

Light Received or Rejected

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸ He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. ⁹

That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:6–13)

Just like ships on the ocean, like cars on a country road, light received brings life. Light refused brings death. In this passage is a reflector of the light, the real Light himself, and then the responses to the light. Here we can measure ourselves: what are we doing with the Light received? Are we more like a child in the darkness, or more like a scoundrel at midnight?

I. The Reflector of the Light

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸ He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.

Once John has explained to us the true identity and the true actions of the Word, he now begins where all the other Gospels really begin – the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist's ministry is the historical event that begins the ministry of the Messiah.

He was sent from God, which places him on the same level as Moses, or the prophets. There were many self-proclaiming prophets, but John was a genuine, God-sent prophet. He fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3:1:

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. (Malachi 3:1)

Of course, there is already a contrast for us here. The Word is God and with God. John is a man sent from God.

Verse 7 gives us his calling, and the reason for that calling. He came to be a witness. This is the Greek word from which we get our English word *martyr*. It means someone who testifies, who witnesses what he has seen on behalf of another. John's calling was to be a witness of the Light, spoken of in verse 5, who is the same Person as the Word. And the idea of that witness is what we saw as the purpose of the whole book 20:31: “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

Now having a witness is still important to us today. When you go for a job interview, interviewers ask for references, people who will testify or witness to your capability. Our courts still call upon witnesses to testify of their version of events in civil or criminal cases. We use character references, testimonials, affidavits so that we can hopefully get an idea of who it is we are trusting or hiring or believing.

Well, if that's important in the area of getting a job, I would say it is vital in the area of deciding who the Messiah is. No one expects you to get to 20:31, believing that Jesus is the Christ, without reasons, without some kind of testimony that persuades you. And so the Gospel of John is very big on what bears witness of Christ.

Count all the witnesses to Jesus:

³² There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.

³³ You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth... ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. ³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. (John 5:31–37)

³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. (John 5:39)

¹⁸ I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” (John 8:18)

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 15:26–27)

The Father witnesses of Jesus. The Son bears witness to Himself. The Helper, or the Spirit bears witness to Jesus. The works of Jesus bear witness to Jesus. The Scriptures bear witness to Jesus. John the Baptist witnessed to Jesus. And here in verse 27 the apostles will bear witness to Jesus. That's seven witnesses to Jesus.

John the Baptist was one of these testimonies, witnesses to Jesus, so that we might believe that He is the Christ.

But the text wants to make sure there is no confusion. John was not the Light. He was sent to bear witness of the Light. He was not the source; he was the reflector. We remember his words when his disciples panicked because more people were now following Jesus than following John the Baptist. He replied, “I am not the bridegroom, I am his best man. It is his day, not mine. And if his day has arrived, I rejoice. He must increase, I must decrease.”

I cannot help wondering if when John the apostle composed this prologue, and he began with In the beginning was the Word, if he was perhaps drawing on some other themes from Genesis 1. Because the very first thing which God says is “Let there be Light”, and here John speaks of the Word who made the world and is the Light. A few verses later, we read “Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.” (Genesis 1:16)

We know that the sun is the greater light and the moon is the lesser light. The greater light, the sun, produces light, whereas the lesser light, the Moon, reflects light. Here we have something similar. The Lord is the real light, the sun that brings light. But John the Baptist was like the moon, reflecting the light of the son, bearing witness of him, pointing people to him, even when those people were in the nighttime of darkness.

Astrophysicist Neil Degraesse Tyson explains space is dark. Why does our sun not light up space? Light needs something to reflect off of. Light from our sun and other stars move through space, but without anything to reflect off, there is only darkness. The moon has no light of its own. The moon is just a rock in space. But because it reflects the sun's light, the moon offers us a bit more light to guide us in the evening.

In fact, one of the great questions of life is this: will you be a reflector of God's perfect glory, or will you try to be a glory-bearer yourself? Will you seek your own glory, to have light of your own, as Lucifer sought to be? Or will you accept the great privilege of being a reflector of Him?

