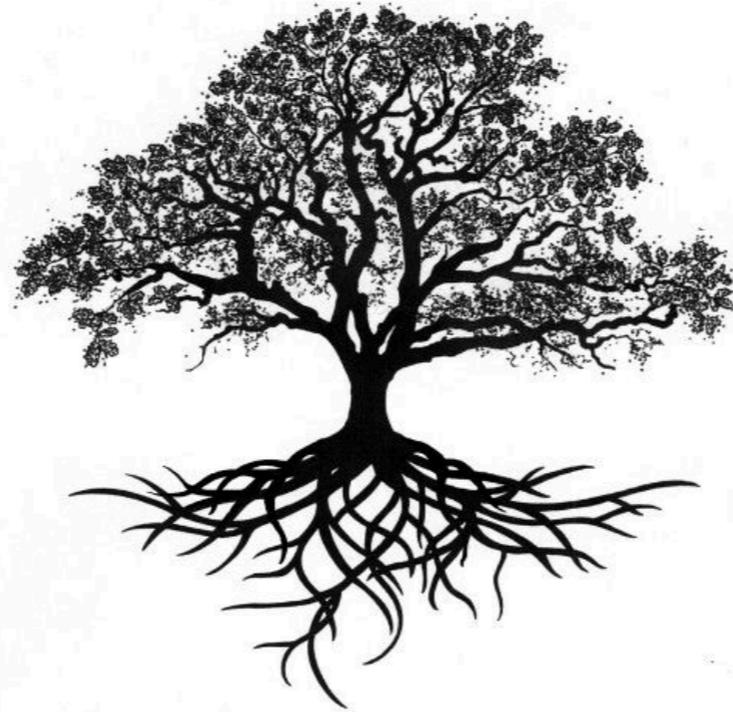
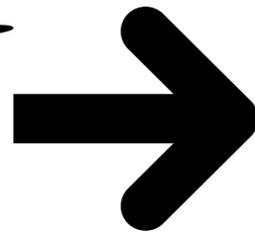




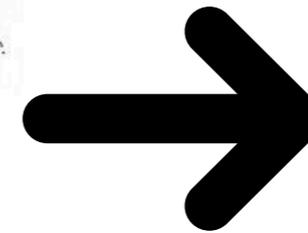
Know-Grow-Go



Know the Gospel



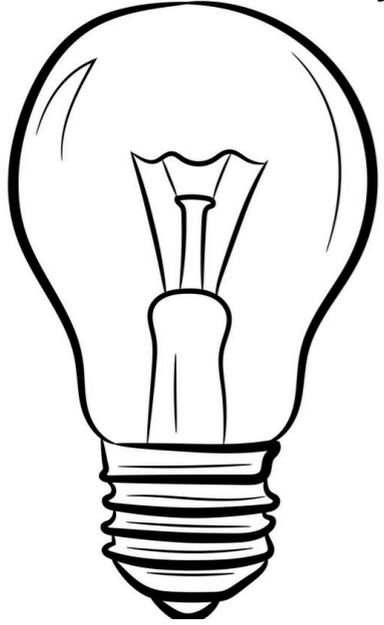
Grow in Grace



Go Make Disciples

Romans 10:13-15 “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Know the Gospel



This first section contains the following bible studies along with additional resources in order to help the seeker Know the Gospel message as found in the New Testament.

Does God Exist?

Is the New Testament reliable?

Who is Jesus?

How can I seek God?

Why should I read the Bible?

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Why study sin?

Why did Jesus die for me?

What does it mean to Repent?

What is the purpose of Baptism?

Am I ready?



Does God Exist?

Here are 4 areas of evidence that the Bible provides concerning God's existence:

1-Creation:

Romans 1:20

Illustration: Smart Phone

2-Origin:

Genesis 1:1 & John 1:1-3

Illustration: Big Bang

3-Moral Consciousness:

Romans 2:12-16

Illustration: Internal Compass

4-Personal Experience

John 4:28-30; 39-42

Challenge: Come & see for yourself

Additional Resources:

Appendix: Science Increasingly Makes the Case

<https://www.discovery.org/id/>

<https://biologos.org/>

The Reason for God, by Timothy Keller

The Case for Faith, by Lee Strobel

Mere Christianity, by CS Lewis

On Guard, by William Lane Craig



Is the New Testament reliable?

2 Peter 1:16-21

Peter challenges the notion of the NT being “cleverly devised stories” by appealing to 3 evidences:

1-Peter, and the other Apostles, claimed their credibility as eyewitnesses. They saw with their eyes, heard with their ears and were physically present there with Jesus (vv. 16-18).*

2-The prophetic message of the OT concerning Jesus has been fulfilled in the NT (vv. 19-20). One example being Isaiah 53.*

3-God has spoken through people to reveal His will. Evidence of this includes many things that man would not include if they were the creator of it. One example is the slowness of the Apostles to believe.

John 1:43-51

Nathaniel, one of Jesus’ first followers, was highly skeptical when he first heard about Jesus from his brother Philip.

Instead of insisting that Nathanael just believe, Philip encourages him to “come and see” Jesus for himself.

John 4:28-30; 39-42

Once again the appeal is to “come, see” Jesus. God welcomes the skeptic to personally investigate and hear for themselves the message concerning Jesus.

Additional Resources:

* Appendix: Manuscript Evidence

* Appendix: Predictive Prophecies

How We Got the Bible, by Neil R. Lightfoot

The New Testament Documents, by F.F. Bruce



Who is Jesus?

John's Gospel contains the following summary statement: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31) For this reason many seekers find John's Gospel an easy place to start when searching to learn more about Who Jesus claimed to be.

Two common approaches to studying John are found here:

The 8 Signs in John

Water to Wine (2:1-11)

Healing the officials' son (4:43-54)

Healing the invalid at Bethesda (5:1-15)

Feeding the 5000 (6:1-15, 25-69)

Walking on Water (6:16-21)

Healing the man born blind (9:1-41)

Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

Jesus' Resurrection (20:19-31)

The "I am" Claims of Jesus

Bread of Life (6:35)

Existence Before Abraham (8:58)

Light of the World (8:12)

Gate (10:9)

Good Shepherd (10:11)

Resurrection and Life (11:25)

Way, Truth, Life (14:6)

True Vine (15:1)

Additional Resources:

More than a Carpenter, by Josh McDowell

The Jesus I Never Knew, by Philip Yancey

Who is This Man, by John Ortberg

Encounters with Jesus, by Timothy Keller

Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus, by Ann Spangler

Simply Jesus, by NT Wright



How can I seek God?

Acts 17:24-27

Paul encourages the curious Athenians to consider the fact that God has created everything, doesn't need anything, and yet, He wants us to seek Him and find Him. In fact, He has chosen the time and place for our existence in order to give us a chance to reach out and find Him.

