged—all because the preacher, *unlike Ananias*, tells them to pray on, instead of teaching them, in the language of God's Book, to "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." And now, dear reader, if you are a sinner, let no one deceive you. There is no way for you to be saved unless you accept Jesus as your Savior *by doing just what he requires you to do*. He says: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (Luke 6:36). He says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). And Paul says: "He became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal life" (Heb. 5:9). And now may the Lord abundantly bless you in doing his will to the salvation of your soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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