II. The Real Light

That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

That one was the True Light. John was a reflector. But the source, the originator of the Light was the Word, the Light, the Life, the Son. He was not reflecting anyone else's light. He Himself brings illumination.

And notice this staggering claim: he lights every man coming into the world. The phrase *coming into the world* is probably better taken as belonging to the phrase "The True Light". "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

But regardless, this is an amazing claim. On some level, the Lord Jesus brings light to every human being. How so?

Well, He has placed his light of conscience into every human. Every person has the light of knowing right and wrong, good and evil. Even when that conscience gets warped or distorted, it is never eradicated altogether. It always judges things to be good or bad, true or false, right or wrong, praiseworthy or repugnant, beautiful or ugly. That inner light of self-knowledge and knowledge of good and evil, is in every person.

The Word has also placed the light of the knowledge of God in every human. "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." (Ro. 1:19). This is also why Paul said to the Athenians ²⁷ [men] should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being,' (Acts 17:27–28) . Paul says, people are made in God's image, and therefore they have God-consciousness. The light of God is not dim or invisible. It is what man does with that light.

And then there is a the light of nature. As man combines his innate light of the Creator with his innate conscience, if he looks at creation, he sees both illustrated: the work of the Creator, and the presence of God's Law and right and wrong.

¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:16–17)

On top of this, the Light has given man reason, logic, the ability to think, to use language and reason out the world. Every thing man has rightly figured out about the world, about the human body, about the way the cosmos works is light: the common grace of God giving light to all men. This is light, and it is part of the light that lights every man.

Now I would say that this kind of light makes up by far the majority of light that people receive. It is like the light from our star, wide beams shining down on everyone and everything.

But there is a second kind of light. When light is amplified and focused, it can be turned into focused beams, laser beams. The very specific knowledge of what the Bible teaches, the message of the Gospel, the account of Christ coming into the world is a focused, concentrated message of specific special revelation. Christ is also this kind of light. He is the focus of the Bible, He is the message of the Bible. It is His name that brings salvation.

This light has not lit every person without exception. Many have never heard. It has lit all men without distinction – every kind of person in the world, all nations. But not every individual. Now to be saved, people need more than the wide rays of general revelation light, but the laser

beam of the Gospel message. That's why John has written this book. That's why we preach and teach.

But why hasn't everyone in the world received the message? Isn't it unfair that not everyone has received the special revelation, the laser-like beam of the Gospel, and others haven't? Well, the answer to that question is what most people do with the light they already have. Let's say general revelation made up 80% of what you needed to know about God, yourself, your sin. Let's say special revelation provided the crucial and essential last 20%. What would you say about a person who rejected the 80%, and then said, where's the 20%? If you have rejected the light of the sun, why would we think you want a concentrated form of that light? If you won't receive and believe the general light of creation, conscience, and innate God-consciousness, then what do we think you will do with the special light of the Bible, and the message of the Gospel?

The problem with mankind is not that God's light is not clear enough or strong enough. It is that man prefers darkness. All this brings us to the responses to the light.

III. The Responses to the Light

⁹ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

In fact, look at what verse 10 says: ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

John here uses the word world in three ways. The first way is human society. Jesus was in the world of human kind. He dwelt among people. The second meaning of world is the created order, the creation, the planet. The world was actually his handiwork. The third way is the evil, unbelieving system that Satan is the god of which deceives men into rejecting God. Jesus was in the world, the world He made, but the world system did not recognise Him.

Think about it: John is saying that Jesus is the author, who writes Himself into His own story, and the other characters do not recognise that He is the author. Jesus is the director of the play, who comes on stage as one of the actors, and the actors do not accept that it is the director. The world sees His light, but shuts their eyes tight.

Verse 11 takes it further. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

He came to His own creation, but His creation did not receive Him. And more to the point, He came to His own covenant people, Israel, came among them as one of them, a natural-born son of Israel, but his own people did not receive Him. His own brothers and sisters didn't accept Him at first. The townspeople and elders of Nazareth did not receive Him. The nearby capital city of Galilee, Capernaum, did not receive Him. The religious leaders of the synagogues – the Pharisees, and the religious leaders of the Temple – the Sadducees did not receive Him.

