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## **Introduction**

"The Better Covenant" self-published 2012 on Amazon and is available still as a printed version or a kindle purchase. If you buy the printed copy the kindle purchase is free.

This series - The Better Covenant - revisited.

-started Jan 7th 2021-completion dated Aug 4th 2022 - 66 Studies.

The Better Covenant. Chapter 26: Where do I go from here?

It depends, of course, on where you are when you ask the question.

I was once given this topic to address a group of teenagers who had all made 'decisions' at a Billy Graham meeting. I conducted an experiment in which they followed a series of instructions that I issued step by step.

Turn right, take 3 steps, turn left, take 2 steps etc. It was pretty chaotic but one person in the group actually arrived at the exit. It was no accident; he was the one I had in mind as I issued the instructions. It was all to illustrate the point that there is no single answer to the question "where do I go from here?" There are as many answers as there are people asking the question.

So we should not expect a detailed prescription in this chapter but, hopefully, some practical pointers for anyone who wants to make progress in their Christian pilgrimage.

The companion question to 'where do I go from here?' has to be 'where am I?'

## **It is absolutely necessary**

### **Heavy burdens that new converts carry in terms of labels.**

#### **What do I mean by that?**

In some circles an 'enquirer' or even complete stranger will be asked 'Would you like to invite Jesus into your heart'? If the answer is 'yes' a brief prayer will be followed by the assertion..

"Your sins are now forgiven, you are now born-again and your name is written in the Lamb's book of life and you are guaranteed a place in heaven."

#### **I recall hearing a church leader telling a true story.**

He was working in a city in the North of England and they were passing out evangelistic tracts in a 'red light' district. One of the 'working girls' was offered a tract and turned it down. "I don't need one of those" she said "I'm born again".

The perplexed missionary asked what she meant. She replied that she had 'gone forward' at an evangelistic rally and having been counselled had prayed 'the sinner's prayer'.

She pulled a leaflet from her handbag. It was a 'prayer letter' from the organisation that had held the 'evangelistic rally'. It gave an account of the meetings that included an item entitled, something like, 'Street Walker finds Christ'.

The news item recounted the event and rejoiced that the Street Walker had prayed 'the sinners prayer' and had been converted. She was sent on her way rejoicing that she had been 'born again' and the her name was now 'written in the Lamb's Book of Life'.

The 'prayer letter' had become her assurance that all was now well between her and God and that a welcome awaited her in heaven.

Now, this is certainly an extreme case, but how did evangelicals ever get to the place where this sad parody of 'evangelism' was acceptable?

## Misused Labels

Among evangelicals one of the most misused labels is the phrase 'born again'. The phrase, taken from John Chapter 3,

▼ John 3:7 KJV

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

The sentence "you must be born again" has probably been the title for thousands of sermons. We must, however, understand it rightly to avoid putting an unbearable burden on the shoulders of those who hear it.

## Not a divine command

This is NOT a command, as is so often preached. It is the statement of a spiritual fact of life. I have used the Old King James version to make the point.

I have switched back to this archaic English to illustrate my point. If we taken a careful note of the sentence we notice that Christ switched from the personal pronoun in the singular 'thee', to the personal pronoun plural in the word 'ye'.

This is the equivalent of saying,

"don't be amazed that I say to you, personally, Nicodemus, that everyone must be born again."

Christ is addressing Nicodemus, that's the 'thee' pronoun' but the information he gives is not an instruction to Nicodemus but an explanation.

If this were a command it would be in the Greek imperative; it isn't.

Christ is simply expressing the spiritual truth to Nicodemus that it is necessary 'dei' that everyone be born again/from above

## A spiritual axiom

So the spiritual truth is expressed simply and follows very naturally from what preceded it;

▼ John 3:6-7 KJV

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. John 3:6-7 KJV

Christ is simply making the point that 'it is necessary that everyone is born again, from above.'

This is a spiritual axiom; a statement that is self-evidently true. It is the starting point of the explanation not an instruction to be obeyed.

I have actually heard the statement directed at a struggling believer; "you need to get yourself born again!"

We can make as little contribution to our second birth as we did to our first. The matter is out of our hands. This is why in this famous passage Christ declares it to be the unique work of the Spirit, and his ways are untrack-able;

▼ John 3:8 NKJV

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. John 3:8 NKJV.

The words 'wind' and 'spirit' are translations of the same Greek word in these two sentences.

## Regeneration is 100% a work of God

This utter dependence upon someone else strikes hard at the root of our independence and there is an almost irrepressible determination in human beings to make some contribution to being 'born again'.

But every conscious contribution we make only further disqualifies us.

There are no percentages in true regeneration; either God provides 100% or the work remains undone. Every 'per cent' that I apply consciously, undermines God's unique gift.

If I try to add faith, it will undermine God's work. If I try to add repentance, it will undermine God's work.

'Oh', I hear the cry, "that is so frustrating". Yes it is, and it is designed to be. By the way, did you know that the Hebrew language had no specific word for 'frustration' until the mid 20th century? That doesn't mean people didn't have the experience only that they were forced to describe it differently. They could call it anger, or disappointment, but not 'frustration'.

What is 'frustration'? 'frustration' is really the way I feel when my 'will' is being thwarted... or frustrated. I want to be in control of this situation but I am not and I cannot bring my choices to bear. In short and at its most brutal, it is the way I feel when I am not getting my own way.

