

The Whetting Iron

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." –Proverbs 27:17 KJV



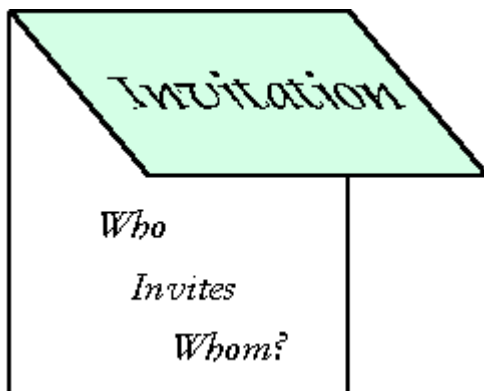
"If the iron is blunt, and he does not whet the edge, then he must put more strength to it. But wisdom is profitable to direct." –Ecclesiastes 10:10 MKJV

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INVITING JESUS?

BY SCOTT J. KELLER



"YOU need to invite Jesus into your life and tell Him forgiveness for your sins." I was not surprised to hear a nationally known Christian radio personality recently say these very words. Unfortunately this rather strange way of phrasing the Gospel-call is not uncommon today. We have all heard these words (or statements of the like)—even by those who you think should know better. I must even confess that the first time I had personally used similar language. This I had heard many times before and it was the first time it popped into my head when I was confronted with the opportunity to present the Gospel to someone. Little preparation and forethought will often lead to inadequate, if not downright unbiblical statements.

“The Bible never speaks of

You see it is God and His ministers who are the ones supposed to put forth the *invitation*. The Bible never speaks of inviting God. It is God who invites. It is God who

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the sinner *inviting* God or Jesus but rather it is God or Jesus who *invites* the sinner. The sinner, in turn, is to *believe* on Jesus Christ. The invitation has already been given (and should have been given); then it is up to the sinner to *believe* to *invite*.

**Laying The Proper
Groundwork**

Before we go any further let me first say a few words about the gospel and evangelism in general. Gospel invitations are often given prematurely. People are being asked to become Christians when they really know not from what they are to be saved. People are being asked to believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ without either God the Father nor God the Son having been defined or explained. Even a biblical Gospel-call is inappropriate if the listener does not at least have a basic understanding of what is meant by the terms *God's Word, God, Jesus, sin, and salvation*.

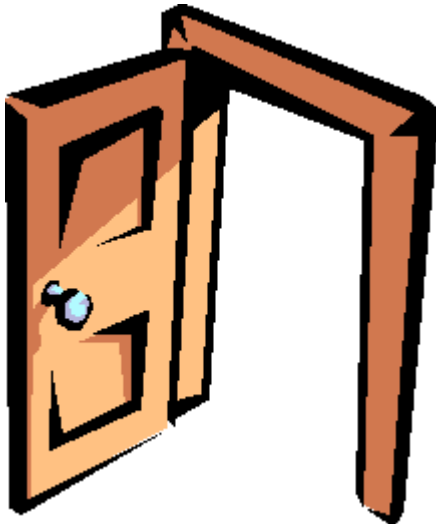
In contrast to today's premature invitations the Bible teaches that Jesus, the Apostles and others did not give a Gospel invitation until the listeners themselves first cried, "What must we do to be saved?" (John 6:28; 9:36; Acts 2:37; 16:30; Luke 3:7-9). Their cry came as the result of properly explaining some of the basic matters first. This is the example that should be followed. Throughout this analysis I am assuming that the groundwork for the invitation has already been properly laid and I am evaluating the actual gospel invitations upon their own merit.

What Does It Mean?

Now, aside from what has already been stated, the statement itself is at best ambiguous and at worst incoherent. It is not a good reason enough for rejecting it. What does 'invite Jesus into your life' really mean? I find it amazing that this frequent terminology is rarely questioned. Politicians aren't the only ones guilty of uttering statements that are so ambiguous that they mean anything and therefore they mean nothing. Theologians and evangelists are equally guilty of this behavior, and the statement in question is a prime example. Theologians and evangelists as well as politicians will continue to say these things as long as people don't question them—as long as people seem satisfied and even pleased with such ridiculous statements.

Have you ever asked anyone else into your life or reserved a phrase reserved for the Son of God? Have you asked

mother, father, siblings, spouse, children, friends, or associates into your life? All of these may be a part of ; some of them may have even been asked by you. But same type of relationship really exist between the creature Creator? Even if it did, is that the requirement of S simply ask Jesus to be a *part of your life*? The fact is, you like it or not, He is already a part of your life as the Sustainer of all creation. ". . . *In Him we live, and we have our being*" (Acts 17:28). It is *belief*, not an *invitation* is required for salvation—belief in what the Word of God belief in Jesus Christ. We all have many people around us would consider to be a part of our lives yet we do not them—at least we don't consider them very trustworthy essential element is *belief*.



“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he will sup with me.”

–Revelation 3:20

Biblical Support?

Perhaps some feel there is biblical support for the use of this type of terminology when giving a Gospel-call. The verse found in Revelation 3:20 does seem to allow for an invitation on the part of the sinner. There we find Jesus saying, ". . . *stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he will sup with me.*" While this is not the place for a thorough exegesis of this verse, closer examination will reveal that it is a misuse of the verse to apply it as a gospel imperative. The words of this verse is not asking anyone to do anything. It states a matter of fact: Christ knocks and will come in to sup with those who hear His voice and open.

