

Three Doctrinal Issues In Explaining Salvation to Children

1. "LET JESUS INTO YOUR HEART."

- * Someone once asked me why I never use the phrase "Let Jesus into Your Heart." He said he always used it when talking to children. I simply asked him what he meant when he told a child to let Jesus into his heart. He said that when a child believes that Jesus died on the cross to pay for his sin, that is his way of understanding what happens. I said, "It seems to me that when a child believes in Jesus Christ as the one who died on the cross to pay for his sin, he is quite able to express it that way."

"Unfortunately," I said, "I have talked to adults who, as children, sincerely prayed the "let-Jesus-come-into-my-heart" prayer, and by their own admission, were never saved." At the end of the prayer they still believed that it was necessary to be good to go to heaven.

- * These adults who have told me they "let Jesus come into their hearts" as children were clearly trusting in their good works for salvation. Sincerity [*really meaning it*] does not assure us that the child understands. Letting Jesus into one's heart makes no more sense than "letting Buddha into your throat" in order to become a Buddhist.
- * God's two favorite words for salvation are faith and belief. He uses them 196 times in the New Testament to refer to salvation. *see my blog, God's 2 favorite salvation words*
- * Ask a child a series of questions until you are positive that he knows what he believes. Be careful about asking questions which can be answered with the one word, "Yes."

1. "What did Jesus do for you when He died on the cross?"
2. "What is His promise in John 3.16 about eternal life if you trust Him?"
3. "If you believe that He died instead of you, do you have eternal life?"
4. "What does the Bible say about very nice people who believe they are good enough to go to heaven?"
5. "What are you believing in right now?"
6. "What happens to very bad people who believe Jesus died for them?"
7. "Where will you go when you die? Heaven Hell And why?"
8. "How do you know?" (*he must explain with a whole sentence, not just a yes/no answer*)
9. "Tell me what the Bible says?"

2. "PRAY TO RECEIVE CHRIST"

- * Only after he is certain of his salvation and knows he has a home in heaven, do I encourage a child to pray.
 - * THIS IS THE POINT AT WHICH TO ENCOURAGE THE CHILD TO PRAY IN THANKFULNESS HE IS NOT REQUESTING TO BE SAVED.
 - * This comes only after you are quite sure the child is already saved and is trusting Jesus!
 - * "Why don't you **thank Jesus** right now for dying for you and giving you eternal life."

You want to be quite careful you are not just leading the compliant child through a series of "yes" questions. The danger is that he will think he will be saved by giving the right answer to all these questions about heaven.

I have friends who often say, "If you just prayed that prayer and **really meant it**, you are saved and God has a home in heaven for you."

False.

Of course he “meant it.” The drunk in the rescue mission “really meant it this time.” The drug addict has prayed it many times and was truly sincere. He is still depending on his sincerity for his salvation because somebody said, “If you really mean it.” Catholics pray for God’s forgiveness and mean it every day and are not forgiven. My father-in-law, Chuck Zeman a pilot for Pan American Airways, prayed for forgiveness faithfully for years every night. He wasn’t saved until he understood salvation was by faith in Jesus, not by sincere prayers.

Many Bible believers have prayed the “Lord’s Prayer, Our Father who art in heaven. . .” and meant it. But they didn’t understand the implications such as “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others.” Maybe you have also prayed it that way. In the same way an unbeliever can pray anything he’s told to without understanding.

*** Warning: a child [or adult] may have been very sincere about praying a “sinners prayer” and still be trusting in his own good works. He was not trying to fool you. He was not a hypocrite. He was not dishonest as he followed your directions—he simply did not understand the heavy theological message in that prayer.** He was praying because he meant whatever the preacher told him to say.

In my experience in dealing with unsaved adults, many people were very sincere and “really meant it” when they “prayed to receive Christ” and were “saved.” They weren’t false, but they did not pray theologically. The one leading them in the “sinner’s prayer” was cramming a lot of theology into the 2-paragraph prayer which this lost soul couldn’t process. They weren’t saved at all. They said what the person encouraged them to pray.

The person who encouraged them to be saved did not ask them to explain what **they meant** by their prayer.
People who pray

* Never give a child the assurance of his salvation by saying:
“Today is your spiritual birthday because you said that prayer.”
“You now have a home in heaven!”
“You’re saved!”

. . . unless the child can explain salvation simply to you in his own words. Otherwise he is not saved. So ask him.

A child who has just trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior should be able to go home and explain these 5 things to his parents, not just “I got saved!”

1. **“God never did anything wrong in His life.**
2. **God said He would punish our sin.**
3. **Everybody sins.**
4. **I can’t do anything to earn my place in heaven.**
5. **Jesus loves us all and died for every bit of our sin.**
6. **The Bible says since I believe Jesus died for me I have eternal life.**

“Mom & Dad, will you believe this, please?”

3. BE-GOOD-ISM”

* **“Be good”** is not the child’s way of saying “trust Christ as the One who was punished for my sin.” It is his way of relying on his own good life to please God. It is SALVATION BY WORKS. If he is old enough to say, “Be good,” he’s lost.

Many well-meaning Sunday School teachers are telling their students that sin displeases God. Yes, it does, but they often leave the impression that doing good pleases God so much that they feel they can enter heaven if they earn it. Inadvertently they are teaching salvation comes by being pretty good.

* Kids need to know what is written in these 3 verses.

All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

Isaiah 64.6

There is none righteous, no not one.

Romans 3.10

For by grace are ye save through faith. . .not of works.

Ephesians 2.8,9

* No one has ever been saved by praying a prayer.

A child is not saved by being good.

A child is not saved by asking Jesus to forgive him. *Unsaved people do it every day.*

A child is not saved by praying a special prayer.

No one receives salvation by “praying to receive Christ.” We believe to receive Christ.

A child is not saved by asking Jesus to come into his heart.

A child is not saved by opening his heart to Jesus or giving his heart to Jesus.

A child is not saved by telling Jesus how sorry he is for bad things he’s done.

A child is not saved by confessing all the sins he can think of.

A child is not saved by taking communion which puts Jesus in his heart.

A child is not saved by confirmation, confirming his **belief** in 100 answers he’s memorized.

There is no such thing as being saved **by means of** a “sinner’s prayer.” *If an individual is not trusting in Jesus before he prays, he is not trusting in Jesus just because he said any kind of prayer.*

“Praying to receive Christ” is not a biblical doctrine. Yes, many people have prayed, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Well then, leave it at that. That’s might be the sinner’s prayer.

A child or adult is **saved by believing** something very specific. It’s our job to know what he is believing.

* Even children are only saved by believing. A child stops believing good works will save him and starts believing that only Jesus can save him. He used to trust that by being good he could earn eternal life. Now he trusts in Jesus as the one who paid for his sin. He can’t earn his eternal life. Just as adults are only saved by believing, so the child is never allowed to think he is going to heaven by repeating your special prayer while his eyes were closed.

Before he closes his eyes he should know

[and you should be pretty sure you know]