Matthew 7:7-14

One of the great promises of the bible: everyone who seeks finds! Plus, one of the great warnings in the bible: only a few will find. If only a few find God, then how many actually seek Him? It is also helpful to note that there are only two roads and two destinations, no grey area, no middle ground!

Luke 13:22-30

Yes, only a few will be saved; therefore, make every effort to seek. Those who simply 'try' will be caught off guard by their rejection from the kingdom of God. How can you make every effort to seek Him? These efforts should help develop and increase your faith in Jesus. Why is it so dangerous to simply 'try?'

Acts 8:26-40

Here's an example of a seeker who humbly puts God first, thus finding Him and finding great joy. Take note that the Eunuch was: intelligent, wealthy, and committed...Yet needed help from someone else in order to seek God.

Additional Helpful Passages:

Jeremiah 29:11-15 Seek with all your heart and find

Isaiah 55:6-11 Seek the lord while He may be found

Hebrews 6:1-3 Learn the elementary teachings

Matthew 6:25-33 Make seeking God a priority

Matthew 13:44-46 Finding God is like finding treasure



Why should I read the Bible?

Romans 10:17

The Bible is the source of our faith. Hearing/reading the Word is essential if we want our faith in God to grow.

James 1:22-25

The Bible is like a mirror that enables us to see ourselves clearly, but beware of self-deception! When you see something, act on it! What does it mean to look intently? How can God's law actually give freedom? What is the promise if you do continually look intently into it and obey?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Bible is useful. Paul calls it God-breathed, like oxygen for our souls. Echoes Genesis 2:7 where God formed man and breathed into him the breath of life. When utilised fully it can thoroughly equip us for life.

Acts 17:10-11

The Bible is the standard for our faith, not traditions (Mark 7:5-13) or people (1 Thess 2:13). Consider why God viewed the Bereans as being of more noble character than others. Paul was one of the main leaders in the 1st Century Church and yet fact-checking his teaching was praised. Will you eagerly, examine the scriptures everyday?

Additional Helpful Passages:

John 12:47-48 The Word will judge us on the last day
Hebrews 4:12-13 The Word is living and active
1 Peter 1:22-25 The Word is an imperishable seed
1 Timothy 4:7-8 Train yourself for Godliness
1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely
1 Thessalonians 2:13 The Word is at work in believers
2 Peter 3:16 Don't distort the Word
Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus countered temptation by the Word
Mark 4:1-20 The Word is scattered like seed on the soil
Mark 7:5-13 Be careful of traditions, they nullify the Word

Additional Resources:

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, by Gordon Fee

Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, by Kenneth E. Bailey

Women of the Word, by Jen Wilkin

The Bible Jesus Read, by Philip Yancey



What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Mark 1:14-20 Jesus' arrival on earth has ushered in His Kingdom as well. What does it mean to repent & believe? Here we also find the examples of His first followers as they respond to His arrival. What does Jesus promise to make them into if they choose to follow Him? Are you willing to follow?

Mark 8:34-38 Here Jesus further defines what He expects from those that follow Him. Why is self-denial so important within the context of following? What would this crowd have thought He meant when He called them to take up their cross? What do these expectations teach us about the kind of followers Jesus desires? Are you willing to follow like He expects?

Luke 14:15-24 In Jewish thought the Kingdom of God is pictured as an epic wedding. The people invited make excuses to not attend. What are some excuses you make that prevent you from responding to His invitation? What is the danger of us making excuses?

Luke 14:25-27 In this passage Jesus uses a hyperbole to demonstrate his expectation that we love Him above all. What are the relationships that Jesus targets here? Which one do you find the most challenging? How do increase our love for Jesus?

Additional Helpful Passages:

Acts 11:25-26 Terminology: disciple=christian

Luke 5:1-11 Peter's initial encounter (Master-Lord)

Luke 5:27-32 Dr. Jesus calls the "sick"

Mark 12:28-34 Greatest commandment

Matthew 13:44-46 Treasure and Pearls

Matthew 28:16-20 Disciples make Disciples

Additional Resources:

Crazy Love, by Francis Chan

Multiply, by Francis Chan

If You Want to Walk, by John Ortberg

Master Plan of Evangelism, by Robert Coleman

Radical, by David Platt

Follow Me, by David Platt & Francis Chan

Following Jesus, by NT Wright



Why study sin?

Romans 3:19-23 Everyone sins, but not everyone “sees” that fact. The law can help us be conscious of our sin.

Luke 7:36-50 Awareness of our big debt of sin + Jesus’ immeasurable grace= great love.

Mark 7:20-23 The source of sin is our hearts (start of the list and end of the list). If it comes from within who is responsible? Over all this is a good list for everyone. Define terms using the sermon on the mount (Mt 5:21-48) which is all about taking the Law into our hearts!

Galatians 5:19-21 The “works” of the flesh are obvious and the consequences high.

James 4:17 Sin isn’t merely what we do, its also what we don’t do. Hopefully at this point the reality is clear, we all are full of sin and need Jesus.

Isaiah 59:1-2 Sin separates us from God

Romans 6:23 Sin leads to death (bad news) but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus (good news)! The latter is useless without the former.

Additional Helpful Passages:

Matthew 5:21-48 Sin begins in the heart

John 3:19-21 Living by the truth means we allow light

2 Timothy 3:1-5 Good list for religious.

James 2:8-11 Break one part of the law broken the whole.

Additional Resources:

Appendix: Teaching about Sin

Appendix: Sins Defined (Mark 7:21-22 & Galatians 5:19-21)

Not the Way It's Supposed to Be, by Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Respectable Sins, by Jerry Bridges

Counterfeit Gods, by Timothy Keller



Why did Jesus die for me?

Romans 6:23 Pick up where we left off. This verse contains several contrasts: Wages/Gift...Death/Life...Us/Jesus. Last time we focused on what we deserve (wage) is death, because of our sins. This time we will focus on the good news: The Gift of Life through Jesus!

There are 2 crucial questions to consider:

1-What happened when Jesus was crucified?

Romans 3:20-28 The words “righteousness” and “justified” in these verses are all the same word in the greek which mean a validating performance record which opens doors. This is given through faith as opposed through works. It is the object of belief, rather than the belief itself, which is crucial. It is not faith that saves; it is not even faith in God that saves: it is faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ is atonement or propitiation (temple illustration) for the wrath we deserve. He redeems (slavery illustration) us; He justifies (legal illustration) us. Discuss the illustrations.

2-Why did He do it?

