

A Prayer
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

BOOK II

PAUL

INTRODUCTION

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in July of 1947. I had placed my old Underwood on a small table in the front yard, under the shade of the hickory, with a chair on which I had seated myself. I was composing an essay, being inspired by my thoughts about the racial injustice of the land of my birth and nurture. I looked up toward the Whitworth's home to recognize the car approaching on the dirt road. It was The Rev. Russell Duffer, who was "preaching a revival" at Walnut Grove Baptist Church. I was not surprised to see him and I felt sure he was coming to see me, a young sinner, home from college for the summer and in need of conversion and salvation. Sure enough, he pulled into our yard and drove up to within a few feet. I invited him out and went inside to get another chair. I wanted to hear what he would say, for I had been giving much attention to Jesus for the last four years, though I had never made a decision to follow him nor would I that day. However, during the following week I decided to "accept Christ" and was baptized the next Sunday afternoon.

Brother Duffer did not pressure me; he only wanted to explain the Plan of Salvation and to encourage me to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. He pointed to one passage of scripture as the key to salvation because it listed all the necessary steps to take, which were, in number, only two. It was from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 10, verses 8-10:

But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.

This simple two step formula, believe and confess, to be followed by baptism, is the foundation of Evangelical Christianity. Extrapolated into evangelical terms, it means that salvation is by faith alone, and not by works, as Paul was careful to state elsewhere in his letters. I believed Paul then, and this formula became the basis of my faith and of the faith of others who came to Jesus at my invitation during the following years. I came more and more to love and appreciate the "slave of Christ" who had done so much to spread a message about Jesus throughout the First Century Mediterranean world.

But there was a problem brewing behind the barrier of the subconscious. It required years to acknowledge it, and years more to define it, but it was there and would not disappear. Let us begin by focussing on it.