

## RESPONDING TO THE WORD'S LIGHT

John 1:9-13

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"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup> 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: <sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

**LOOKING AT THE WORD:** The spiritual line of demarcation runs through the cross. Unbelievers wonder how Christians can pin their hope for eternal life on the claims of a man who was crucified two-thousand years ago. It seems so foolish to them! On the other hand, Christians wonder how unbelievers can walk away from the light so clearly seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ? His deity seems so clear to us; his sacrifice so precious! Why can't the unsaved see it? The Apostle John wrestled with these same two spiritual realities.

**THE WORD'S TRUE LIGHT (John 1:9)** There were many in first century Israel energized with the idea that John the Baptist was the Messiah. Jesus will later say of John, "He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35). The prophets brought spiritual light to Israel; but comparing John's light to the light of Messiah, would be like setting a "burning and a shining light" (a first century oil lamp) out in the noonday sun. There are five different words in Greek that can be translated as "true" in English. The term *alēthinos* (true), in John 1:9, is only used by John when referring to God. In context, it carries the idea of being real, authentic, or genuine as opposed to "secondary". When John wrote "That was the true Light", he was saying Jesus is the standard by which every other light is measured. Others may possess a slice of truth but with Jesus Christ, we have God's full and ultimate gift of light.

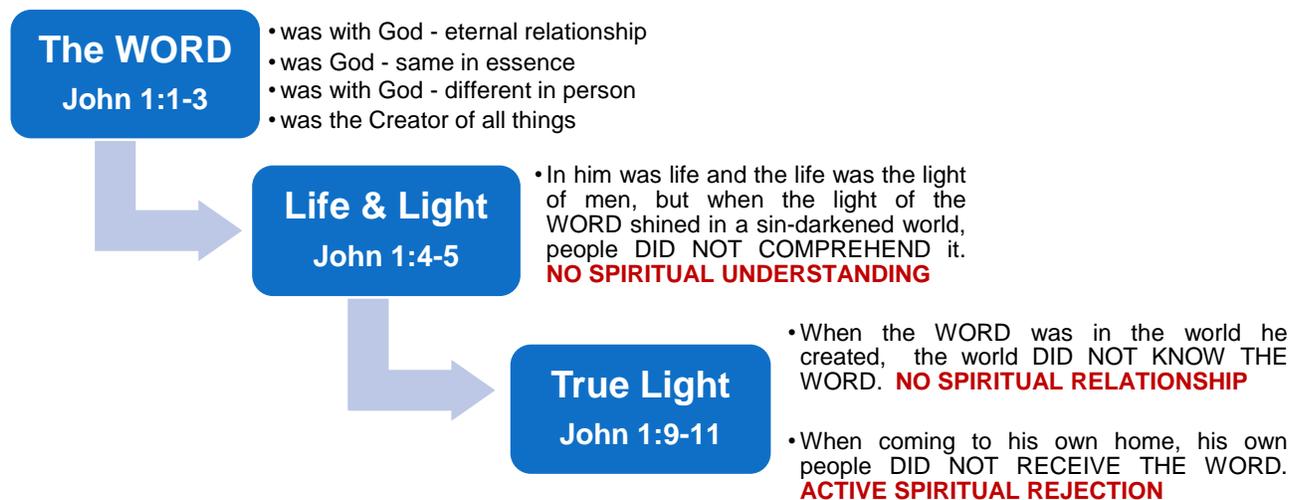
TRUE ἀληθινός ( <i>alēthinos</i> )	
All 23 occurrences of this word (in 21 verses) in the writings of the Apostle John refer to God's Word, God's worshippers, God's character, or God's action.	
John 1:9	"That was the <b>TRUE</b> Light" referring to Christ, the incarnate Word
John 6:32	" <b>TRUE</b> bread from heaven" referring to Christ, the bread of life
Revelation 19:11	"called Faithful and <b>TRUE</b> , and in righteousness he doth judge and make war" referring to Christ just before the battle of Armageddon
All references in the writings of John using ἀληθινός	John 1:9; 4:23, 37; 6:32; 7:28; 8:16; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35; 1 John 2:8; 5:20; Revelation 3:7, 14; 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2, 9, 11; 21:5; 22:6

Translators are divided as to how the last half of John 1:9 should read. Some see the participial phrase "coming into the world" as referring to "every man" (KJV, Church Fathers, and most of the older commentators). Some of the more recent translations see this phrase referring to the "true Light." Regardless, John's point is that God is not without witness to mankind. And with the incarnation of the Word (John 1:14), God's light has gone out with unprecedented brilliance impacting men and women on every continent. It is not a matter of inner enlightenment to a select few. The Father's revelation of glory in the Son is for all who have eyes to see. However, spiritual light by itself is no guarantee of results. From John's day to this, mankind's response to God's light remains the same; either rejection or acceptance; though the difference in individual response will indelibly shape our eternity.

**REJECTION OF THE TRUE LIGHT (John 1:10-11)** The sad tones of John 1:10-11 echo the sentiment voiced by the prophet more than seven hundred years earlier in Isaiah 1:2-3 "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: For the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against me. <sup>3</sup> The ox knoweth his owner, And the ass his master's crib: *But* Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." Even animals know where their food comes from, but people sometimes forget that everything we are and possess comes from God.

John writes of the Son in John 1:10, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” Whenever John speaks of the “world” in his Gospel, almost invariably, he is talking about the people living in the world. Instead of being welcomed for who he was and what he had accomplished, we read “the world knew him not”. This is not an intellectual failure in recognition as much as it is the total absence of a personal relationship between the people of this world and God, their Creator. John 8:19 “Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” The Jews had ritual and ceremony, but they did not have a personal relationship with their God (cf. John 7:28-29; 8:54-55). In the world he brought into existence, the Son of God was treated as a stranger.