Romans 5:6-11 Why did Jesus choose to make an atonement for our sins, pay the ransom to set us free, and take our punishment upon himself? Love. Why was He pierced, crushed, wounded for us? Love. Despite the fact that we are powerless to save ourselves, ungodly, sinners and even enemies of God, Christ died for us. Why? verse 8 is the key. To demonstrate His love. In the cross we not only find a solution to our sins, but also the most compelling reason to put our faith in Christ.

As you read through the account stop and consider along the way the two main points:

1-He is enduring the punishment we deserve in order to pay our debt (Isaiah 53:5)

2-He is enduring all of this to demonstrate to us His love (John 3:16)

Closing challenge: Think and pray about a 3rd question: How should respond to this loving sacrifice?

Additional Helpful Passages:

Matthew 26:17-28:10

Mark 14:12-16:8

Luke 22:7-24:49

John 18:1-20:23

Isaiah 53

Psalms 22

Additional Resources:

The Atonement, by Leon Morris

The Cross of Christ, by Leon Morris



What does it mean to Repent?

1 Peter 2:21-25 Great summary of the cross in verses 21-23. Verse 24 is important for understanding the proper response. Key phrase “so that”. Christ died SO THAT we might die to sins and live for righteousness. The Cross demands a two-sided response: die to sin, live for righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2 These verses powerfully tie together the motivation (Christ’s love) and the expectation (stop living for self and start living for Christ) for the radical change that the Cross should produce in us. Nearly every sin we commit has its roots and motivation in a self-centred life. The cross has the power to make us into a new creation; changing our motivation (Christ love), our outlook (God’s point of view) and our purpose for life (ambassadors).

Luke 3:1-14 The fruit of repentance is the evidence of a changed mindset. Merely talking about it or showing up is far from sufficient. Note also that John the Baptist insisted on repentance before baptism. If you were to ask John, “What should I do?” – how would he respond to you?

Luke 13:1-5, 6-9 How important is repentance? Jesus preaches that without it, we will all perish. God expects to find fruit every time there is true repentance. In order to help that to happen He does everything He can (dig around, water, more time).

Additional Helpful Passages:

Luke 18:18-30 vs. Luke 19:1-10 Rich ruler vs Zach
Acts 26:15-21 Paul’s example and message
Acts 3:19 Repentance leads to forgiveness and is refreshing
2 Corinthians 7:8-11 Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow
Luke 15:11-32 Both sons need to repent.
Luke 16:19-31 Hindsight is 20/20 and so is repentance
Romans 2:4 God’s kindness leads to repentance
Luke 18:9-14 Pharisee and tax collector

Additional Resources:

Repentance, by Ed Anton

Prodigal God, by Timothy Keller



What is the purpose of Baptism?

Acts 2:36-41 Those convicted humbly ask for direction (v. 37). Peter's response is clear: Repent and be Baptised. Not come down and pray this prayer asking JC into your heart while saying sorry. What is the order? Do you think these people have faith? When do we receive the forgiveness of sins? How important are those two things Peter promises?

Romans 6:1-4 Baptism has tremendous spiritual power because of what it connects us to: we are baptised into Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. (Thus, Peter directed his hearers to be baptised in response to the cross – Act 2:38). We, too, will be raised to a new life through baptism. Thus, we are born again.

Colossians 2:11-15 To a church wrestling with the Judaizers false insistence on the necessity of circumcision Paul emphasises the completed spiritual circumcision they received by the hands of Christ at Baptism. Note what we are raised by, Faith. If there is no faith present then the baptism is useless.

John 3:1-5 Jesus provides some of the most direct teaching on the essential step of baptism. No entrance into God's kingdom unless we are born again. Early Church Fathers unanimously agree that Jesus is referring to baptism here in this text.

Additional Helpful Passages:

Galatians 3:26-29 Baptised into Christ, clothed with Christ
Acts 16:25-33 The jailer baptised in the middle of the night
Acts 22:7-16 What are you waiting for?
Matthew 28:18-20 Make Disciples, Baptise, Teach to obey
Mark 16:15-16 Believe and Baptised you will be saved
1 Peter 3:18-22 Baptism saves you by the resurrection of JC
Acts 8:26-38 respond to the good news by being baptised
Titus 3:4-7 Saved by washing of rebirth and renewal by HS

Additional Resources:

Appendix: Early Church Fathers on Baptism

Appendix: Elements of Conversion in Acts

Appendix: Common Objections Refuted

Appendix: History of the Sinner's Prayer



Am I ready?

Luke 14:15-24 Those at the Messianic Banquet, the feast of all feasts, will truly be blessed! Many are invited (vv. 16, 17, 21, 23) and there is room for all (v. 22). The question is will you accept the invite or will you make excuses? Interesting to note the excuses are all good things (field, oxen, marriage) put above the main thing (v. 17).

Luke 14:25-27 Hyperbolic language makes for a powerful point: Our love for Jesus must transcend our love for anyone else, especially self (Mt 10:37).

Luke 14:28-35 Jesus' strong expectation for commitment is now balanced by two parables. The first cautions us against commitment without consideration. The second against delaying the decision when defeat is determined. Total surrender (v. 33) & total commitment (v. 34) are essential.

1 Timothy 6:6-16 Here Paul reminds Timothy of his good confession made before many witnesses and God. That most likely took place at Timothy's baptism where his previous pursuits (6:9-10) were abandoned and new ones begun (6:11). The 6 character traits are a good picture of Christian character. Discipleship is a battle at times, completed only when we reach eternity.

Additional Helpful Passages:

Matthew 28:18-20 Discipleship continues post-baptism

Luke 9:57-62 No excuses, no turning back!

John 3:1-5 You can't be born again before being born again

Acts 8:26-38 How much did the Eunuch know?

Acts 9:9 Saul (Paul) fasted for three days pre-baptism

Acts 16:25-33 How quick did the jailer respond?

Acts 22:7-16 What are you waiting for?

Philippians 1:3-6 Partners with one another & God

James 4:13-17 Beware of arrogant presumption of security

2 Kings 5:1-14 Wash and be cleansed!

SCIENCE INCREASINGLY MAKES THE CASE FOR GOD-1

March 25, 2015

The op-ed, “Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God,” was published in the Wall Street Journal on December 25, 2014. Since then, the article has garnered over 600,000 Facebook shares and more than 9,250 comments, making it, unofficially, the most popular article in Wall Street Journal history.

In 1966 Time magazine ran a cover story asking: Is God Dead? Many have accepted the cultural narrative that he’s obsolete—that as science progresses, there is less need for a “God” to explain the universe. Yet it turns out that the rumors of God’s death were premature. More amazing is that the relatively recent case for his existence comes from a surprising place—science itself.

