

Receiving Christ

by Ron Bailey

The sermon challenges the common understanding of 'receiving Christ' and emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in Christ's work on the cross.

Scripture: John 1:12, John 3:8, John 3:16, Romans 8:16, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "Salvation Experience", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Ron Bailey delves into the concept of 'receiving Christ' as a product of 20th-century evangelistic campaigns, contrasting it with pre-20th-century patterns of response to God. He emphasizes the importance of genuine responses to God and the potential pitfalls of reducing salvation to a formulaic prayer. Bailey explores the biblical theme of 'witness' throughout John's writings, highlighting the role of various witnesses to Christ, including John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit. He underscores the necessity of the Holy Spirit's witness in authenticating one's faith and the true understanding of being 'born from above' as a work of God, not a human responsibility.

Transcript

The phrase has become one of the most familiar in contemporary evangelical Christianity, but what does it mean? In most evangelical groups it has come to mean a personal response to the gospel. In evangelistic meetings or personal evangelism the enquirer is encouraged to make a response to a small subset of Bible doctrines often referred to as the gospel. These are sometimes reduced to 4 steps, the concept being that agreement with these truths and the praying of a simple prayer of confession and commitment effects a transaction in which the enquirer 'receives Christ'. I came this way, as have many thousands of others. It was a starting place and not to be dishonoured. Every genuine response to God is of vital importance and not to be mocked.

It may come as a surprise to some reading this that this concept of 'the gospel' and of 'receiving Christ' was the product of the evangelistic campaigns of the 20th Century. This pattern of evangelism has no roots in the history of the Church as we read in the Acts, nor is it in any other part of the New Testament. "But it can be a real help" says the objector. Yes, it may. The purpose of these thoughts is not to undermine or attack any. My anxieties lie in the fact that counsellors or personal workers may 'go through the motions' and then declare that the seeker has 'received Christ'. This then becomes like a Catholic sacrament which is effectual as long as it is in accordance with a pattern.

As a point of reference let's think about pre-20th Century patterns. Some churches whose traditions go back to the turn of that century may still have what is called an 'after-meeting'. The idea was that people who had heard the truth and knew they must respond were able to withdraw from the main church service into a more private room where they could pray. Their praying was not the repetition of a 'sinner's prayer' but confession of conscious sin and prayer for personal forgiveness. In some traditions 'helpers' would pray by the side of the 'seekers' until the seeker was assured that God had heard their cry and forgiven their sin. In the language of Paul in Galatians, they prayed 'until faith came'. It is interesting to read the histories of these times. Where a contemporary account would have "12 received Christ" those older records would say "12 found peace in believing" or "12 sought forgiveness in prayer" or "12 were comforted".

Sometimes the struggles of the 'seeker' could be alleviated by an occasional word of direction from a 'helper' pointing them to Christ Himself or to a word of promise. Later this spontaneous 'help' became more formalised in 'counselling techniques' which led the seeker through a prescribed list of Bible verses which brought them to the place of understanding and enabled them to pray the 'sinner's prayer'. It was much more efficient than spending hours in prayer, apparently.

The Bible verses used in this formalisation often included a few verses from the gospel according to John. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:11-13 KJV) Seekers were then encouraged not to follow the pattern of the Jews of that time, but to follow the pattern of those who 'received Him'. The counselling format became the means of 'accepting Him' and the consequential blessings which followed. The reasoning was 'they received Christ' and become 'sons of God'; so you may 'receive Christ' and 'become a son of God'. The pattern spread and became the norm for evangelical Christianity; to follow the counselling pattern was to 'receive Christ'.

It became such an integral part of contemporary Christianity that to just ask questions about this methodology was to risk being labelled 'non-evangelical'. Is that true? Not at all, but as John's gospel is so often used in this context I will try to unpack some of these key verses so that rather than importing our practice into scripture we examine the scripture itself to see how we should behave and what we might expect.

John's first chapter, as we have it now, is a wonderful introduction to his record and several themes begin here which can be traced through the remainder of the book. He introduces us to the person of the Word who was already present with God at the beginning of all things. He goes on to say that this Word became flesh i.e. human. As well as being an introduction it also contains a little summary of the impact of the Word, Jesus of Nazareth, upon the world that He entered, and of the response of that world to His presence. This response is detailed in a few sentences. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. (Joh 1:9-11 KJV) John is actually describing three concentric circles; we will follow his account.

