

Why Your Child Should Not Ask Jesus into Their Heart

By: Andy Johnson

You may be somewhat shocked by reading the title of this article. I hope that you might even ponder it a moment before reading the rest. I hope it will get you to think. But don't start calling for my job with the claim that I have steered far from evangelicalism just yet. Notice, I did not call the article "Why Your Child Should Not Be Saved" but "Why Your Child Should Not Ask Jesus into Their Heart." I genuinely believe that children can be saved and disciplined. My topic of interest here is not the salvation of a child, but **how** the saving gospel is **communicated** to the child. To not take this seriously, I think, is a grave mistake, one that could lead children down the wrong path for all of eternity. Let me also say that this topic can not be treated fully in just a one page article so this is just to get you started.

My main point here is that the phrase "ask Jesus into my heart" is at best nebulous and at worst, a phrase which leads kids down the road of false assurance. I'm heralding a clarion call for intentional, thoughtful presentations of the gospel with our children. With such impressionable minds, our children need the concrete gospel message with no deviations (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Our Lord Jesus praised the natural faith of a child, commanding that us adults won't get into heaven unless we modeled it (Luke 18:17). There are two major problems with the "ask Jesus into your heart" model of evangelism. The first is a theological problem, the second a practical one.

From a theological standpoint, there are several issues. First of all, asking Jesus into your heart is not what it takes to be saved. To be saved, one must repent (change their mind/heart about their need for a savior) and believe (place faith in Jesus' work on the cross and resurrection) (Mark 1:15, John 3:16). This means that you receive the Holy Spirit (God in your heart) as a result of salvation. God dwelling in you is the result of salvation, not the cause. **The cross and resurrection are the cause**. To say that they are saved by asking Jesus into their heart is to say they are saved by the result of salvation, not the cause. That's backward and theologically wrong. Also, it is the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, not Jesus himself. It is a Trinitarian issue (1 Cor. 6:19). This means that Jesus is NOT with us. He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. This means that we should long for His return (John 14:3; Rom. 8:23,34; Heb. 1:3). Let's take this seriously so that we don't have to do theological damage control when our kids grow up.

There are also some practical problems with this terminology. Children are generally concrete thinkers. I have spoken to children (generally under age 8) who really think that a little man is going to come live inside their heart. Metaphors don't work well with small children. If a child does "ask Jesus into their heart" I fear that they have merely put their trust in a warm fuzzy experience that results in them trusting in a decision they made rather than trusting in the person of Jesus. Ultimately this is self trust and I have witnessed too many adults who made decisions as a child who now trust in their decision instead of Jesus. Finally, we often treat a child who says they asked Jesus into their heart as if they accomplished something. "Good for you!" "Way to Go!" and "I'm so proud of you!" are common responses. Let's congratulate God for the work **He** does, not ourselves.

Let's teach our kids the clear message about Jesus' death for their sin, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Let's not make the lines of salvation unclear. Children easily believe what we tell them. Children rarely have a belief problem when it comes to Jesus, they have an understanding problem. Let's be clear in our message about salvation so that they can understand the raw facts and see the Holy Spirit lead them to genuine faith!