Here’s the story: The same year Time featured the now-famous headline, the astronomer Carl Sagan announced that there were two important criteria for a planet to support life: The right kind of star, and a planet the right distance from that star. Given the roughly octillion—1 followed by 27 zeros—planets in the universe, there should have been about septillion—1 followed by 24 zeros—planets capable of supporting life.

With such spectacular odds, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, a large, expensive collection of private and publicly funded projects launched in the 1960s, was sure to turn up something soon. Scientists listened with a vast radio telescopic network for signals that resembled coded intelligence and were not merely random. But as years passed, the silence from the rest of the universe was deafening. Congress defunded SETI in 1993, but the search continues with private funds. As of 2014, researchers have discovered precisely nothing—0 followed by nothing.

What happened? As our knowledge of the universe increased, it became clear that there were far more factors necessary for life than Sagan supposed. His two parameters grew to 10 and then 20 and then 50, and so the number of potentially life-supporting planets decreased accordingly. The number dropped to a few thousand planets and kept on plummeting.

SCIENCE INCREASINGLY MAKES THE CASE FOR GOD-2

Even SETI proponents acknowledged the problem. Peter Schenkel wrote in a 2006 piece for *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine: “In light of new findings and insights, it seems appropriate to put excessive euphoria to rest We should quietly admit that the early estimates . . . may no longer be tenable.”

As factors continued to be discovered, the number of possible planets hit zero, and kept going. In other words, the odds turned against any planet in the universe supporting life, including this one. Probability said that even we shouldn't be here.

Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth's surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.

Yet here we are, not only existing, but talking about existing. What can account for it? Can every one of those many parameters have been perfect by accident? At what point is it fair to admit that science suggests that we cannot be the result of random forces? Doesn't assuming that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?

There's more. The fine-tuning necessary for life to exist on a planet is nothing compared with the fine-tuning required for the universe to exist at all. For example, astrophysicists now know that the values of the four fundamental forces—gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the “strong” and “weak” nuclear forces—were determined less than one millionth of a second after the big bang. Alter any one value and the universe could not exist. For instance, if the ratio between the nuclear strong force and the electromagnetic force had been off by the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction—by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000,000—then no stars could have ever formed at all. Feel free to gulp.

Multiply that single parameter by all the other necessary conditions, and the odds against the universe existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all “just happened” defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really?

SCIENCE INCREASINGLY MAKES THE CASE FOR GOD-3

Fred Hoyle, the astronomer who coined the term “big bang,” said that his atheism was “greatly shaken” at these developments. He later wrote that “a common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as with chemistry and biology The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.”

Theoretical physicist Paul Davies has said that “the appearance of design is overwhelming” and Oxford professor Dr. John Lennox has said “the more we get to know about our universe, the more the hypothesis that there is a Creator . . . gains in credibility as the best explanation of why we are here.”

The greatest miracle of all time, without any close seconds, is the universe. It is the miracle of all miracles, one that ineluctably points with the combined brightness of every star to something—or Someone—beyond itself.

Mr. Metaxas is the author, most recently, of “Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life” (DuttonAdult, 2014).

<http://ericmetaxas.com/media/articles/science-increasingly-makes-case-god/>

Predictive Prophecies

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isa 7:14)

“Those who hate me without cause are more numerous than the hairs of my head” (Ps 69:4).

“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and His Anointed One” (Ps 2:2).

“Even my friend in whom I trusted, one who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps 41:9).

“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Zch 13:7).

“...’If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed my wages, 30 pieces of silver. ‘Throw it to the potter,’ the Lord said to me—this magnificent price I was valued by them. So I took the 30 pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the Lord, to the potter” (Zch 11:12–13).

“They are striking the judge of Israel on the cheek with a rod” (Mc 5:1).

“I gave My back to those who beat Me, and My cheeks to those who tore out My beard. I did not hide My face from scorn and spitting” (Is 50:6).

“They pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps 22:16).

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1).

“Everyone who sees me mocks me; they sneer and shake their heads: ‘He relies on the Lord; let Him rescue him; let the Lord deliver him, since He takes pleasure in him’ ” (Ps 22:7–8).

“They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Ps 69:21).

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are disjointed; my heart is like wax, melting within me” (Ps 22:14).

“Yet He Himself bore our sicknesses, and He carried our pains; but we in turn regarded Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted” (Is 53:4).

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth” (Is 53:7).

“They divided my garments among themselves, and they cast lots for my clothing” (Ps 22:18).

“He submitted Himself to death” (Is 53:12).

“He bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels” (Is 53:12).

“You may not break any of its bones” (Ex 12:46).

“He protects all his bones; not one of them is broken” (Ps 34:20).

“They will look at Me whom they pierced” (Zch 12:10).

“They made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man at His death, although He had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully” (Is 53:9).

“For You will not abandon me to Sheol; You will not allow Your Faithful One to see the Pit” (Ps 16:10).

“You ascended to the heights, taking away captives; You received gifts from people, even from the rebellious, so that the Lord God might live there” (Ps 68:18).

“The Lord declared to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool’ ” (Ps 110:1).

The probability that Jesus could have fulfilled even eight such prophecies would be only 1 in 10 to the 17th. That's 1 in 100, 000, 000, 000, 000, 000.

Manuscript Evidence

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies
Pliny	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	7
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	1100 A.D.	800 yrs	8
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8
Suetonius	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs	8
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1300 yrs	9
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200	10
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000	10
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400	49
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 yrs	193
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (50-100 A.D.)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. 130 A.D. f.)	less than 100 years	5600

As you can see, there are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing. The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy. In addition there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000. If the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer, and the other authors mentioned in the chart at the beginning of the paper. On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the historicity and writings of the New Testament authors; after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others. The Christian has substantially superior criteria for affirming the New Testament documents than he does for any other ancient writing. It is good evidence on which to base the trust in the reliability of the New Testament.

Teaching about Sin

Jesus & The Holy Spirit

Luke 4:16b-21 What was Jesus' mission? Freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, the oppressed set free and to proclaim the time of the Lord's favor. Prisoners, blind, oppressed all point towards conditions brought on by sin.

Mark 2:15-17 Jesus was often accused by the religious of spending too much time with "sinners". His response was that "its not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick". Of course everyone is sick (Romans 3:9-18), including those teachers of the law that complained, but due to self-deception (Luke 12:13-21), James 1:22, Revelation 3:17), not everyone believes they are sick. Jesus spent a great deal of time helping people to come to grips with that reality and then providing the forgiveness that we all need.

John 15:22 "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin..."

John 16:8-11 The Holy Spirit has come into the world to convict people of SIN.

The Law

Galatians 3:23-25 The Law leads us to Christ. Martin Luther: "With its whippings, the law draws us to Christ."