He came, says John, into the world as the True Light. In the earlier verses he had carefully made the point that John Baptist was not the True Light, but a witness to it. The ideas in this section have to do with God's witnesses. John was a witness, but the Word, Christ, was The Witness. He was the 'Real Light'. How did the world that He entered respond to that Light? The answer came a little earlier; That light shines in the

darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it. (Joh 1:5 HCSB) There is a definite sense of conflict in this verse. The Light, which continues to shine, was not overcome by darkness. It hints at a concerted effort of the darkness to extinguish The Witness of the Light as it entered our world. (You can see how deep this idea goes in the Appendix 1: The Witness)

In the later verses this conflict is spelled out more precisely. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. The Greek word behind 'knew' is 'ginosko'; it is used in many different ways. It is often used in the sense of 'recognition'; For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. (Luk 6:44 KJV) and again... he was known of them in breaking of bread. (Luk 24:35 KJV) It means much more than acquiring information. The world did not 'recognise' Him. Was this ignorance or defiance? We sometimes use this kind of language when we say that 'one state does not recognise another'. This is not ignorance but a settled determination to refuse specific status to another country. There may be something of that feel here too. He who created the world was in the world but His creation refused to recognise his person and authority. The world refuses to recognise His status as the Light; the True Witness. That is the widest of our concentric circles, now we can focus more precisely.

The world would ultimately not only refuse to recognise the Light but would actually attempt to extinguish it. There was one place however that God had been specially preparing; His own land. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (Joh 1:11 NASB) The NASB here has tried to show the distinction in the original, literally 'He came to His own things, and His own people did not receive Him'. He came to His own things... Later He told a story with a terrible punch line; But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. (Mat 21:38 KJV) This was the heir coming into His inheritance, the fulfilment of all the prophecies and rituals. This was His land, leased to His servants. This was true of the whole world but especially true of this place and time. Another version translates it; He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. (Joh 1:11 RSVA) Surely if all the world rejected Him there would be one place He could call home, where He would be welcomed? This was the next of our concentric circles and now we come to the innermost core.

and his own people received him not. (Joh 1:11 RSVA) They had been chosen for this; delivered from bondage in Egypt, joined in Covenant with God, entrusted with the oracles of God, served by judges and prophets and kings. All was lost in successive deportations which took the whole nation into exile. In the mercy of God a tiny remnant was restored to their land and given a new start; the prodigal nation. Super powers rose and fell. The Babylonian exile severed their dependence on the Temple and made them people of the Book. The Greek empire of Alexander and his successors gave them the tools for world evangelism and put the Book into the lingua franca of the day. The Roman Empire tamed the piracy of the Mediterranean, built thousands of miles of roads along which the gospel could speed, and guaranteed open access to their whole empire. And when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law... (Gal 4) ...and his own people received him not.

As the word 'receive' is important to this topic we will pause to make it as clear as we can. In this first instance in John 1:11 the original word is 'paralambano'. It means 'to take to oneself, to associate with,' Literally, the word means to 'take to one's side'. The negating of this then becomes ostracism. John only uses it twice, the second time will give us some idea of what the kind of 'reception' the word has in mind; And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am,

there ye may be also. (Joh 14:3 KJV) You will see immediately that John does not have a passive reception in mind. Can you imagine the kind of welcome He has in store for us? That was the kind of 'reception' that might have been expected by His own people but His own people did not receive Him. The first time this particular word is used in the New Testament is also significant; But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. (Mat 1:20 KJV) Joseph was to take her to his side and recognise her as his very own.

This is not passive acceptance, but a deep personal commitment that places the person by the side of the one who has welcomed him. This, however, His people refused Him. The three concentric circles had no room for Him, but John then introduces another group that is defined not by space or geography or culture but by their right response to the Light.

This group is defined by the phrase 'as many as received Him'. In his account of the gospel John will show how this group crosses every other barrier. It will include Jews and Samaritans, rich and poor, male and female. Its own defining criterion is that they 'received Him'. In what sense did the 'receive Him?' If we follow the line of John's thinking it will become plain. The preceding verses have had the Light in mind. John has carefully distinguished the Light from John who came to bear witness to the Light. Later Christ was to call John a 'lamp'; not the endless source but a local reservoir of illumination. It is this True Light that the world refused to recognise, and the Light that His own people refused to own.

