

## **Scriptural Evaluation of Salvation Invitations**

### **Will you give your heart to Christ?**

This invitation is misleading. The Scriptures never tell us to give our heart to Christ. Such an invitation implies some effort on our part. We are not saved by giving God anything, but rather by receiving His gift of eternal life (Eph. 2:8-9). Remember also that the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). Romans 10:10 tells us that with the heart man believes unto righteousness, but the nonbeliever is unable to give his heart to God. Some use this Scripture, however, with the idea that the unsaved person is making a decision of his will to accept Christ. Even so, this invitation contains very confusing terminology that does not clearly present the truth of the gospel.

### **Will you surrender your life to Christ?**

Surrender implies "giving everything" to the Lord, while salvation is accepting the work of Christ on our behalf as a free gift. This invitation is the reverse of scriptural teaching. We are saved by receiving rather than by giving (John 1:12). The appeal of surrender is fitting only for a believer to yield his life to obedient service to the Lord. Such an appeal cannot be used for salvation. The expression "yield" in Romans 6 and "present" in Romans 12, both of which apply to believers, are calls to obedience and the need for dedicating one's life to God's will. Do not confuse these expressions and concepts with accepting and believing for salvation.

### **Will you confess your sins and ask the Lord to forgive you?**

This is an appeal for a believer who needs to renew fellowship with the Lord on the basis of 1 John 1:9. This is not a salvation verse. It is God's direction for a sinful believer to be restored to fellowship with Himself. The unsaved person is not asked to confess his sins to get saved (he couldn't remember all of them anyway). Rather he is asked to recognize his sinful condition and accept Christ's payment for him. The unsaved person is forgiven and cleansed of his guilt because of his acceptance of Christ's death for him (Rom. 3:24).

### **Will you come to Christ tonight and promise to serve Him from now on?**

The promise to serve Christ has meaning only for the believer. No invitation for service could be given to the unsaved because he has no spiritual life (Eph. 2:1). Also, the idea of "coming to Christ" may give the thought of trying to make oneself acceptable to Christ. If "coming" means deciding to accept Christ and His finished work on the cross, however, such an invitation may be acceptable. This invitation contains vague terminology, though, and will very likely be misunderstood by the unsaved person. The promise to serve Him is unacceptable for salvation, because it gives the idea of works (Eph. 2:8-9). Serving the Lord is a result of being saved. Service has nothing to do with getting saved.

### **Will you come and "pray through" to Christ?**

The whole idea of praying through, hanging on, letting go, etc., is entirely foreign to a salvation invitation. Such terms imply some kind of action on our part and do not apply to receiving Christ. All we need to do is believe the gospel and receive the gift of salvation. Christ promised to save us when we accept and believe (John 3:18). Never are we told that we must plead with God. The way to Christ is open. When we come to Him in faith, He accepts us as we are (John 6:37). Such invitations are often used by those who put great emphasis on emotions. They insist that a person must keep on praying until he has a feeling of being saved.

**Right now ask Jesus to come into your heart.**

We are not saved by Jesus coming into our heart, but rather by trusting in His death for us (Eph 1:7). When we believe, He does indwell us. Our body then becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. However, that is a result of salvation. It is not the method whereby we are saved. Children find it confusing because they wonder if Jesus can physically come into their hearts. The simplicity of believing and trusting is misunderstood. Revelation 3:20 is often the basis of this invitation. Yet this passage does not deal with salvation. It does not focus the attention on Christ dying in my place and my acceptance of His work for me.

**Will you make your commitment for Christ tonight?**

This is one of the most misleading, vague invitations imaginable. A "commitment to Christ" could mean any number of things, such as serving, breaking wicked habits, obeying, making greater effort to do right, changing friends, or changing my life-style. Committing or promising something to God is certainly a "work" on my part. The unsaved person who is dead in trespasses and sin is unable to make any kind of commitment whatsoever. We are not saved by our promises to God, but by believing Christ's work is for us (John 3:18). The unsaved person needs a new life in Christ. Only when he places his faith in the finished work of Christ will he receive that life in Christ (1 John 5:12).

**Will you make Him Lord of your life?**

This invitation deals with personal dedication and obedience by the believer (Rom. 6:11). It does not deal with salvation for the unsaved. The idea of "lordship salvation" is not scriptural. Jesus saves us from sin because of His work on the cross. There He took upon Himself the punishment for our guilt and died in our place (Rom. 5:8). The unsaved person cannot make Christ the Lord of his life. He has no spiritual life and no ability to obey the Lord. The work of Christ on the cross saves all who believe. His death and resurrection give spiritual life whereby the believer may obey and serve Him (1 Pet. 2:24).