1 Timothy 1:8-15 The Law is good, if used properly. Proper use of the law is to convict with the aim of leading someone to Christ.

Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. He didn't lower the standards, He raised them above the letter of the law and brought them down into the depths of our hearts.

Romans 3:19-20 The Law: humbles us & holds us accountable. Both of those are about helping us be conscious of sin and therefore seeing our need for forgiveness.

Romans 5:20-21 The Law increases sin (awareness of our sin)

Romans 7:7-13 The Law brings sin which brings death. You can't have verses 24-25 without verses 14-23.

More Tips for Teaching Law/Sin

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Rebuke=elencho=expose. More about gently uncovering than yelling.

Acts 5:28 Preaching of the New Testament involved a message that produced guilt in those who heard it. There is nothing wrong with people feeling guilt or being convicted by the H.S. It is a crucial step towards salvation.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 Outsiders convicted (prophecy-prophet Jn 4)

John 4:4-26 Jesus is the master in all things, especially exposing sinful behaviour and beliefs. What was his technique here? Questions!

John 8:1-11 The Law bring us before Jesus under the threat of death. It is then that we find forgiveness and a new life.

Sins Defined-1

Mark 7:21-22 & Galatians 5:19-21

EVIL: κακός, ἡ, ὄν basically, denoting a lack of something bad, not as it ought to be, opposite καλός (sound, good) and ἀγαθός (good)

SEXUAL IMMORALITY: πορνεία, ας, ἡ (1) generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution (1C 5.1); (2) when distinguished from adultery (μοιχεία) in the same context extramarital intercourse, sexual immorality, fornication (MT 15.19); (3) as a synonym for μοιχεία (marital) unfaithfulness, adultery (MT 5.32); (4) metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (spiritual) immorality, unfaithfulness (RV 19.2)

THEFT: κλοπή, ἡς, ἡ theft, stealing

MURDER: φόνος, ου, ὁ murder, slaughter, killing (LU 23.19)

ADULTERY: μοιχεία, ας, ἡ (also μοιχαλία) as an act of sexual intercourse with someone not one's own spouse adultery (JN 8.3)

GREED: πλεονεξία, ας, ἡ as bad behavior, a disposition to have more than one's share greed, covetousness, avarice (LU 12.15); ὡς π. as a matter of being compelled to, as what is grudgingly given (2C 9.5)

MALICE: πονηρία, ας, ἡ only in a moral and ethical sense in the NT, of intentionally practiced ill will evil, wickedness, malice (LU 11.39); plural, for various expressions of evil-mindedness wicked ways, evil doings, malicious deeds (AC 3.26)

DECEIT: δόλος, ου, ὁ strictly bait for fish; hence deceit, treachery, fraud

LEWDNESS: ἀσέλγεια, ας, ἡ as living without any moral restraint licentiousness, sensuality, lustful indulgence (2C 12.21); especially as indecent and outrageous sexual behaviour debauchery, indecency, flagrant immorality (RO 13.13)

ENVY: ὁ. πονηρός literally evil eye, greed, perhaps stinginess (MT 20.15; MK 7.22)

SLANDER: βλασφημία, ας, ἡ (1) generally harmful, abusive speech against someone's reputation; slander, reviling, evil speaking (CO 3.8); (2) predominately of speech that is against the nature and power of God blasphemy, insult, outrage (MT 26.65)

ARROGANCE: ὑπερηφανία, ας, ἡ as a conscious effort to appear conspicuously above others arrogance, pride, haughtiness (MK 7.22), opposite ταπεινοφροσύνη (humility)

FOLLY: ἀφροσύνη, ης, ἡ morally or intellectually, not using one's ability to understand foolishness, lack of sense, (boastful) folly (2C 11.1)

IMPURITY: ἀκαθαρσία [akatharsia /ak·ath·ar·see·ah/] n f. From 169; TDNT 3:427; TDNTA 381; GK 174; 10 occurrences; AV translates as "uncleanness" 10 times. 1 uncleanness. 1a physical. 1b in a moral sense: the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living. 1b1 of impure motives.

Sins Defined-2

Mark 7:21-22 & Galatians 5:19-21

DEBAUCHERY: ἀσέλγεια, ας, ἡ as living without any moral restraint licentiousness, sensuality, lustful indulgence (2C 12.21); especially as indecent and outrageous sexual behavior debauchery, indecency, flagrant immorality (RO 13.13)

IDOLATRY: εἰδωλολατρία, ας, ἡ (also εἰδωλολατρεία) idolatry, worship of idols

WITCHCRAFT: φαρμακεία, ας, ἡ as the use of drugs of any kind for magical effect sorcery, magic (GA 5.20); plural magic arts (RV 9.21)

HATRED: ἔχθρα, ας, ἡ enmity, hostility, hatred, both as an inner disposition and objective opposition (RO 8.7); plural, of hostile feelings and acts animosities, hostilities, discord, feuds (GA 5.20)

DISCOURSE: ἔρις, ἰδος, ἡ strife, debate, discord (RO 1.29); plural quarrels, rivalries (1C 1.11)

JEALOUSY: ζήλος, ου, ὁ and ζήλος, ους, τό strictly ferment of spirit; (1) in a good sense, as a human emotion expressing active enthusiasm, ardent affection, keen interest zeal, ardor, jealousy (2C 7.7); (2) of the intensity of divine action extremity πυρὸς ζ. fiery indignation, fierceness of fire (HE 10.27); (3) in a bad sense jealousy, envy (GA 5.20)

FITS OF RAGE: θυμός, ου, ὁ from θύω (move violently, rush along); (1) as a strong passion of soul or mind wrath, rage; used for divine (RV 15.1), satanic (RV 12.12), and human wrath (LU 4.28); (2) in contrast with ὀργή as settled indignation, θ. is used of anger that boils up and subsides again, swelling up of anger, hot temper, angry outburst (2C 12.20); (3) the difficult phrase in RV 14.8 ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν τὰ ἔθνη she

has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication probably refers to the godlessness with which Babylon ensnared the nations and brought them under God's wrath, rather than to "the wine of her passionate immorality"

SELFISH AMBITION: ἐριθεία, ας, ἡ from ἐριθεύω (serve for hire), which is from ἔριθος (day-laborer); as denoting an attitude of self-seeking selfish ambition, self-interest, rivalry (PH 2.3)

DISSENSIONS: διχοστασία, ας, ἡ strictly standing apart; hence disunity, dissension, division within a community

FACTIONS: αἵρεσις, ἔσεως, ἡ strictly choice or option; (1) of a separatist group characterized by loyalty to a certain school of thought and practice sect, party, school (AC 5.17); (2) of such separatist groups claiming status within the Christian community heretical sect, party, division (1C 11.19); (3) in a religious sense, of belief contrary to established doctrine heresy, false teaching (2P 2.1)

