

REVELATION 3:20

WHY THIS IS NOT AN INVITATION TO SALVATION



“Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock”:

Why This Is Not an Invitation to Salvation

Few verses have been more frequently quoted in evangelistic appeals and more widely misunderstood than Revelation 3:20. But Scripture is best understood not by sentiment, tradition, or popular usage, but *by the context* in which the Spirit placed it. And when we allow the text to speak with its own voice, something striking appears:

Revelation 3:20 has *nothing* to do with the unbeliever’s decision to “let Jesus into his heart.” It is addressed to a church- a congregation of professing believers. And far from supporting synergistic salvation, the verse reinforces that even fellowship with Christ is initiated and sustained by grace alone.

1. Context, Context, Context

John is not writing to the unconverted. He is writing to Laodicea, a self-assured, spiritually indifferent church.

When Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” *He is not outside the heart of an unbeliever. He is outside the fellowship of His own professing assembly.* This is not an evangelistic appeal. It is a rebuke, warning, and summons to restored communion – not to salvation.

This removes it entirely from the category of synergistic salvation. No one in Laodicea is invited to *become* a Christian; they are called to repent *as* Christians.

2. “If Anyone Hears My Voice...” - The Key Clause

Synergists fixate on: “If anyone opens the door...”

But Jesus says: “If anyone *hears My voice* and opens...”

Therefore, “hearing” not opening, is *the decisive action*. Throughout Scripture, hearing is the supernatural work of God, not the natural ability of man. Hearing is awakening. It is grace giving understanding. Consider:

“My sheep *hear My voice*.” (John 10:27)

“He who is of God *hears* the words of God.” (John 8:47)

“Everyone who has *heard and learned* from the Father comes to Me.” (John 6:45)

Jesus contrasted those who hear “and do not understand” with those who “hear and understand” (Matt. 13:19, 23) – the latter are the only ones He said “bring forth fruit.”

Speaking to the Pharisees who audibly heard Him, Jesus said, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word” (John 8:43). Clearly, Jesus was not suggesting they were physically deaf, but devoid of true perception. Thus, “to hear His word” means to hear *with* understanding.

Hearing – with understanding, produces “opening”. Grace produces obedience – supplying even the will to do so (Phil. 2:13). **Philippians 2:13 is simply the doctrinal explanation of Revelation 3:20:**

“For it is God who works in you, *both to will* and to work for His good pleasure.”

3. Christ at the Door: Not Helpless, Not Waiting, but *Calling His Own Back*

The popular evangelistic image turns Jesus into a helpless visitor waiting for permission.

But the Christ of Revelation 3 is Lord, Judge, and Redeemer. He summons His own with the same sovereign authority with which He called Lazarus from the tomb. His knocking is not pleading, it is mercy wrapped in rebuke.

The invitation is not to conversion but to *renewed communion*: “I will come in... and eat with him.”

4. “IF – THEN” Does Not Imply Inherent Ability

“But He said *if* anyone hears, that means hearing is up to us.” This – or something similar, would be a typical synergistic response. I reply, A conditional statement can be valid without presupposing the inherent ability to meet the condition. So, it is with the Lord’s statement here and many places where God frames His admonition or command in an “*If-then*” way. Consider the following examples, some are humorous by design. They are each objectively true without implying unilateral equal ability to meet the required condition.

- If you can hold your breath for 1 hour, you will shatter all known records.
- If you can afford to purchase Amazon, you will be as wealthy as Jeff Bezos.
- If you can speak and write fluent Mandarin, you will qualify for the position in Hong Kong.
- If you can run 100 meters faster than Usain Bolt, you will be the fastest sprinter in history.

- If you can lift and hold a car high enough with one hand, you will never require a jack to change a tire.
- If you can fly, you will never need to purchase an airplane ticket.
- If you can perfectly keep the moral law of God, you can earn salvation by your own righteousness and effort.

Luther famously made this argument in his classic “The Bondage of the Will.” He rebuked and refuted Erasmus’ claim that God’s commands must presuppose our ability to comply, otherwise they are unfair. Luther argued that God’s commands only reveal His *standard* – which He never lowers to accommodate human weakness – it does not presuppose the sinner’s ability. The Law cannot be perfectly kept by any sinner. Paul said it like this, - note the “IF -THEN” framing of his statement.

“Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For *if* a law had been given which was able to impart life, *then* righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (Gal. 3:21)

5. Far From Teaching Synergism—The Verse Teaches the Opposite

Read rightly:

- The verse addresses believers, not unbelievers.
- Jesus initiates and enables the hearing: those enabled responds.
- Hearing precedes opening.
- Grace produces hearing.
- Thus grace alone produces the opening- SOLA Gratia!

Revelation 3:20 is not weak sentiment. It is sovereign mercy calling a wandering church home. And it quietly destroys the very notion it is misused to support.

Conclusion: Grace Remains the First Cause—Even in Repentance

The Laodiceans shut Christ out. He did not abandon them, but neither would He leave them self-deceived.

He speaks. He knocks. *He awakens “hearing”.*

Those who hear, open - *because grace moves before they do.*

Grace is not God helping the will. Grace is God *energizing* the will.

Grace is not the co-pilot. Grace is the *cause*.

Sola Gratia, Soli Deo Gloria

© 2025 thesolasmatter.com