The gospel according to John is a life history of that Light. You may trace the story at your leisure; Joh 1:4-9; 3:19-21; Joh 5:35; Joh 8:12; Joh 9:5; Joh 11:9; Joh 11:10; Joh 12:35; Joh 12:36; Joh 12:46. It is a central point of John's writings and appears again in John's first letter; 1Jo 1:5; 1Jo 1:7-9; 1Jo 2:10.

The second section (John 3:19-21) of John's gospel is very significant. It follows on from the statement that the purpose of God's sending of His Son into the world was not in order to 'judge' but to 'save'. John goes on to say that the one 'believing' on Him is not judged: but the one 'not believing' on Him has already been judged as a result of his refusal to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. God's judgement then is based on the attitude of men and women to His Son. This must imply a meeting with Christ. It is not the idea or doctrine of Christ we are reading of here, but the person of Christ.

This is part of the most famous part of the Bible and the 'golden text'; For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (Joh 3:16 KJV) This is probably the best loved text in the Bible but even the best texts can become dangerous if detached from their context. For example, this single verse speaks of 'believing' but the kind of believing it has in mind can only be discovered by reading the preceding verses. 'Believing' here does not mean agreeing with facts as is usually the case in contemporary counselling patterns. The kind of 'believing' that John has in mind is the kind experienced by people in a unique situation; And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (Joh 3:14-15 KJV) In other words, the kind of believing that John has in mind is the kind found in Numbers 21.

The nation of Israel had sinned and the consequence of their sin was a plague of fiery venomous snakes. The context is so important that I will give the whole section here; And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, because we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee; pray unto Jehovah,

that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived. (Num 21:6-9 ASV)

These people are not just sick or inconvenienced, they are dying and they know it. They also know why they are dying "we have sinned". Conviction of sin is a work of God's Spirit. They had not been persuaded of the facts of the case by an evangelist they knew it. In fact, they took the initiative, they came to Moses. This is much more like New Testament evangelism where the appeal comes from the congregation rather than the preacher. They are desperate in their plea; this sounds much more like those old 'after meetings' too.

They are also narrowed down to a single solution; "pray unto Jehovah, that he take away the serpents from us." They know that there are not various options but only one possible solution; God must intervene. This is also much more like those old 'after meetings'. They are seeking a salvation that only God can provide. If God does not move on their behalf they are dead men. Currently their focus is upon the snakes; that must change.

Moses does as they ask and God commands him to make a fiery snake of brass and to erect it on a standard/pole. There is only to be one brass snake and it must be 'lifted up' on a standard so that it was in sight of everyone who had been bitten. What a vivid picture this presents. I have a beautiful colour print by Harold Copping in an old Bible. I can't look at without weeping but let me see if I can describe it to you.

The tents of Israel spread out into the hazy distance. The scene is chaotic, people rushing out of their tents, some running, some standing. As in any panic it is difficult to make out quite what is happening. Or it would be if it were not for a tent in the foreground which is much closer and has its own tragedy unfolding. In the doorway of the tent there is a young man; face down in the sand, a snake is wriggling over his arm and on its way to the next victim. There's an old man in the doorway, with white hair and beard, his attention is not on any of the chaos around him but is fixed on the horizon where a man holds a wooden stake with single crosspiece; it has a brass snake coiled around it.

There are others in the doorway of the tent; a man and his wife are frantically trying to rouse a young man who looks to be the brother of the snake's other victim. The mother is cradling her teenage son in her arms, his eyes are closed; her face is pale with grief. The father is fear crazed; his eyes show white as he is tries desperately to rouse his young son from his coma. His face strains to see any signs of life in his son, and his left hand points backwards to the horizon where the brass snake coils around the stake. There are no words, but I know what he is saying; "Look and live... look and live".

Young's Literal Translation does well to catch the sense of the verbs; And Moses maketh a serpent of brass, and setteth it on the ensign, and it hath been, if the serpent hath bitten any man, and he hath looked expectingly unto the serpent of brass--he hath lived. (Num 21:9 YLT) A paraphrase might say; any man looking away from everything else and putting his whole trust in the snake on the pole, lived. This not just a wonderful story, this is a definition of 'believing' as used by John in John 3:16. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that any man, looking away from everything else and putting his whole trust in a Man upon a cross, should not perish but have everlasting life. This is John's desperate cry to all who have been bitten, and that is the whole race, "Look and live... look and live".

