

Received in Christ

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[0 : 00] There are two verses of Scripture I'm going to mention at the outset here.

! And I've thought about these over the years.! With some difficulty to grasp precisely what is meant. ! One is found in the great world. The great Gospel of John. And it says this, verse 12, chapter 1, But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in His name.

And the other, also written by John, is a quote from the Lord Himself in Revelation 3.20, And behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.

Now, a passage such as this one fits right in with the evangelism of the last 50 or 60 years.

[1 : 17] In the Bible, modern evangelism, modern evangelism, and modern day evangelists place primary responsibility for salvation on the backs of every individual.

They argue it is that person's responsibility to make the correct decision about Jesus, to pray the correct prayer, to say the right words.

And once a person does that on their own volition, then they are able to receive Christ into their heart.

This method has been with us a long time. And it has become ingrained or entrenched into the methodology of the church as it pertains to salvation.

Ironically, going home yesterday from church, I had on Christian radio, and a guy said, say these words, don't leave any of them out. And then he declared, whoever said those words, you're in.

[2 : 25] And people that hold to this method do so fiercely, they would argue that you can't do evangelism without this step in the process.

But that does raise some questions. The central question is, is this belief and is this method scriptural? And by that, I mean, is it our responsibility to receive him?

And are we the ones required to open the door so Jesus can enter in? We won't even get to that passage tonight, the second passage. But we know this for sure.

These two passages are cited frequently when it comes to modern day evangelism. But tonight we're going to address the question, is this evangelism?

Is this witnessing? By incorporating this method, can we then assure the candidate that receives or opens the door that you now have eternal life?

[3 : 45] And I've got to tell you, I was really active in all this. And I used to give people assurance until I found out I didn't have any grounds to do that. Because I don't know a person's heart.

Put this another way, when a man or woman, boy or girl, makes a one-time decision for Christ, opens up their heart, by an act of the free will, prays a prayer, have they entered into the ranks of those who are now sheep, and destined eternal life with God in heaven.

Now those are profound questions. And we have to come face to face with just how serious such questions can be.

Because let's face it, heaven or hell hangs in the balance. The church and the world, and by that I mean especially the Western world, are rife with professions that were meaningless because they were never lived out in the slightest.

I think I told you a few weeks ago, I think it was Dale Mooney, and a guy came up to him on the streets of Chicago one time, and he was obviously horribly intoxicated, and says, don't you recognize me, Reverend Mooney?

[5 : 09] I'm one of your converts. And he said, you look like one of my converts. People that I've witnessed to, and they've gone through all this, and you know, I don't know where they're at.

We had a guy in this church, good guy, but he'd come in on Sunday morning, and he'd come over to me for whatever reason, and he'd say, I led 37 people to the Lord this week.

I said, wow. Next week I led 44 people to the Lord this week. Well, that's great. And then the next week he said, I set the record. I led 52 people to the Lord.

Where are they at? He said, well, I don't know. And I said, tell me how you're leading them to the Lord. And he said, well, I walk up to them, and I say, you want to go to heaven or hell?

Well, how are you going to answer that? I want to go to heaven. Okay. Repeat after me. And then he'd say, you're going to heaven. And he didn't know their names.

[6 : 15] I mean, but he'd go down the sidewalk. Now, you've got to applaud his zeal, but I would suggest without much knowledge. What we have found over the decades is there's no difference between the carnality of a person before confession and after.

Now, not in every case. I'm obviously not saying that. And people have been saved by doing this. And I'm not saying they're not. God used it. But the ultimate problem with this is it has produced, I would suggest, millions of people who believe they have met all the demands of salvation, and then they have turned back to the good life not to be bothered with things like church, prayer, giving, God forbid, Bible reading, and so on.

In other words, they continue in worldliness and have not the slightest desire for anything to do with God.

And while that sounds harsh, I would have to say that's still very true because I have folks in my family and Diane has folks in her family that are there.

They're living that out. So I know it. I know it happens. You know, we all hang by a very thin thread.

[7 : 58] John MacArthur, when he was ordained, five men signed his ordination certificate. One of them later recanted his belief in Christ.

And he and his buddies would get together and get intoxicated and take Bibles and tear out pages and stomp on them. And do other kinds of things that I won't mention.

And I think he's gone to his reward now. That's one of the men that signed Dr. MacArthur's ordination certificate. A lot of people believe they have no accountability to God in the slightest.

They believe they've got a get out of jail card. I got my card. I'll present this at the judgment. Don't you remember when?

