

KNOWING, RECEIVING, BELIEVING, BECOMING

John 1:10-13 - "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not *know* him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did *receive* him, who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to *become* children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

We are taking longer with this first chapter than we will with any other in John's gospel. I have been amazed in my study just how carefully crafted these opening paragraphs (in our English translations) are. John isn't just flinging ideas about Jesus out at random. He writes in a way that really can't be rushed over or considered lightly. This means we all have to dig a little deeper and think a little harder these first few Sunday mornings.

Verses 10 and 11 are the dark verses. John constructs these verses in such a way that, if only we didn't already know them so well, we'd be shocked that the Word made flesh was rejected so roundly by the very ones He came to save. Then **verses 12 and 13** bring in the victorious message of hope. In spite of the darkness, Jesus Christ still gives life. And we're immediately brought back and reminded of the truth we already studied at the end of **verse 5** - "**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**"

1) **THE REJECTION OF CHRIST JESUS BY THIS WORLD DOESN'T STEM FROM LACK OF CREDIBILITY ON HIS PART, BUT PROVES THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE FALL AND HUMAN SIN**

In other words, what we read in these verses from John demonstrates the effects of what we read in Genesis chapter three.

John 1:10 - "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."

John has a way of making a profound point by the repetition of simple words and phrases. In this verse - containing only nineteen words - John repeats "**world**" three times. Which is John's way of signaling his desire to fasten our attention to it.

John tells us three things about the "**world**." **First**, he tells us that the light (God the Son) was present *in* the world. **Second**, he tells us that the light (God the Son) was the *creator* and *originator* of the world. And **third**, he tells us the light (God the Son) was *rejected* by the world. And this rejection is *heightened* by the way John leads up to it.

So John's point is this very world - this world in which the Word was, even in the sense of His power holding it together moment by moment - this world which was, in fact, brought into existence by the Word, which is rightfully *owned* by the Word - **this** world is the one that didn't recognize or welcome the Word.

And notice the way the meaning of the term "**world**" slightly morphs and evolves as John uses it. The first two times it refers more broadly to the whole created physical world and everything it contains - including mankind. But the third time John uses it, it narrows down - right at the point of *ignorance* toward the Word - "**...the world did not know Him....**" It narrows down specifically to mean, not the whole created order, but *mankind* in particular. The *persons* created by the Word bear a depth of guilt the rest of the created order does not.

John's point here is there is no *logical* excuse for this rejection of the Word made flesh. In fact, John is merely saying of the *Incarnation* what Paul said about all *previous* revelations of God's presence and power and love in **Romans 1:18-20** - "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**"

There is nothing undesirable about Christ. It's not that He failed to meet our deepest need. In fact, He *designed* and *created*

us in the first place. He has **first rights** over everything about us. It's not that He didn't come into this world in love. It's not as though He was an imposter, just **pretending** to be the way, the truth, and the life.

No. Mankind's failure to honor God the Son, when He came all the way down to us in human flesh, doesn't reflect on any defect in **Him**. It magnifies and exposes the nature of sin in **us**. And that's the next topic to which the Apostle John turns his attention:

2) **THE IGNORANCE JOHN MENTIONS IN VERSE TEN IS A GUILTY IGNORANCE, NOT A MORALLY NEUTRAL IGNORANCE**

In other words, those who rejected Jesus weren't ignorant about Him the way I'm ignorant about how to remove someone's appendix. Look at the way John strings together his argument:

John 1:10-11 - "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world **did not know him**. [11] He came to his own, and his own people **did not receive him**."

So "**did not know him**" is further refined and explained as "**did not receive him**." And "**the world**" is further defined as "**his own people**." And the reason this all matters so much to John is the world who did not know the Word made flesh **should** have known who He was because the immediate context of His coming was to **His own** people - the Jewish inheritors of the Old Covenant.

And when **they** wouldn't receive Him it tells us something important about the kind of ignorance John is talking about when he says the world "**didn't know him**" (10). This is because many of those to whom Jesus came had centuries of information about His coming. The whole Bible makes no sense if we forget this central truth:

Hebrews 1:1-2 - "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

God had spoken less directly to His chosen people "**at many times**" and "**in many ways**," via human prophets. And Jesus said in all these many times and many ways the prophets were revealing **Him** as they spoke - **John 5:39** - "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me....**"

So when John says the world didn't **know** the Word made flesh he means they **turned away from Him**. He means they wouldn't **receive** Him. They wouldn't make space for Him. They wouldn't respond to Him. He means they **rejected** Him.

And why did they do this? Later on in his gospel John will spell out clearly the concept he only introduces here:

John 3:19-20 - "And this is the judgment: the **light has come into the world**, [that's the Incarnation] and people **loved the darkness** rather than the light **because their deeds were evil**. [20] For everyone who does wicked things **hates the light** and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

John means to say that if you want to find the reason for the rejection of the light - the coming of Jesus Christ into this world - you can't find the reason by examining the light. There is no reason for rejecting the light based on any flaw or defect in Christ Himself. No. If you want to find the reason Jesus Christ **was** and **still is** rejected by mankind you have to look in the opposite direction. You have to look, not at Christ, but into the heart of those to whom He came.