It is delivered to men and women who know that we have sinned and that there is no other remedy unless God takes away the snakes. I said earlier that men's focus must not remain upon their own condition or even its cause; not the bite and not the poison eating its way through their lives, but upon the one 'lifted up'. It is the truth often repeated by Amy Carmichael; upon a life I have not lived, upon a death I did not die; upon another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity. That's what the Bible means by 'believing'.

The man who hears and will not look is judged already. This is the judgement, says John, that Light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil. The judgement then is because of choices that have been made; not by Adam, but by those who do not come to the Light. Christ's life and words constantly bore witness to the nature of His Father and the nature of men. To those who will embrace the pain of the Light and will accept God's judgement on their deeds come to the Light and learn how to live there; This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1Jo 1:5-7 KJV) The effectiveness of Christ's cleansing sacrifice is linked inseparably to 'walking in the light and He is in the light'.

Christ is Light, The Witness, and men's responses to His Witness determine their destiny. The contrast that John makes in the section under examination is important to note. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (Joh 3:20-21 KJV) The contrast is not as we might have expected between 'doing evil' and 'doing good', but between 'doing evil' and 'doing truth'. John's focus is on honesty not personal merit. The Light entered and its beams disturbed the dust of darkness. Men either scuttled back into the shadow or came to the Light.

It is Christ as the Light, God's Witness, that those earlier references in John were addressing. Those who received His testimony, received Him as the Light and the experience was open to 'as many as'. The ending of the third chapter gathers the themes together; He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. (Joh 3:31-33 KJV) To set to his seal, is to give personal recognition, approval and full hearted consent to The Witness. It is the Amen of the whole of a man's life to God's revelation of Himself in Christ. We are not speaking of mental assent to doctrinal statement. Let me illustrate, for almost 60 years ago now I have believed that the Rolls Royce is the finest car in the world; I received this truth from my father, and I have never waivered in my faith. This belief, however, has never had the slightest impact upon my life. I have lived a life untouched by this truth I have believed. Biblical truth is different, and the Light which shines still in the person of Christ is not a matter of mental agreement but personal commitment; the of putting all the eggs into one basket. There are no Plan B's or contingencies; either He who was lifted high is my only Saviour, or I am lost. Either He is the Faithful and True Witness or I am lost. To those who received His Witness a door opened...

The words translated 'received' in John 1:11, and John 1:12 are different even though they have links. Let's dig a little deeper. Greek has two main words for 'receive'.

1. dechomai: means to receive, but in a passive sense. The imagery might be of the outstretched open hand. The gift must be placed into the open hand which 'receives' it. Perhaps a suitable English word would be 'accept'.

2. lambanO: means to receive, but in an active sense. Strong's Dictionary compares the words by saying it means to take (in very many applications, literally and figuratively [probably objective or active, to get hold of; whereas dechomai is rather subjective or passive, to have offered to one; while lambanO is more violent, to seize or remove.

3. paralambanO: is made up of para, by or to the side, and lambanO. Thayer gives its meaning as

1) to take to, to take with one's self, to join to one's self

1a) an associate, a companion

1b) metaphorically, to accept or acknowledge one to be such as he professes to be. not to reject, not to withhold obedience

The essence is that the basic word lambanO means to take hold of, to grip. Let's try that in our key verse; As many as took hold of Him to them He gave authority to become... How different the sense is to the passive 'accepting Christ as Saviour'. One is passive condescension, the other is proactive ownership. There is another key feature of this verse which has been obscured by contemporary personal counselling. This verse may not say what you think it says.