Now, if you can understand it, these were the people closest to the Light. They were best positioned to see the Light and receive Him. They were the most biblically literate people on earth. They had received the Scriptures, the covenants, the promises, and the messianic prophecies. But one of the great lessons of the Bible is that proximity to the Light, access to it doesn't mean you will receive it.

Why not? Jesus tells us in a passage we will come back to often.

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:19–21)

It is not about not seeing the light accidentally, or because of some obstruction, or it being hidden. It is deliberately avoiding the light. Receiving Christ is not a question of information and ignorance about that information. It is a question of the heart loving one thing and hating another; desiring independence, and the cover of darkness to keep being independent, hating conviction and truth, because it will find him guilty.

But as Scripture shows, there is always a remnant, who believe.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Some did and do receive Him. What does it mean to receive Him? He tells us – it is those who believe in His name. We've already begun to see what believe means: to absolutely embrace the Lord Jesus, to take Him as your life, to submit and receive and accept and trust and become allegiant to. You see Him as the Light and you come to Him for life and truth and guidance.

Now here is the glorious promise to those who receive the Light. He gives them the right, the authority to become children of God. This is the biblical teaching of regeneration, of being born again, born from above. It is what Jesus will discuss with Nicodemus in chapter 3. It is what fills this Gospel when Jesus talks about getting real life, abundant life, new life.

Now being born from above is not like human physical birth. Human birth involves physical descent – that's blood, it involves the will of human desire, and it even involves the will of a man – here the word is specifically for a male, a husband, giving the idea that children are normally born through the decision of a human, or a husband, and involves physical descent. That's not how it works with regeneration. This is a work of God.

Now you have a responsibility: and that is to receive Christ. So which comes first? Are you born of God and then you believe? Or do you believe and then you are born of God? Now good, bible-believing Christians come down on both sides. Some say, regeneration comes before faith. God must first give you a new nature, with new desires, and then you believe. Others say, that sounds backward. Doesn't the Bible make faith a condition in order to then be saved?

There are strong arguments on both sides. I come to my conclusion based upon this text, John 1:12-13. Here John seems to make a clear sequence: those who received Him, by believing were then given the right to become children of God. It looks like faith, then regeneration. Now those who believe in regeneration before faith respond by saying that verse 12 is not talking about regeneration, being born again, it is talking about the work of adoption, where God gives you the legal status of a child. Paul refers to adoption particularly in Ephesians. So they would say, you are born again, then you believe, and then you are adopted. While that's not impossible, John is almost never talking about adoption in his Gospel; he is always talking about new life, being born again. Both the near and far context of this verse point to regeneration, not adoption. For that reason, I believe the biblical sequence is you first repent and believe, and then God regenerates you. Now my strong or strict Calvinist brother will ask me, how could a person dead in sin possess the ability to repent and believe in the first place? My answer is the biblical work of the sanctification

of the Spirit. Peter refers to this in 1 Pet 1:2, and Paul refers to it in 2 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

The Holy Spirit draws you, sets you apart, and changes what you know and love, persuading you to repent and believe. It is the same as what Jesus refers to in this Gospel as the Father drawing you. The Father draws you through the sanctification of the Spirit, you repent and believe, and you are born from above.

Once you are a child of God, you become a reflector of God's light, in the way that children always reflect their parents in some way.

We've said John 1:11-12 are a summary of the whole book. Verse 11 is about His own who did not receive him – that's chapters 1 to 12. Verse 12 is about those who did receive Him, chapter 13 to 21. But in another way, it is a summary of the human race. Light has come into the world, and shone on every human. The general light of creation, the light of conscience, the light of culture. And then the special light of Christ's incarnation, the canon of Scripture, the church and its preaching. But many or most people hate light and love darkness, and do whatever they can to suppress the light, avoid it, and pretend it is not there.

But if you will stop avoiding, and approach the light, and let Him show you what you are, and let Him show you who He is, the pain will turn into relief. You will find not only a Judge, but a Lawyer who will defend you. Not only a Lawgiver, but a deliverer. You will find a new life, and a new family.