

person is obedient. Faith is not complete without action (James 2:22). Thus, without obedience to baptism, there is no faith. Thus, baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:20-21).

I will close with a quote from an article in *The LOOKOUT* magazine, 17 February, 2002. The article is titled *Baptism or the 'Sinner's Prayer'*? It was written by Bob Russell the senior minister at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. This church has a weekly Sunday worship attendance of almost twenty thousand (20,000). It is the largest of our churches.

The Bible makes it clear that we are not saved by our good works, but by trusting in Christ's work for us on the cross. But once a person understands that we are saved by grace through faith and says, "I believe in Christ, and I want to accept him as my savior," what do we tell him or her to do?

It is the widespread practice in evangelical circles today to tell people to repeat the sinner's prayer. The new believer is asked to pray something like, "Dear God, I acknowledge that I am a sinner in need of forgiveness. I know that Jesus Christ died for my sins on the cross. I now ask you to forgive me through his blood, and I receive Christ into my heart." Although not found in Scripture, this practice has its roots in the simple prayer offered by the tax collector in Luke 18:13 who pleaded, "God have mercy on me, a sinner."

Still, nowhere following Jesus' death and resurrection do we find a new convert being asked to repeat the sinner's prayer. Although such a prayer suggests the attitude that should be present in the life of a new believer, it is not a biblical requirement. Neither should it be a substitute for what the Bible actually teaches that a new believer is to do.

On the day of Pentecost, when the believing crowd asked, "What should we do?" they weren't told to repeat the sinner's prayer. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This same principle was taught to the Samaritans (Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38), Lydia (Acts 16:15), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33), as well as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:16).

Some argue that to tell people to be baptized is to teach salvation by works. They are concerned that the convert may erroneously put his faith in baptism rather than Christ. But in reality, repeating the sinner's prayer is more of a work than baptism. Saying the sinner's prayer is something we physically do, while baptism is something that is done for us by another!

Rather than seeking to substitute another response that seems more appropriate, those who believe in the authority of Scripture should follow the biblical instruction that was given to Saul of Tarsus. "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

by Bob Sheffler

Christian Leadership Training Institute, PO Box DD168, Dodowa, Accra, Ghana

Baptism or the Sinner's Prayer?

This is a point of doctrine where the Christian Church disagrees with most of the evangelical Christian world. I will try to give you our understanding of the Scriptures on this topic. Let me first say that I do not condemn anyone who does not agree with our understanding. In the past, some leaders of our church have been very dogmatic and condemning of those who believed differently than we do. I leave the final judgment to God. However, I feel that our explanation of salvation is a more scholarly interpretation of the Scriptures than those who follow the *faith only* approach and use the *sinner's prayer*.

Those who follow the *faith only* approach to salvation view baptism as being only symbolic. They usually say that salvation comes immediately when a person believes in Jesus. They believe that if a person says the *sinner's prayer* in which he confesses that he is a sinner, that Jesus is the Son of God and that he accepts Jesus as his Saviour, then he is saved at that moment. However, I feel that a thorough and logical evaluation of all scriptures on the subject of salvation shows that it is a process that is not completed until baptism and not final until the Judgment Day after a person has been faithful until death.

There are scriptures which seem to say that we are saved by faith. However, there are other scriptures which say that we are saved by other things as well. Which scripture do we believe? Or do we try to see how all scriptures may be true at the same time. For example, if I say that bread contains salt and leavening agent, this is a true statement, but it is not complete. If I say that bread is made with flour, water and salt, that is also true, but not complete. If I say that bread is made with flour and a leavening agent, that is also true, but not complete. So, what is bread really made with. We know that flour, water and a leavening agent are all necessary to make bread. It is not the flour, or the leavening agent or the water that makes bread, but all three. There may be other essential ingredients needed to make bread, but I am not an expert on bread.

It seems to me that those who believe in *faith only* are guilty of what is called *proof texting*. This means they have something that they want to believe, then they look for scriptures to prove it. In the process they ignore and/or sometimes twist the meanings of other scriptures that speak to the same subject.

Consider these scriptures:

Mark 16:16 says, he that believes and is baptized will be saved. In English and in the original Greek, the word **and** links two equally important things.

In **Acts 2:37-38** the Apostle Peter says we must repent and be baptized *for* the forgiveness of our sins. The Greek word **eis** (for) means *into, to, toward, for or among*. It looks forward to something that is going to happen. The Apostle Paul was told to be baptized in order to wash away his sins - **Acts 22:16**.