The presumption in much contemporary evangelistic activity is that a response, followed by counselling and the 'sinner's prayer' guarantees new birth, and they say, this verse proves it. Even when we have redefined 'receive' to make it clear that this means much more than 'decision for Christ' there is more to examine. Perhaps the presumptions come partly from the King James Version pattern of translating two quite different Greek words by one English word; the one English word is 'power', and people love the sound of it. The word here translated 'power' is not dunamis meaning inherent power or ability, empowering, but the word exousia meaning to be lawful, or authorised. A law-officer has exousia, and it he can hold up the traffic. A weigh-lifter has dunamis, and he can lift up the law-officer. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, (Joh 1:12 NASB) The consequence of men and women receiving His testimony as the Light was that it qualified them for the next stage of their pilgrimage. Receiving His testimony was a necessary event which gave them 'the right' to become children of God. However, it takes more than exousia/permission to make a child of God; it would require the dunamis/inward power to that. At this stage John is really only referring to the 'right to become' rather than the dynamic which reconstitutes men and women as children of God.

We might paraphrase these verses... John was not the Light, but was sent in order to bear witness about the Light. He was the Real Light, coming into the world and enlightening every man. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, but the world would not recognise Him. He came to His own inheritance, but His own people rejected Him. But to as many as reached out and took hold of Him, to them he gave the right to become God's children; God's children who were not born from a bloodline, nor from natural origins, nor from man's determined purpose, but whose origin was God.

The question is 'do men and women become children of God as a result of receiving the testimony of Christ?' Becoming a 'child of God' or as the next verses expresses it 'being born... of God' is not accomplished simply by agreeing with God's Witness. Such agreement is absolutely necessary but not sufficient, of itself, to effect regeneration. Regeneration is God's own work and He alone can testify to its accomplishment. This is part of the weakness of the modern evangelistic format that it puts the work of 'testifying/bearing witness' into the hands of a helper; God will not delegate this work.

The process of regeneration, if we dare call it that, appears later in John's gospel with a warning disclaimer; The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (Joh 3:8 NASB) That is to say man or woman, or counselling helper, who thinks they can pin this moment down is fooling himself. The wind, of course, can really only be described by its effects. It is a heavenly action with earthly consequences; Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!" (Joh 3:3 CEV) This is expanding the simple statement 'born... of God' used in John 1:13.

The miracle of regeneration was to be accomplished by He who comes 'from above'. Nicodemus, the person on the other end of this conversation in John 3, was a recognised 'teacher of Israel'. I suggest you regard him as the best man in the Bible! He was not accused of hypocrisy, nor any sin. His coming to Jesus was an act of self-humbling; the older rabbi attending the younger. He has recognised the uniqueness of Christ's work and, unlike some of his fellow Pharisees, identifies it as God-given. I suspect we only have the bare bones of the conversation here, although enough to suit God's purpose in preserving the record. This is a man who from his earliest days has endeavoured to live as he should; I doubt that men come much better than Nicodemus. It was this 'best of men' to whom Jesus stated this spiritual axiom; you must be born from above.

This 'you must be born from above' must not be seen as a responsibility laid upon Nicodemus, as though the Lord had said 'you must get yourself born from above'. It was a statement of spiritual fact which applied to Nicodemus as much as to any man, even though he was the best. If this has been a burden to you, let me express it as plainly as I can. "you must be born from above" is not a command, it is a statement of fact. First the pronoun 'you' is plural in the original, so this was not addressed uniquely to Nicodemus the individual, secondly the pronoun is 'emphatic'. This gives the sense of 'it is necessary for all of you that you be born from above'. Not only Nicodemus, but 'all of you' is the range of the statement. The KJV's 'must' which makes it sound like a command is the Greek word 'dei' which simply means it is absolutely necessary. Sometimes the street preacher quotes this verse as though it were the listener's responsibility, but you can no more make a man responsible for his heavenly birth than you can for his earthly birth.

We must not lay the burden of being 'born from above' upon the shoulders of the seeker or the person listening to the preaching; it is not man's responsibility but God's. What does God require of me? that I achieve 'birth from above? Not at all. God requires that I believe His Witness, that I receive Christ in His office of Witness. This will open the door to God's work; to as many as received Him (the Witness) to them He gave the right to become children of God.

Well, you might say, how can a person be sure that they have been born from above? This truth is captured in the phrase 'the witness of the Spirit'. Notice we are back into the realms of a witness. Modern contemporary evangelistic counselling relies on a linking of Bible texts to convince the seeker of their regeneration. This is what A W Tozer inveighed against when he accused evangelicalism of 'substituting

logical deductions drawn from proof texts' for the true Biblical doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit. Let's see how our 'expert witness' explains this.