A lot of people say, you know, I've got my fire insurance policy. The policy against the fires of hell. But do they?

[9 : 04] Do they? Because one time in their life, for 30 seconds or five minutes, they said some words. One pastor, and he's now passed on down in Houston, and I can almost quote it directly because when I saw it, he said, if you pray that prayer, three minutes later you can say, I recant that.

I'm an atheist. I don't believe what I did. You're still going to go to heaven. Because you said those words. Guys, I don't think the Bible teaches that. And that's what we have to be concerned with. Not what I say. What does the Word of God say? The truth is that many millions of people have never been converted to Christ.

They've gone through some motions at one point. Don't want anything to do with the Lord now or the church. And again, I know this is true because I can name some and I won't do that.

So why is this? And perhaps the answer may be a little more involved than we might imagine. But one thing is certain.

[10 : 21] Preaching a biblical gospel message is meaningless unless we also give a biblical gospel invitation.

They have to be joined. You can't just preach the gospel and say, now do this. It too has to be biblical.

That quote comes from Paul Washer. I can't take credit for that. So what does it mean to receive Christ as John tells us in John 1.12?

That's what we're going to talk about tonight. And to understand that, first of all, we need to consider some words that precede that declaration.

Christ tells us, just before that verse, the Word tells us that Christ came to His own people.

[11 : 23] And His own people did not receive Him. So that's the lead up to verse 12.

The word there means to welcome Him. Receive is a Greek word that means welcome Him. Jesus came to His own people, in the context, that's the Jews, and they rolled up the welcome mat.

They wanted nothing to do with Him. You might recall that after three intense years of preaching the good news, healing, raising people from the dead, feeding them, basically with nothing, practically, that Jesus, at the end of His public ministry, of His ministry before His ascension, had about 500 true followers.

He had 500 true followers. At one time, even a crowd gathered when He entered Jerusalem and declared Him to be the Messiah, the Messiah of God upon His entrance into that city.

And many of those same people, just a few days later, were screaming, crucify Him, we have no king but Caesar.

[12:51] That was three days later, three or four days later. So John tells us the nation was actively rejecting Jesus, but at the same time there were some in that nation who received Him.

To those that received Him, Jesus gave them the right to become the children of God. And we can see from this that the word receive is vitally important to understand.

What does it mean? Has a man or a woman received Him if they are in fundamental agreement with the claims of the gospel?

Well, yeah, I believe Jesus came to earth and I believe He was a man of love and I believe He died a horrible death on the cross. When John 1.12 is applied correctly, people are brought into the kingdom of God.

They're saved. Conversely, many have used it incorrectly and the best they have been able to achieve is a false assurance as it pertains to their salvation.

[14:10] And since heaven or hell are being weighed in the balance, it is vitally important and in fact essential that we rightly understand the biblical application.

Only then can people be brought to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Can they truly receive Him? And you'll know they've received Him because once they do, Jesus gives them the power to become children of God.

Jesus came to His own and they did not receive Him. And again, that word believe is not that remarkable. It just means those who believe in His name, welcome Him.

And this goes certainly beyond intellectual assent. We do not merely believe in a certain volume of facts. And once we get to the magic level, we're now designated believers.

To believe in His name means to believe as used in John 1.12. And that is, we can inject the word trust.

[15:25] We trust in His name. We trust Him. Now what does that mean? Now we've got a whole other lesson to start. We are all familiar with that word, but there is more.

We trust in Him. We trust in Him. We trust in the very name and the person of Christ Jesus. We trust in Him.

We trust in Him to the extent, and this is the heart here. We're at the heart. We trust in Him. We trust in Him to the extent that we base our actions, the things that we do in this life, regardless of what they are, upon that great truth, upon our trust in Jesus.

Never is our faith or trust based upon the strength of our confession of what we now believe.

Neither is it based upon our feelings or the common expression of how we feel in our heart.

Actually, the Latter-day Saints do that. You'll know it's true because you'll have this welling up inside you. I told a Mormon, that might be indigestion. You know, carry some roll aids when you guys are out there on your bicycles.

[16:52] Our trust in Christ will be proven true or false based upon the degree to which Jesus will determine our actions and our responses through the full course of our life.

We are to live our lives based upon the claims of Jesus. We are to trust Him in all that we say and all that we do and all that we are and all that we shall become.

In other words, we are staking our very future on the claims of Jesus Christ. We are saying we believe that He is who He says He is.