We must pay attention to this. Jesus Christ **reveals** our true selves. That's exactly what John means by that last word in **John 3:20** - "For everyone who does wicked things **hates the light** and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be **exposed**."

"**Exposed**" is the tell word. The light lays bare something about us that isn't usually seen. The light **reveals** something about

us we can usually keep hidden. We can be clean and proper and refined and polite and classy in this world's eyes. But when Jesus Christ comes close and speaks and then isn't accepted on His Lordship terms suddenly the layers of self-deceit are peeled back. Something **selfish** and **proud** and **rebellious** is suddenly exposed.

This is why John calls the Incarnation of Jesus Christ the unique arrival of **the light**. It is the very nature of Jesus Christ to **reveal**. He constantly does this revealing work. He can't **help** but reveal. That's what light does.

He does this in all our hearts. I see it in my office all the time. "This is what Jesus says you must do about this sin." "No. I can't do that. I **won't** do that. I refuse." And what just happened at that moment is Jesus entered that room and **exposed** the true condition of a heart. And many times even religious people hate that. They're **exposed**. People who still come to church, who sing about how much they love Jesus, and close their eyes when they pray, turn away from Jesus when He **exposes** their sin. They **say** they love Jesus. They probably **think** they love Jesus. But they **don't** love Jesus. Not really.

So remember the second main point we're considering. It's anchored in that tenth verse - **John 1:10** - "**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.**" The ignorance John mentions is a **guilty** ignorance, not a **morally neutral** ignorance. This means dealing fruitfully with Jesus Christ - the **light** - requires tremendous honesty. We can never successfully come to the light apart from humility and repentance.

3) **THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD**

John 1:12-13 - "**But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

We should be so grateful John continued with these verses. Because right at the end of verses ten and eleven one might easily conclude **no one** will **ever** come to the light. But there were some who came. There were some who **received** Him. There were some who **believed in His name**. There were some who went against the flow of the crowd. There were some who followed. There were some who stepped out when Jesus called. They left the non-followers behind.

Imperfectly, to be sure, they followed. Falteringly, they followed. Unworthily, and knowing it, they followed. And what about them? What about these weak followers? He gave them "**...the right to become children of God...**" (1:12).

And we're meant to see John's emphasis. I'm sure the same apostle John who recorded those famous words, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...**" - I'm sure we're meant to see the strong emphasis on that same word, "**He gave the right to become children of God...**" (1:12).

And the way John keeps the spotlight on the **freeness** of this gift is by linking up those two words, "**receive,**" and "**believed**" - 12 - "**But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name...**" Receiving comes from believing. Please rub your brain with this truth. John could easily have linked **receiving** with **accomplishing**, or **receiving** with **performing**.

But no. With John it's all and always about **believing**. The fact that this lies close to his heart is demonstrated by the fact that this wonderful phrase, "**believe on His name,**" occurs over thirty times in this fourth gospel - more than the combined total of the synoptics.

Believing is trusting. Believing is loving. Believing is relying. Believing is resting on. Or how could it be better said than with John's tell-tale synonym for believing - "**receiving**"? Or, better still, you **receive by believing**. You **keep** believing. Or, perhaps better still, you **keep** believing **in spite of** all the things that mock your continuing trust and commitment.

Years ago, when I wasn't ready to appreciate the gift, my dad gave me a set of volumes written by the great evangelical scholar of a precious generation, **Wilbur Smith**. What Smith did was actually put together a series of volumes known as

“Peloubet’s Select Notes on the International Sunday School Lessons.” And that’s exactly what they were - first class, complete, highly readable lessons by a great scholar designed for Sunday School teachers. Obviously, it was a completely different era.

So I was reading this Sunday School lesson from John’s Gospel, written in March, 1943. And I came across this wonderful quote regarding **verse 12** - ***“Children are such as partake their father’s nature. That is the infinite, profound mystery of the thing resulting from the coming of our Lord. He gave them the right to become children of God. He made those to whom He gave that right, partakers - and do not be afraid of the word, it is Peter’s word in his letter - partakers of the Divine nature.”***

“Are you a child of God? Then already you are a partaker of His nature. I state it so because it is an amazing declaration. Sometimes the heart is tempted to be fearful and afraid in the presence of such revelations or statements of Scripture, because we are so conscious of being unlike God. Think again, and always think patiently of your own life, and always continue in believing. See your life with the patience of your Heavenly Father.”

Remember, receiving comes from believing. And the way John reinforces this **positive** principle in **verse 12** is by stating it **negatively** in **verse 13** - ***“...who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

Three negatives come before the positive. And John could have listed fifty negatives. John labors to show the absolute exclusion of any human, temporal, earthly, genetic contribution to being made children of God. And even with such a strong emphasis we still easily miss this truth.

O, the joy of wrapping up a teaching like this by refolding into our minds the precious truth that being made a child of God never happened because of how good this past week was for you. It never came on the basis of being born of Abraham, or stringing together a necklace of moral improvements.

No wonder John uses such joyous repetition. ***“Not by this, or by that, or by this, or by that, or this either!”*** Receiving is by believing. Plus nothing. Persistent belief is the call. This is what will gradually transform the affections. This is what will inspire courage. This is what will please God.