This is a long passage which I will put in the words of the American Standard Version, as it avoids some technical difficulties with this passage, but mainly because it consistently uses the word 'witness' and shows the flow of ideas much more clearly as a result. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him(self): he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life. These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. (1Jo 5:7-13 ASV) The repetition of the noun and verb 'witness' is very powerful. John opened his gospel by declaring that the Word was the True Light; God's revelation of Himself to His world. Now he says the Spirit is Truth. The mutual witness to the Persons within the godhead by the Persons of the godhead is and undergirding of the truth of Trinity.

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit alone who can bear witness to the believer. Others may give their opinions, and we may even have our own opinion, but the last word must belong to God Himself; If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. These verses are closely linked. God has borne witness to His Son. Those uniquely commissioned as eye-witnesses have borne witness to the Son; John is one of them. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the Son. The Holy Spirit bears witness to true faith in the heart of the believer. There are no human uncertainties here. The 'one believing into the Son of God' has the witness within him. This is how I may know... I will know. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: (Rom 8:16 ASV)

There is an interesting post-script to this in one of Paul's letters. To the Colossians, whom he had never met, he wrote; As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (Col 2:6 KJV) he uses the word *paralambanō* that we met in John 1:11 of His own people who refused to 'welcome' Him. How could Paul make this statement of people that he had never met? He had received information from a reliable source that certain things were 'true'; ...ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: (Col 1:5-6 KJV) They had believed the witness of those who had preached the gospel to them, and had come to know the truth of God... for themselves... in truth. To these who have started well Paul says 'carry on'. The pattern does not change. We begin by acknowledging God's Word to us, we progress by continually receiving that same Word, and 'walking in Him'.

Ron Bailey, December 2004

Appendix 1. The Witness

Tracing the words 'witness' and 'to witness' through John's writings is a surprising exercise. It is probably the greatest focus of his writing; in the gospel he uses the word or its associates 47 times; in the epistles 18 times, and in the Revelation 18 times. There is a case to be made for seeing John's focus on 'witness' as the great theme of all his writings. The power of the repetition is often obscured by the fact that

translations use many words where he used one; witness, testimony, record, report. Christ is introduced in this gospel as the Word and the Light.

Before Pilate we see His consciousness of His mission in his answers; Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (Joh 18:37 KJV) Christ came into the world... to bear witness to the truth. He has always been God's Witness to Himself; the 'spoken one', the divine communication, the Word. To the church which has ceased in its faithful witness the Risen Christ describes Himself; And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; (Rev 3:14 KJV)

He fulfilled in His own life that failed mission of Israel. Ye are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen. (Isa 43:10a ASV) As a people Israel were to have been the authentic 'Jehovah's Witnesses' but they failed in their mission. God's plan would be restored in Christ; Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples. (Isa 55:4 ASV) The Word who was Light came into our world to bear witness to Jehovah; the Triune God.

As John develops his theme it is seen that he is focussing not only upon The Witness, but upon witnesses to The Witness. John's whole gospel is his own witness to The Witness; This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written. (Joh 21:24-25 ASV) The community who completed the gospel with its last sentences certainly saw the links; they added their own witness to the apostolic witness to The Witness. They are setting their own seal to the authenticity of John's witness to The Witness.

This is where John Baptist comes into his story. John Baptist is the official witness to The Witness, and references to John Baptist's witness to The Witness fill the first chapter; Joh 1:7,8,15,19,32,34; John Baptist came in order to bear witness to The Witness. We ought not to forget that John the Gospel Witness was a disciple of John Baptist before followed Christ. John Baptist's authentic witness to the Witness was the means whereby John the Gospel writer became a witness.

John's promise of the Spirit includes the promise; But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me: and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. (Joh 15:26-27 ASV) We cannot pursue the theme more at his point, but it will make a fruitful study for any who will pursue it. The heart of it is found in one of John's mini-summaries; What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness. He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true. (Joh 3:32-33 ASV) John is vitally concerned with the reaction of men and women to The Witness. Here he follows the pattern of the earlier verse in John 1:12. 'he that received His witness' is the equivalent of the phrase 'as many as received Him'.

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YLT: Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by J.N. Young, 1862, 1898 (Author of the Young's Analytical Concordance)

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