

Revelation 3:20 and Asking Jesus into Your Heart

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20

“I asked Jesus into my heart” is a common way Christians relate their salvation testimony. Preachers, teachers, witnessing Christians, and gospel literature frequently end their gospel presentation with the invitation to “Ask Jesus into your heart.” When we look at the practical, theological, and biblical objections to this phrase, we may decide to use different language.

Practical Problems

A woman related how as a child she was lying on her stomach in bed when her mother told her she needed to ask Jesus into her heart. She rolled over onto her back so that Jesus could come into her heart. This story illustrates how children think in concrete terms. It is easy to see how such an appeal can miss the gospel message altogether. Left with this imagery, we understand why assurance of salvation is a big problem with many children. They don’t *feel* Jesus in their “hearts.” Adults too are left with a subjective evaluation of whether they feel Jesus indwelling them. “Asking Jesus into you heart” easily breeds confusion and undermines the true basis of assurance, faith in God’s promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Theological Problems

Most Roman Catholics would say they receive Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives when they eat the communion elements at church. But a physical transaction involving food, the digestive system, or the heart organ has nothing to do with receiving eternal life. Again, asking Jesus into the heart or receiving Him into one’s life does not deal with the issue of one’s sinful condition and Christ’s provision for sin’s penalty through His death and resurrection. A person is diverted away from the gospel message if “asking Jesus into your heart” is the condition for salvation.

Biblical Problems

Those who defend the invitation “Ask Jesus into your heart” usually cite Revelation 3:20. But as we interpret the passage in its context, we find that there is no basis for this invitation here.

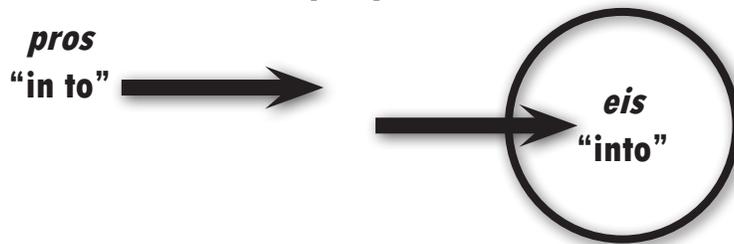
In the larger context, the book of Revelation was recorded by John to inform and prepare readers for the end times (Rev. 1:19). Within this general purpose, chapters 2 and 3 address contemporary churches and their respective situations. Six of the churches are displeasing to the Lord Jesus Christ and are told to repent. In contrast, the Gospel of John, which was written to tell readers how to have eternal life (John 20:31), never uses the word “repent” but uses “believe” almost one hundred times as the condition for salvation. This in itself is sufficient reason not to model our evangelistic invitation from the words of Revelation. When Revelation includes a clear invitation to salvation in 22:17, it echoes the invitations of the Gospel of John with “Come” and “take the water of life” (John 4:10; 6:37, 44, 65).

We also observe that Revelation 3:20 is part of Christ’s message to the church in Laodicea. Churches are composed of believers, but believers can be displeasing to the Lord by disobedient actions and sinful lifestyles (for example, the Corinthian church). The message to these and the other disobedient believers in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 is not to get saved, but to repent of that which displeases the Lord.

The Laodicean believers are not good or useful to Christ because they are like lukewarm water. He would prefer them to be like hot or cold water, because each has its respective useful purposes. Lukewarm water is

useless, unpleasant, and thus spit out (vv. 15-16). They think they need nothing in their relationship to God, but the Lord's assessment is very much to the contrary (v. 17). In verse 18 Jesus counsels them to buy gold, garments, and eye salve. This cannot speak of salvation because salvation is by grace without cost. Jesus speaks of paying the price for the things that are of spiritual value to the Christian. Further evidence that they are believers is the Lord's reassurance in verse 19 that He only reproves and chastens those He loves. The command to "be zealous and repent" is then illustrated by verse 20.

Verse 20 shows how these believers can repent by responding to Jesus' invitation to renew fellowship with Him. Jesus has been excluded from the fellowship of the church, so He knocks seeking entrance. Since a church is made up of individuals, the invitation is to whoever in the church "hears" and "opens the door," a picture of receptivity. The promised result is that Jesus will come "in to" him. It is important to know the original language Jesus used. He did not say "into" to denote *contact with* (which would use the Greek *eis*), but he said "in to" to denote *motion toward* (using the Greek *pros*). The different emphases between the two prepositions can be seen in John 6:35: "He who comes to (*pros*) Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in (*eis*) Me shall never thirst." Jesus will come *in to* where the receptive person is (not *inside* him) to eat together with him.



The imagery of eating together is a common biblical and cultural picture of fellowship. The reward of sitting with Jesus on His throne is not a result of salvation, but a reward for the conquering or victorious Christian (v. 21).

Objections

Some will say, "But are we not supposed to ask Jesus for eternal life as indicated by John 4:10? Yes, for *eternal life*; but there is no biblical precedent for asking Jesus "to come into your heart." *Ask* is an analogy for believing. Others may also refer to John 1:12 to say we must receive Christ. But that verse uses receiving Christ for the result of salvation, not the means of salvation, which is to "believe in His name." Others might argue that many people get saved by asking Jesus into their heart. We would respond that if they were saved, it is because they also understood and believed the gospel. No one can be saved by only asking Jesus into his or her heart. We would also add that there are many people without assurance of salvation because they responded to this confusing invitation.

Conclusion

When presenting the gospel, we should be as biblical and as clear as possible. We have an overwhelming biblical basis for telling people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died for our sins, rose again, and guarantees our eternal salvation. There is no good reasons to use the confusing gospel-evading, and unbiblical invitation to "Ask Jesus into your heart."