Humanity’s rejection of God’s light becomes even more personal in John 1:11 “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” There is an interesting interplay in gender between the first “own” (neuter gender) with the second “own” (masculine gender). The idea conveyed by John is that the Son of God came to his own property or home (the Promised Land), and his own people living there (the Jews) refused to receive him.



Scripture presents this not as an error in judgment but as willful rejection. The Apostle Paul was so broken over Israel’s rejection of their Messiah that he voiced a willingness to be accursed if only it would bring Israel back to Christ (Romans 9:1-5).

**RECEPTION OF THE TRUE LIGHT (John 1:12-13)** The nation, as a whole (and especially those in religious leadership), rejected Jesus Christ for who he really was, but not everyone turned away from him. There were some who received him gladly and discovered their lives changed forever by their encounter with Christ including:

- ♦ **A NEW BELIEF (DEPENDENCE) ON CHRIST:** “But as many as received him . . . *even* to them that believe on his name:” In John 1:12 receiving and believing are two parallel truths intertwined with God’s gift of life. Two questions emerge from this verse.
  - **QUESTION #1: What Does it Mean to Receive Him?**
    - Receiving Christ means we accept his words as true “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” (John 17:8) Note the close connection between receiving and believing. We can’t receive Christ but then quibble over his words. He is the WORD.
    - Receiving Christ means we recognize and submit to his authority: “. . . and he that receiveth me {the Son} receiveth him that sent me {the Father}” (John 13:20b). Our relationship to the Son is mirrored by our relationship to the Father.
  - **QUESTION #2: What Does it Mean to Believe on His Name?**
    - Believing on the name of Christ means we are depending on him to fulfill his word – “Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.” (John 4:50; cf. 12:47–48)
    - Believing on the name of Christ means accepting him for who he claimed to be – “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are

written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20:31)

- Believing on the name of Christ means accepting the “finished” sacrificial work of Christ on the cross to be sufficient for securing our forgiveness of sin and eternal life (Jn 1:29; 19:30).
- Bultmann writes, “Behind the word which is believed is the man whom one trusts.”<sup>1</sup> Belief is not affirming a list of theological truths as much as it is resting in the faithfulness of God to keep his promise of eternal life in Christ.

◆ **A NEW FAMILY RELATIONSHIP:** “. . . to them gave he power to become the sons of God”.

- **TRANSFORMED FOR INTIMACY:** John’s message is that trust, once given to Christ, engenders a new family relationship between God and believer. What an amazing development in personal circumstance this is; from “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12) to experiencing a close intimacy with God (Ephesians 2:19-22). Paul speaks of our privileged position in Christ as a son and heir (Galatians 4:1-7), but John’s focus is on the believer’s relationship to the Father as his child. While τέκνα (*tekna*), the word used for believers in John 1:12 can be translated as “sons”, it is normally used of small “children” needing special protection and care. As a term of endearment, it is similar to the Scottish word, *bairns*, “born ones”. Regardless of our actual age, once we trust Christ as Savior, we become baby believers; not merely tolerated as former spiritual rebels but warmly snuggled into God’s arms as precious and treasured children in his household of faith.
- **TRANSFORMED BY DIVINE POWER:** This new-found intimacy with the Father is made possible by a transformation of nature. John tells us God gives believers a new power, not possessed before trusting Christ. The term John uses is ἐξουσία (*exousia*) which brings the idea of a legal right, authority, or freedom to do something. When translating *exousia* in John 1:12, the KJV focuses on the power inherent within the authority granted to achieve its purpose, while most modern translations (NASV, NET, NIV, ESV) use the word “right” (focusing solely on the authority granted). Commenting on this, Borchert writes, “Although “right” is certainly one of the meanings of ἐξουσία . . . This Gospel is not about judicial rights but about life and the power to live.”<sup>2</sup> The same power that brought Christ out of the tomb is the power that brings new birth and spiritual life to a believer in Christ.

◆ **A NEW BIRTH: John 1:13** “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man” – John is not speaking of a moral reformation but of a spiritual rebirth.

- **MAN CANNOT MAKE IT HAPPEN:**
  - “Not of blood” (lit. “bloods”) – Not from human biology. The Jews claimed God as their father based on their ancestral ties to Abraham (John 8:33-42). In the same way, many nominal Christians base their claims to Christianity on the merits of a godly relative. Having a Christian heritage is a wonderful treasure, but that does not ensure a descendent becoming a child of God.
  - “Nor of the will of the flesh” – Not from human will or desire. Just wanting (or deciding) to go to heaven isn’t enough. It is not our desire but our faith in Christ that opens the doors of heaven.
  - “Nor of the will of man” – Not from human authority. The new birth in Christ is beyond the will or power of a husband, church official, or any other person to bestow upon another. Each soul must personally respond in faith to the light of the WORD to experience a new birth in Christ.
- **GOD ALONE HAS THE POWER FOR SPIRITUAL REGENERATION:** “. . . but of God.” Salvation starts and ends in the loving power of God. Man is invited to faith, but God alone brings new birth. John will expand on this later when relating Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21).

**APPLICATION AND MEDITATION:** Consider God’s mercy and grace in continuing to send light to a world wrapped in darkness. Even when people turned their backs on him and refused to acknowledge the light of the gospel, God did not give up on them. Neither should we. The offer of life in Christ is still available to anyone who will open their heart to God by faith.

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Dr. Mike Davidson

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Πιστεύω, Πίστις, Πιστός, Πιστόω, Ἄπιστος, Ἀπιστέω, Ἀπιστία, Ὀλιγόπιστος, Ὀλιγοπιστία,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 187.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 115.