**Will you repent of your sins to get saved?**

Repentance means a "change of mind" and is followed by a decision or action because of that change. Genuine repentance is the result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and is often accompanied by sorrow. Repentance is more than just sorrow, however. It involves a change of mind about guilt and the penalty for sin, one's need of salvation, and the Savior's sacrificial provision for salvation on the cross. While it is associated with salvation, repentance alone is not salvation. Faith and trust in the work of Christ on Calvary is the needed result of repentance. It must be followed by faith in the Lord Jesus to save from sin and to give spiritual life (Acts 20:28, John 1:12). Emphasizing only repentance leaves the unsaved with an incomplete message that does not give clear understanding of salvation.

**Just believe now and allow Jesus to touch you.**

The idea of Jesus touching me appeals to my emotions and feelings. It doesn't say anything about receiving Christ as Savior. The emphasis in this invitation is on feelings and some unusual experience that indicates I am saved. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that Jesus saves us by touching us nor are we told to seek or expect any particular feelings when we trust Christ as our Savior. Feelings of joy, cleansing, and relief may all come as a result of believing. Our assurance of salvation, however, is based on the simple promise of the Word, not on how we feel (John 1:12). Even if there are no special feelings, the promise of God is to save everyone who believes the gospel. On this basis alone, salvation can be claimed by the believer (John 3:16).

**Are you willing to forsake all your sins to obtain salvation?**

As a person who is dead in transgressions and sins, the sinner has no ability to forsake his sins. Even if he could forsake his sins, it would only be self-reformation, not regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Scripture never tells us to forsake anything as a requirement for salvation. Rather Scripture commands us to believe the "Good News" that Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). God saves us just as we are--lost and without hope outside of Christ. We cannot make ourselves more acceptable to God by trying to forsake our sins. This invitation puts the emphasis on something we cannot do. Rather, we must believe that Christ in His death and resurrection has done all we need to become saved. All God requires is that we believe and trust Him (Rom. 4:5). Once we are saved, it is a different matter. Then the believer should forsake sin with the power of the Holy Spirit and obey the commands of Christ to live a godly life (Gal. 5:16). This invitation confuses the results of salvation (godly conduct) with the method of salvation (to receive and believe).

**Will you accept the Lord Jesus as your own personal Savior?**

This invitation is biblically correct. Accepting (receiving) the Lord Jesus as my Savior is believing that He died for me and paid the penalty for my sin (Rom. 5:8). Because He loves me, He died for me. Placing my personal trust in His death for me is God's only requirement for salvation (Rom. 3:24). Trusting Christ is personal. Christ died for me, and I personally trust Him to save me from the penalty of my sin. "As many as received Him" (John 1:12) is the open invitation to anyone to be saved. "Receiving" results in an immediate salvation. Christ died for your sins. Believe it personally. That's all you need to get saved. This is the heart of the gospel (Rom. 5:8). The Bible uses believe as an absolute trust in the work of Christ for me (John 3:18). Christ died for my sins and demonstrated His victory over sin by His physical resurrection from the dead (Rom. 4:24-25). The work is all done! Our Savior lives to assure the believer that He can and will complete our salvation (Phil. 1:6). The payment is complete for the penalty of my sin (1 John 2:2). Knowing my guilt of sin, all that I can do is believe that He died for me and trust that payment to be all I need for salvation (Rom. 4:5; 6:23).

**You can be saved right now by believing that Christ died for your sins.**

This is a correct statement. It includes the immediate fact of salvation when we believe or trust in the work of Christ at Calvary. It also includes the substitutionary aspect that Christ died for me in my place (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ shed His blood for me; that is the payment for my sins (1 Pet. 1:18-19). His sacrifice fulfilled the Old Testament stipulation that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). We have redemption and forgiveness through His blood (Eph. 1:7). His bodily resurrection assures us that He lives to keep the believer saved, to intercede for him, and to finally present him faultless before the throne (Heb. 7:25, Jude 24). Because He lives, the believer has the blessed assurance of the physical return of the Lord and the certainty of his place in heaven (1 Thes. 4:14-18).

**Will you believe Jesus took your place on the cross?**

This invitation is also true to the Word of God. All the penalty of our sins was laid on Christ (Isa. 53:6). He suffered the consequence of death for us (1 Pet 3:18). He took my place when He died for me. To believe is to trust Him completely to do all that is needed to remove my penalty of sin and impart spiritual life to me. The Bible usage of "believe" is different than our common daily usage. Today "believe" usually means "maybe"--something I think I may do or want. The Bible uses believe as an absolute trust in the work of Christ for me (John 3:18).

**Right now believe that Christ paid the price in full for your sins.**

Again, this is a correct statement that centers on the need for immediate action. The basis of salvation is also indicated. Christ paid the awful penalty for sin--death. Note the emphasis also that He paid the price

in full. There is nothing left to pay, to do, to join, or to earn. We must only receive Him and trust in what He accomplished for us at Calvary. We are justified "freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24). He loved us while we were yet sinners. His love was not based on any goodness on our part. He loved us because He wanted to save us and make our salvation possible by paying the price of our sin on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). The urgency of our believing is important! There is no promise of tomorrow, or some future opportunity. Rather, "now" is the best time of all to receive Christ (II Cor. 6:2).

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Produced by AWANA Clubs International