ENVY: φθόνος, ου, ὁ (1) in a negative sense envy, jealousy over the good success of another (MT 27.18); (2) in a positive sense of God's protective jealousy (perhaps JA 4.5 πρὸς φθόνον to the point of envy, even with envy)

DRUNKENNESS: μέθη, ης, ἡ drunkenness, intoxication

ORGIES: κῶμος, ου, ὁ originally festive procession in honor of the wine god, merrymaking; in the NT always in a bad sense carousing, revelry, excessive feasting

Early Church Fathers on Baptism

110-165 AD Justin Martyr The "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles" also refer to John 3:5. There, the one who refuses to be baptized is to be condemned as an unbeliever, partially on the basis of what Jesus told Nicodemus.... "He that, out of contempt, will not be baptized, shall be condemned as an unbeliever, and shall be reproached as ungrateful and foolish. For the Lord says: 'Except a man be baptized of water and of the Spirit, he shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.' And again: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved but he that believeth not shall be damned.'" (Justin Martyr "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," ANF, vol. 7, pg. 456-457.)

110-165 AD Justin Martyr "As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, 'Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all... And for this we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe." (Justin Martyr, "First Apology," ANF, vol. 1, pg. 183)

120-205 AD IRENAEUS "As we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord. We are thus spiritually regenerated as newborn infants, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'" (Irenaeus, "Fragments From Lost Writings", no. 34, ANF, vol. 1, pg. 574)

140-230 AD TERTULLIAN "The prescript is laid down that 'without baptism, salvation is attainable by none' chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, 'Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.'" (On Baptism, ANF, vol. 3, pg. 674-675)

140-230 AD TERTULLIAN "But they roll back an objection from that apostle himself, in that he said, 'For Christ sent me not to baptize;' as if by this argument baptism were done away! For if so, why did he baptize Gaius, and Crispus, and the house of Stephanas? However, even if Christ had not sent him to baptize, yet He had given other apostles the precept to baptize. But these words were written to the Corinthians in regard of the circumstances of that particular time; seeing that schisms and dissensions were agitated among them, while one attributes everything to Paul, another to Apollos. For which reason the 'peacemaking' apostle, for fear he should seem to claim all gifts for himself, says that he had been sent 'not to baptize, but to preach.' For preaching is the prior thing, baptizing the posterior. Therefore the preaching came first: but I think baptizing withal was lawful to him to whom preaching was." (Tertullian, "On Baptism," ANF, vol. 3, pg. 676)

150-200 AD CLEMENT "Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal... This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing. Washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly." (Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," ANF, vol. 2, pg. 215)

Elements of Conversion in the Book of Acts

Text	Teaching	Believing	Confessing	Repenting	Baptizing
Acts 2:38	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES	YES
Acts 8:12	YES	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 8:13	<i>implied</i>	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 8:37	YES	<i>implied</i>	YES	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 9:5ff	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 10:34ff	YES	YES	<i>implied</i>	YES	YES
Acts 16:14ff	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 16:25ff	YES	YES	<i>implied</i>	YES	YES
Acts 17:32ff	YES	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>
Acts 18:8	YES	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES
Acts 19:1ff	YES	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	<i>implied</i>	YES

Common Objections to Baptism Refuted

What about the thief on the cross? How could the thief be baptised into Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (Ro 6:3-5) when Jesus hadn't died? According to that objection why weren't Abraham, Moses, Elijah or David baptised? The thief died under the Old Covenant (Heb 8:6-7) and was saved simply by Jesus having the authority to forgive sins (Mk 2:10).

What about Cornelius and his household (Acts 10-11)? The Spirit coming on the Gentiles was necessary to show a reluctant Peter that the Gentiles could be saved (Acts 10:47). After witnessing the outpouring Peter then commanded that they be baptised with water (Acts 10:17). Peter's explanation in Acts 11:1-18 confirms his reluctance & the convincing that the outpouring of the Spirit gave in order to motivate him to not "stand in the way" of them being baptised and receiving the gift (Acts 10:47 & 11:17).

Baptism is a work, we are saved by faith not works! Passages like Ephesians 2:8-9 or Romans 10:9-13 are often used to plot baptism and faith against one another. It's important to consider what Paul means by "work". In Paul's mind he is targeting works of merit according to the Law (Romans 3:28) done under the belief that salvation can be earned through good deeds. Colossians 2:11-15 which is a parallel passage to Ephesians 2:1-22 shows that the work done at baptism is done by the hands of Christ as we are raised by our faith. Also, baptism is something we submit to, not something we do.

Baptism doesn't save us, Jesus does! The gospel message is clear: Salvation is found only in Jesus' work on the cross (Romans 3:19-.28) The question however is how do we connect to that work? Do we pray the sinners prayer? Or is it at baptism? Romans 6:1-5 shows the clear parallels between baptism and Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. 1 Peter 3:21-22 also shows the same reality. Baptism, along with the clear conscience (belief & repentance), saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism without the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is useless.

All you have to do is declare with your mouth and believe in your heart! Romans 10:9-13 is a passage frequently used to dispute the necessity of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. However, when examined closely it is actually a powerful passage in favour of baptism for the forgiveness of sins! It is important to remember that it is written to Christians in Rome who in the 1st century had shared language and doctrinal understandings. A key phrase is Paul's summary in Romans 10:13 where he writes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That is a quotation from Joel 2:32 and is used two other times in the NT. The first is found in Peter's Sermon in Acts 2:21 and is most likely the reason why those "cut to the heart" knew there was hope for salvation and therefore asked, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's response is to, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). The other time Joel 2 is quoted is even more relevant as it is at Paul's own conversion as told by Paul in Acts 22:1-22. There we find in v. 16 "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name." So its clear to see in Paul's mind we call on the name of the Lord at Baptism. It is there and then that we believe in our heart, confess with our mouth and receive the gift of salvation.

Since there is only One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5), doesn't my understanding retroactively apply? By the time Paul writes Ephesians there is only one baptism. However, in NT times there were several different baptisms: 1-Jewish convert baptism 2-John the Baptist's baptism (Luke 3) 3-Jesus' disciples baptised pre-Jesus' glorification (John 4:1-3) 4-Jesus' metaphorical baptism of the cross (Mark 10:38-39) 5-Baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:1) 6-Water baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36-38). Only two are directly tied to the forgiveness of sins: # 2 & # 6. In Acts 19:1-5 Paul re-baptised those that had received #2 on the basis of incomplete belief. If that was necessary for a valid biblical baptism then surely it is necessary for unbiblical practices of baptism.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-1

C.S. Lewis used the term “a great cataract of nonsense” to describe how people use a modern idea to construe Bible theology. One such example, perhaps the best example, is a conversion method called the Sinner's Prayer. It is more popularly known as the Four Spiritual Laws.