And we believe He has done what He says He has done. And we believe He will do what He says He's going to do. We trust that.

And you know, let's be honest here. There's an element of risk here. There's an element of risk.

And Paul talked about that. If He is not who He says He is, then we're pitiful.

[18:06] We're in deep trouble. But if we believe Him in all of these things just mentioned and much more, then we're joined to Him.

We've received Him. To trust in Christ then is to stake our present life, which is very temporary in the grand scheme of things, and our future eternal life, which lasts forever upon Christ and Christ alone.

Remember the Reformers told us nothing need be added, nothing can be added. Sola Christos. It's Christ alone. Thus our lives are directed by His will.

And there's one source to know what His will is. One source and one source only. It is expressed in His Word.

And remember, 10, 20, 30. 10, 20, 30. And in complete candor, I've got the 10 in early this morning. Then the day fell apart.

[19 : 23] But the day is still going. We are to trust in His name. This means we believe in the totality of everything He has revealed about Himself.

We do not believe in certain parts of Jesus because it suits us, and rejects certain parts of Jesus because it hampers our lifestyle.

We don't do that. True believers are in a covenant relationship with Christ. We don't leave part of Him behind when we enter into that relationship.

Now for me personally, this all came to light a few dozen years ago in the Lordship controversy. A seminary professor at one of the better seminaries in our country wrote a book that said, people can believe in Jesus as Savior, reject Him as Lord, and still be saved.

They're going to heaven. This was more than John MacArthur could handle. John rose up. He published a book, which I bought, the Gospel according to Jesus.

[20 : 47] He was vilified for His actions. He still is. And that was what, 25, 30 years ago. He was accused of being unloving to those who chose not to make Jesus Lord.

And I love what Dr. MacArthur pointed out. Look, nobody has ever made Him Lord. He is Lord. I didn't make Him Lord.

He was Lord a long time before I came along. Since publishing that book, Dr. MacArthur has now written The Gospel according to the Apostles, The Gospel according to Paul, and his latest book, The Gospel according to God.

And by the way, that book, which I can barely put down, is the latest book. It is an exposition on Isaiah 53. And many people, many theologians refer to Isaiah, I like the British pronunciation Isaiah, as the fifth gospel.

Because it's Jesus from front to back. So, when we believe in His name, we believe in the totality of Christ.

[22 : 07] We believe He is the prophet, the prophet who was to come. We believe He is the High Priest. And we capitalize those, like the earthly high priest, where small h, small p.

This is capital H, capital P. He is the high priest. And He is the king. Meaning the sovereign ruler over everything.

He is the king. And we believe in Him as such. Now, we need to point out something very important. When we are first saved, none of us had the depth of understanding all of this in its totality.

We didn't get saved and say, wow, He is prophet, priest and king. I heard that ten years later. We had to dig in and get into the word and get into good Bible studies and get into a good church and good preaching.

But it was the role and the purpose of the Holy Spirit who entered into our lives to reveal to us truth. And said, I will never leave you, never forsake you, and I am going to open your eyes.

[23 : 25] Jesus said, I am going to send you another. He is going to lead you into all truth. That is the Spirit of God. And this has been a progressive revelation. I know more today than I knew yesterday.

Hopefully, I will know more tomorrow than I know today. When I get home and do my 20 and 30. I trust, I certainly hope, there are men here tonight that have learned things, not from me, but from the Spirit of God, as we have gone through these 11 lessons.

And we have a long way to go. I know I have learned much in preparing it. By the way, and some of you may not be aware of this, but this entire block of instruction, which now number 11, is intended to be part of a larger lesson on the sanctification process, which we'll kick off this fall.

This has been the introduction to that. So we're still in the introduction, but we're, this is part of the sanctification process. That's what I hope it is anyway. I hope it has been as we grow closer and closer to Christ, until the day we actually see Him.

Which I think could happen at any time. I don't read anything in the scripture. It has to happen next. The next tick of the prophetic clock. Will it happen tonight? It might.

[24 : 56] Will it happen in 5,000 years now? It might. God knows, not me. Paul Worsher offers the following illustration of what it means to receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

He says, In another scenario, the people recognize the king's power to save and are willing to receive him as Savior.

He's doing scenarios here. This is the group that they want to receive the king, but they refuse to turn over their sovereignty to him.

Yeah, we'll receive you, but we're sovereign over our lives. And again, this king turns away and the city where they live is destroyed.

In another scenario, the people recognize the king's power to save and joyfully throw open the gates to the city and receive him as Savior and sovereign. The king enters the city, takes the throne, and delivers the people.