What is more, this verse is not at all addressing the issue of salvation—*faith*; it is intended to show Christ's concern for His own. Again and again the Bible emphasizes that the way to salvation is *faith*. "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. . . . For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, unless they be sent? . . . So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:9, 13-15, 17).

Additional evidence that illustrates that Revelation 3:20 has an entirely different intent than an evangelistic one can be found in the Song of Solomon 5:2. There we find a passage that is undoubtedly drawing on when he makes His state of mind in Revelation. Song of Solomon 5:2 reads, "*I sleep, but*

waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, sayi to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for m filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the r should be clear that the intent of both passages is to s Christ knocks and calls for His beloved, His elect.

Moreover, notice that in Revelation 3:20 Christ also *any man hear my voice.*" This is very important because beloved alone who hear His voice: "*But he that entereth door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter ope. and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him. know his voice*" (John 10:2-4). The meaning here in R 3:20 is unquestionably pertaining to Christ's particular His elect. It describes how Christ—in spite of the sinf the church of Laodicea—seeks out His beloved there, c; by name, and they will hear his voice. This verse neithe us how to bring the Good News nor what to answer in to the question, "What shall I/we do to be saved?"

Put this all together—it is not an imperative but i indicative, there is no reference to the means of salvation faith, and the thrust of the passage shows Christ's partic for His elect—and you have an overwhelming argumen using Revelation 3:20 in support for telling people to 'in into their lives.'

Perhaps you think this is hair-splitting. You may aq me that there is no command to invite Jesus. "Howev argue, "it would surely not be wrong to tell a person w actually does—that He stands knocking—and they are Him in." But it would be wrong. To take this approac that you have missed the point entirely. The vital trut *faith IS the means by which we 'open the door'* to let Telling someone to *invite* Jesus is an extremely poor c words if one intends to convey to them that they need *faith* in Jesus.

"However," you rebut, "it wouldn't be wrong to tell to invite Jesus into their life in addition to telling them to Again you have missed the point. Aside from the fact would be a misuse of the verse based on its contex superfluous and therefore confusing addition. Someone saving faith already sees Jesus as Lord as well as Savi being true, we are left with the problem that has alre mentioned, namely, what do you mean by 'invite Jesus : life'?"

When the verse is properly understood it is a most comforting portrayal of Christ's love for His elect. On the other hand, when it is misused and seen with an evangelistic focus it becomes a confusing if not misleading imperative.

'Everyone' Wants Forgiveness

You may have noticed that I haven't yet considered the second part of the statement, "and tell Him you want forgiveness for your sins." It should be even more obvious that this part of the statement has as little to do with a Gospel-call as the first part did. Wanting forgiveness for sin is the desire of every Christian, every would-be Christian, and certainly a great many people who have never even seriously considered Christ. Many of them probably do not understand Original Sin or their own Total Depravity. Few of them, however, would admit to a need for perfection. Most would admit to some wrongdoing and would like to know they are forgiven. But when did this request become part of the Gospel-call?

¹There are some who falsely assert that a person may have Jesus as their Savior even if they don't submit to Him as Lord. See the article *Is Christ Your Lord?* by A.W. Pink in this issue. [Click here to View](#)

Wanting to be forgiven for your sins *may* indicate a request for an admission of guilt on the part of the person seeking salvation, but this should never be confused with the biblical imperative to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*. That these two matters are distinct and should be clear enough without further explanation.

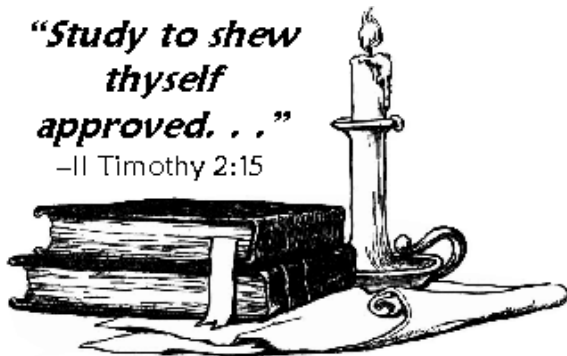
What Can We Do?

The real cause of such confusing and unacceptable statements is due to an ignorance of what the Bible teaches. Those who call upon others "to invite Jesus into their lives and tell Him they want forgiveness for their sins" undoubtedly have a very poor or inaccurate understanding of many biblical doctrines. This was my problem when I spoke in this manner, and it was through my increased understanding of the Bible that I realized my mistake. If one had a better understanding of the doctrines of the Bible—God, Jesus, Sin, the Gospel, Justification, Sovereignty, etc., he would not make such a statement. It is no wonder there is so much confusion as to what Christianity really is when such confusing statements are being used to invite sinners to be saved.

The Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31), and that "*faith cometh by hearing the word of God*." Faithfully teach others the "*counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27). No, you don't have to tell

***"Study to shew
thyself
approved. . ."***

—II Timothy 2:15



everything in the Bible before they can become Christians. Considering the fact that nobody knows everything that the Bible teaches that would be an impossible task. What I mean is you must have a thorough understanding of the Bible yourself so you can tell whoever you may be speaking to whatever is appropriate for them. Don't limit your knowledge to an evangelistic checklist whereby you run through the same steps of salvation for every person you meet. God is pleased to use all different portions of Scripture to convict and save sinners.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a work needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). Only then will you "be ready always to answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" and clarity (I Peter 3:15)

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