Lewis used this term to describe what happens when someone looks backward at the Bible based only on what he or she has known. Instead, an evangelical should first discern conversion practices from Scriptures and then consider the topic in light of two thousand years of other thinkers. As it is, a novel technique popularized through recent revivals has replaced the biblically sound practice.

Today, hundreds of millions hold to a belief system and salvation practice that no one had ever held until relatively recently. The notions that one can pray Jesus into his or her heart and that baptism is merely an outward sign are actually late developments. The prayer itself dates to the Billy Sunday era; however, the basis for talking in prayer for salvation goes back a few hundred years.

Consider the following appeal:

“Just accept Christ into your heart through prayer and he'll receive you. It doesn't matter what church you belong to or if you ever do good works. You'll be born again at the moment you receive Christ. He's at the door knocking. You don't even have to change bad habits, just trust Christ as Savior. God loves you and forgives you unconditionally. Anyone out there can be saved if they ... Accept Christ, now! Let us pray for Christ to now come into your heart.”

Sound familiar? This method of conversion has had far-reaching effects worldwide as many have claimed this as the basis for their salvation. Yet, what is the historical significance of this conversion? How did the process of rebirth, which Jesus spoke of in John 3, evolve into praying him into one's heart? I believe it was an error germinating shortly after the Reformation, which eventually caused great ruin and dismay in Christendom. By supplying a brief documentation of its short, historical development, I hope to show how this error has served as “a great cataract of nonsense”.

The Reformation

Although things weren't ideal after the Reformation, for the first time in over a thousand years the general populace was reading the Scriptures. By the early 1600s, one hundred years after the Reformation was initiated, there were various branches of European Christendom that followed national lines. For instance, Germans followed Martin Luther. There were also Calvinists (Presbyterian), the Church of England (Episcopalian), various branches of Anabaptists and, of course, the Roman church (Catholics). Most of these groups were trying to revive the waning faith of their already traditionalized denominations. However, a consensus had not been reached on issues like rebirth, baptism or salvation--even between Protestants.

The majority still held to the validity of infant baptism even though they disagreed on its significance. Preachers tended to minimize baptism because people hid their lack of commitment behind sayings like “I am a baptized Lutheran and that's that.” The influence of the preachers eventually led to the popular notion that one was forgiven at infant baptism but not yet reborn. Most Protestants were confused or ambivalent about the connection between rebirth and forgiveness.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-2

The Great Awakening

The Great Awakening was the result of fantastic preaching occurring in Europe and the eastern colonies during the early to mid 1700s. Though ambivalent on the practice of baptism, Great Awakening preachers created an environment that made man aware of his need for an adult confession experience. The experiences that people sought were varied. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and John Wesley furthered ideas of radical repentance and revival. Although there is much to be learned from their messages, they did not solve the problems of the practices associated with baptism and conversion.

Eventually, the following biblical passage written to and inspired for lukewarm Christians became a popular tool for the conversion of non-Christians:

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:14-20)

This passage was written explicitly for lukewarm Christians. Now consider how a lecturer named John Webb misused this passage in the mid 1700s as a basis of evangelizing non-Christians:

"Here is a promise of Union to Christ; in these words, I will come in to him. i.e. If any Sinner will but hear my Voice and open the Door, and receive me by Faith, I will come into his Soul, and unite him to me, and make him a living member of that my mystical body of which I am the Head." (Christ's Suit to the Sinner, 14)

Preachers heavily relied on Revelation 3:20. By using the first-person tense while looking into the sinner's eyes, preachers began to speak for Jesus as they exhorted, "If you would just let me come in and dine with you, I would accept you." Even heathens who had never been baptized responded with the same or even greater sorrow than churchgoers. As a result, more and more preachers of Christendom concluded that baptism was merely an external matter--only an outward sign of an inward grace. In fact, Huldreich Zwingli put this idea forth for the very first time. Nowhere in church history was such a belief recorded. It only appears in Scripture when one begins with a great cataract of nonsense. In other words, it only appears in the New Testament through the imagination of readers influenced by this phenomenon.

Mourner's Seat

A method originated during the 1730s or '40s, which was practically forgotten for about a hundred years. It is documented that in 1741 a minister named Eleazar Wheelock had utilized a technique called the Mourner's Seat. As far as one can tell, he would target sinners by having them sit in the front bench (pew). During the course of his sermon "salvation was looming over their heads." Afterwards, the sinners were typically quite open to counsel and exhortation. In fact, as it turns out they were susceptible to whatever prescription the preaching doctor gave to them. According to eyewitnesses, false conversions were multiplied. Charles Wesley had some experience with this practice, but it took nearly a hundred years for this tactic to take hold.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-3

Cane Ridge

In 1801 there was a sensational revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky that lasted for weeks. Allegedly, people barked, rolled over in the aisles and became delirious because there were long periods without food in the intense heat. It resulted in the extreme use and abuse of emotions as thousands left Kentucky with wild notions about rebirth. Today it is generally viewed as a mockery to Christianity.

The excesses in Cane Ridge produced expectations for preachers and those seeking religious experience. A Second Great Awakening, inferior to the first, was beginning in America. Preachers were enamored with the idea that they could cause (manipulate) people into conversion. One who witnessed such nineteenth century hysteria was J. V. Coombs who complained of the technique:

“The appeals, songs, prayers and the suggestion from the preacher drive many into the trance state. I can remember in my boyhood days seeing ten or twenty people laying unconscious upon the floor in the old country church. People called that conversion. Science knows it is mesmeric influence, self-hypnotism ... It is sad that Christianity is compelled to bear the folly of such movements.” (J.V. Coombs, Religious Delusions, 92ff).

The Cane Ridge Meeting became the paradigm for revivalists for decades. A lawyer named Charles Finney came along a generation later to systemize the Cane Ridge experience through the use of Wheelock's Mourner's Seat and Scripture.

Charles Finney

It wasn't until about 1835 that Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) emerged to champion the system utilized by Eleazar Wheelock. Shortly after his own conversion he left his law practice and would become a minister, a lecturer, a professor, and a traveling revivalist. He took the Mourner's Seat practice, which he called the Anxious Seat, and developed a theological system around it. Finney was straightforward about his purpose for this technique and wrote the following comment near the end of his life:

“The church has always felt it necessary to have something of this kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles, baptism answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ, were called out to be baptized. It held the place that the anxious seat does now as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians”

Finney made many enemies because of this innovation. The Anxious Seat practice was considered to be a psychological technique that manipulated people to make a premature profession of faith. It was considered to be an emotional conversion influenced by some of the preachers' animal magnetism. Certainly it was a precursor to the techniques used by many twentieth century televangelists.