[26 : 02] In a similar manner, we receive Christ into our lives. At the moment of conversion, and that's true salvation, we realize that we are in a desperate state from which we cannot save ourselves.

In turn, we hear the call of Christ, the demands of his kingdom, and the promise of salvation. In response, we open our lives to him and receive him as Savior and Lord.

We reject autonomy and acknowledge his sovereign rule over us. We denounce our own strength and merit and rely upon his power alone to save.

Consequently, the evidence that we have truly received him is that of our submission to his lordship. That's why that debate was so important.

And our reliance upon his saving work as it deepens and becomes a greater and greater reality through the full course of our lives. This ongoing work of sanctification is guaranteed in the life of every believer.

[27 : 18] In fact, through the course of my studies, I've come to the point, you know, we often ask people, have you made a profession of faith? Well, first of all, I would submit Christianity is not a profession, it's a possession.

But I think the other thing is, I'm at the point where I want to say to people, tell me where you're at in the sanctification process. Because let's face it, there's a lot of people in churches that couldn't define that word.

And I won't put anyone on the spot here. But there's a lot of people that don't know what that means. But it says, every true convert is justified and then starts the process of being sanctified. And by the way, we never arrive in this life. It keeps going as we become more like Jesus, that's sanctification, until we are called out through death or the rapture.

And then we enter into glorification because we see Jesus as He is. Let me get back to Paul Worsher. We denounce our own strength and merit.

[28 : 29] We rely upon His power alone to save us. Consequently, the evidence that we've truly received Him is that we submit to Him. His saving work deepens and becomes greater and greater.

And then he quotes Ephesians 2.10, For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And then he quotes Philippians 1.6, And I'm sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

But modern day evangelism does not often emphasize those truths. Instead, seekers are led to believe they can receive the benefits of Christ's salvation without submitting to the rule of His sovereignty or of His kingship.

Furthermore, they often feel assured of their salvation because, well, at one point in my life I prayed a prayer. And I think I was pretty sincere when I did it.

[29 : 46] And then you look at their lives and they're a wreck. There's no evidence of a continuing work. There's no evidence of sanctification in their lives.

This is the malady of our day, leading to the deception and destruction of many people. And again, I know some of them. I know some of them.

But we speak often of the sovereignty of God, and we should. He is sovereign. And He is to be sovereign over our lives.

But I think there's another term. It's kind of little used in our day. It's another attribute of God. And that's His supremacy.

We don't often talk about the supremacy of God or of Christ. I don't know if I'm even able to articulate this to our understanding.

[30 : 47] Jesus is not an add-on. We do not receive Jesus as an addition to our life.

When we're saved, men, Jesus becomes our life. He is our life. Some people treat Jesus as an accessory.

You know what an accessory is? Some examples. A tie. Shoes. A belt. Jesus is something they just add on to their closet, and they bring Him off the hanger on Sunday morning.

So how do I explain what I mean? Well, I can't. I'm not smart enough. So let me give you a quote from one of the great Puritan preachers.

He lived a couple hundred years ago. John Flavel or Flavel, depending on whether you're from France or England. He wrote many works. This one is The Fountain of Life.

[31 : 58] And this is his quote. O fair sun, and fair moon, and fair stars, and fair flowers, and fair roses, and fair lilies, and fair creatures.

But O ten thousand, thousand times fairer, Lord Jesus. Alas, I wronged him in making the comparison this way.

O black sun and moon, but O fair Lord Jesus. O black flowers, and black lilies, and roses, but O fair, ever fair Lord Jesus.

O all fair things, black, deformed, and without beauty, when ye are set beside the fairest, Lord Jesus. O black heaven, but O fair Christ.

O black angels, but O surpassingly fair Lord Jesus. He's our life. He's all in all.

[33 : 12] Christ is everything. With Jesus, we need nothing else. Paul said, we count all things as dung, manure, that we might gain Christ and be found in Him.

Some of you are saying, that's not in the Bible. Philippians 3, 8 and 9. It's all rubbish, if we want to soften that a little bit.

So as we close out the section this evening on receiving Christ, we need to point out that at best we see and understand this darkly.

We're growing through sanctification, through the Spirit of God, but we still see this darkly. We welcome Him into our lives at the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

But do we really grasp that in the fullness of this life? Will we fully grasp it in the next life? Well, of course, that remains to be seen.

[34 : 22] But that's where we'll pick it up next time. . . .