In opposition to Finney's movement, John Nevin, a Protestant minister, wrote a book called The Anxious Bench. He intended to protect the denominations from this novel deviation. He called Finney's New Measures “heresy”, a “Babel of extravagance”, “fanaticism”, and “quackery”. He also said, “With a whirlwind in full view, we may be exhorted reasonably to consider and stand back from its destructive path.” It turns out that Nevin was somewhat prophetic. The system that Finney admitted had replaced biblical baptism, is the vertebrae for the popular plan of salvation that was made normative in the twentieth century by the three Bills --- Billy Sunday, Billy Graham and Bill Bright.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-4

Dwight Moody and R. A. Torrey

However, it wasn't until the end of Finney's life that it became evident to everyone and himself that the Anxious Bench approach led to a high fallout rate. By the 1860s Dwight Moody (1837-1899) was the new apostle in American evangelicalism. He took Finney's system and modified it. Instead of calling for a public decision, which tended to be a response under pressure, he asked people to join him and his trained counselors in a room called the Inquiry Room. Though Moody's approach avoided some of the errors encountered in Finneyism, it was still a derivative or stepchild of the Anxious Bench system.

In the Inquiry Room the counselors asked the possible convert some questions, taught him from Scripture and then prayed with him. The idea that prayer was at the end of the process had been loosely associated with conversion in the 1700s. By the late 1800s it was standard technique for 'receiving Christ' as Moody's influence spread across both the United States and the United Kingdom. This was where a systematic Sinner's Prayer began, but was not called as such until the time of Billy Sunday.

R. A. Torrey succeeded Moody's Chicago-based ministry after his death in 1899. He modified Moody's approach to include "on the spot" street conversions. Torrey popularized the idea of instant salvation with no strings attached, even though he never intended as much. Nonetheless, "Receive Christ, now, right here" became part of the norm. From that time on it became more common to think of salvation outside of church or a life of Lordship.

Billy Sunday and the Pacific Garden Mission

Meanwhile in Chicago, Billy Sunday, a well-known baseball player from Iowa, had been converted in the Pacific Garden Mission. The Mission was Chicago's most successful implementation of Moody's scheme. Eventually, Sunday left baseball to preach. He had great public charm and was one of the first to mix ideas of entertainment with ministry. By the early 1900s he had become a great well-known crusade leader. In his crusades he popularized the Finney-Moody method and included a bit of a circus touch. After fire and brimstone sermons, heavy moralistic messages with political overtones, and humorous if not outlandish behavior, salvation was offered. Often it was associated with a prayer, and at other times a person was told they were saved because they simply walked down his tabernacle's "sawdust trail" to the front where he was standing. In time people were told they were saved because they publicly shook Sunday's hand, acknowledging that they would follow Christ.

Billy Sunday died in 1935 leaving behind hundreds of his imitators. More than anything else, Billy Sunday helped crusades become acceptable to all denominations, which eventually led to a change in their theology. Large religious bodies sold out on their reservations toward these new conversion practices to reap the benefits of potential converts from the crusades because of the allure of success. Both Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday admitted they were somewhat ignorant of church history by the time they had already latched on to their perspectives. This is highly significant because the Anxious Seat phenomenon and offshoot practices were not rooted in Scripture nor in the early church.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-5

Billy Graham, Bill Bright

Billy Graham and his crusades were the next step in the evolution of things. Billy Graham was converted in 1936 at a Sunday-styled crusade. By the late 1940s it was evident to many that Graham would be the champion of evangelicalism. His crusades summed up everything that had been done from the times of Charles Finney through Billy Sunday except that he added respectability that some of the others lacked. In the 1950s Graham's crusade counselors were using a prayer that had been sporadically used for some time. It began with a prayer from his Four Steps to Peace with God. The original four-step formula came during Billy Sunday's era called in a tract called Four Things God Wants you to Know. The altar call system of Graham had been refined by a precise protocol of music, trained counselors and a speaking technique all geared to help people 'accept Christ as Savior.'

In the late 1950s Bill Bright came up with the exact form of the currently popular Four Spiritual Laws so that the average believer could take the crusade experience into the living room of their neighbor. Of course, this method ended with the Sinner's Prayer. Those who responded to crusades and sermons could have the crusade experience at home when they prayed,

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Later, in 1977 Billy Graham published a now famous work entitled, How to Be Born Again. For all the Scripture he used, he never once uses the hallmark rebirth event in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The cataract (blind spot) kept him away from the most powerful conversion event in all Scripture. It is my guess that it's emphasis on baptism and repentance for the forgiveness of sins was incompatible with his approach.

The Living Bible and Beyond

By the late 1960s it seemed that nearly every evangelical was printing some form of the Four Spiritual Laws in the last chapter of their books. Even a Bible was printed with this theology inserted into God's Word. Thus, in the 1960s, the Living Bible's translation became the translation of choice for the crusades as follows:

"Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few welcome and received him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn! --not a physical rebirth resulting from human passion or plan--but from the will of God."(John 1:11-13, Living Bible, italics mine)

The italicized words have no support at all in the original Greek. They are a blatant insertion placed by presuppositions of the translator, Kenneth Taylor. I'm not sure that even the Jehovah's Witnesses have authored such a barefaced insertion in their corrupt Scriptures. In defense of Taylor's original motives, the Living Bible was created primarily with children in mind. However, the publishers should have corrected the misleading verse in the 1960s. They somewhat cleared it up in the newer LB in the 1990s, only after the damage has been done. For decades mainstream evangelicals were using the LB and circular reasoning to justify such a strong 'trusting moment' as salvation, never knowing their Bible was corrupted.

History of the Sinner's Prayer-6

A whole international enterprise of publishers, universities and evangelistic associations were captivated by this method. The phrases, "Receive Christ," and "Trust Jesus as your personal savior," filled airwaves, sermons, and books. James Kennedy's Evangelism Explosion counselor-training program helped make this concept of conversion an international success. Missionaries everywhere were trained with Sinner's Prayer theology. Evangelicalism had the numbers, the money, the television personas of Graham and Kennedy and any attempt to purport a different plan of salvation would be decried as cultic and "heresy."

Most evangelicals are ignorant of where their practice came from or how Christians from other periods viewed biblical conversion. C.S. Lewis regarded it as chronological snobbery when we don't review our beliefs against the conclusions of others:

"Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age." (Learning in Wartime, 1939)

While most do this unknowingly, evangelicals are skewing church auditoriums all over the world from a clear picture of conversion with a nonsensical practice.

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This article is an overview of an ongoing research project.

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