Theologically, it is God not allowing me to be 'god', and my reaction to that realisation. Every human effort to produce regeneration will result in frustration. God has determined that the choicest gift of regeneration will be the consequence of his grace and because of that it can only be received by faith;

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, Rom 4:16 NKJV.

## **God, him say, 'me OK'**

The Judaism of Christ's and Paul's day had reduced the Law to a ladder of achievement in which they thought that God received them because they had attained a particular standard. Against this notion Paul makes his most extreme objections. God, he writes in Romans 4:5, justifies the ungodly.

If our theology does not include this statement, it is incomplete.

## **Accepted with God**

We are accepted with God and declared to be 'right' with Him, not on the basis of our own right-eousness but because of what Christ has achieved at Calvary and our simple but absolute trust in him.

Being 'justified', 'declared right with God', is never on the basis of a kept law, but on the basis of our reliance upon another.

As Amy Carmichael was fond of quoting; upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die, upon another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity.

That is Bible 'faith'; all my eggs are in one basket.

## Distinguishing between Justification and Regeneration.

Justification is a change in legal standing; regeneration is a change in nature.

Often the words 'justification' or 'conversion' or 'regeneration' are used as if they were synonyms but they are not. These are very distinct ways of describing different aspects of salvation.

They may, at times, synchronise but that does not make them synonyms. There are very few absolute synonyms in the Bible.

And at times they do not synchronise and then the puzzles begin.

### David Pawson, "The Normal Christian Birth"

...pointed out the confusion caused by failing to distinguish between conversion and regeneration.

It is a simple fact of Biblical Greek that God is never the 'subject' of the verb 'convert' as it applies to human beings.



People convert people, and sometimes people convert themselves but it is not recorded that God ever converted anyone.

There are lots of stories about people who were 'converted' by the evangelist but never by God and so are astray. From a Biblical perspective, however, God never converted anyone.

#### ▼ Acts 3:19 NKJV

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

This translation makes it sound as though the word 'Repent' is an imperative, an order.

eg 'Do This'. And so it is, however,

but the words 'be\_converted' sound as though the word is passive. In fact both words are active imperatives ie 'you repent' and 'you convert'.

God justifies and God regenerates. Man has no part in these miracles, although 'faith' is man's responsibility.

Conversion is man's work. It signifies the 'turning from one way to another'; it is man's work.

## **Justification, on the other hand, is God's work.**



There is a delightful Pigeon English definition of 'Justification' used, so I understand, by the people of Papua New Guinea. It is crude but wonderfully precise; "God, him say, me OK".

Theologically it would be difficult to improve on that definition. Justification is not the way I feel or the way that someone else may feel about me, justification is the pronouncement, by the judge, that the charge against me, and its sentence of death, has not stood.

I walk from the court a free man, not because I feel innocent but because the court has declared me to be 'just'. But justification, coming from the forensic background of the Scriptures, is not a pronouncement that just anyone can make; it is the legal verdict of the Judge.

## **Justification is always 'by grace' but always 'through faith'.**

Grace is the source, and faith is the channel.

Faith does not create any virtue or deserving on my part but simply facilitates God's free grace; faith is response to revelation. In other words, the initiative always rests with God but the response rests with me.

I cannot believe at my own whim but only because I have heard 'the voice of God' but once I have heard that voice I will be held responsible for my response.

## **Justification and Regeneration**

that is one of the sources that God has used to communicate truth to us. It is the language of what Isaac Watts called God's 'condescending ways'. That is the Old English use of the word meaning 'to come down to another's level'.

If the word and concept of Justification comes from the background of the law court then the word Regeneration comes from the vocabulary of life itself. It is not forensic but dynamic.

- Justification has to do with records and standing.
- Regeneration has to do with life and its impartation.

## Old Testament witnesses

### David's experience of Justification

Justification has many consequences and Paul quotes from a list of them that David included in a psalm;

▼ Rom 4:6-8 NKJV

*just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." Rom 4:6-8 NKJV.*

It includes, according to this list,

- imputed righteousness,
- the remitting or putting away of trespasses,
- atonement in the covering of the stain and consequences of sin,
- and a refusal to keep a record of sin.

### Abram's experience of Justification

It is a wonderfully rich expression of what was no doubt David's own experience and blessing. The list comprises the blessings that are the consequence of justification.

It appears in a chapter of Romans that Paul begins by asking the question; 'what was Abraham's experience?' The list is the answer, or part of it.

The chapter concludes with the statement that the record of Abraham's and David's experience was not a mere archive;

▼ Rom 4:23-25 NKJV.

*Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Rom 4:23-25 NKJV.*

In other words this is not just for the blessing of Abraham and David but is the blessing of all *who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

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This is wonderful but there is more... much more. (Rom 5:9-10, 15, 17, 20; 11:12)

## Much more

Romans Chapter 4 is the foundation for Chapter 5.

It begins with the common experience of all those who are justified by faith, but it builds on that a brand new building.

The theme of justification, now firmly established, settles into the background and Paul moves on to the issues of life and power;

▼ Rom 5:1-2 NKJV

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Rom 5:1-2 NKJV.*

This justifying faith gives us 'access into this grace in which we stand' but the 'grace in which we stand' is the 'much more' grace of regeneration.

## rejoicing in hope of the glory of God

Paul's reference here to the 'glory of God' is all the more amazing if we contrast it with an earlier reference. When Paul was establishing the guilt of the whole of

humanity he pointed out that there was no difference in the culpability of Jew or Gentile;

▼ Rom 3:22-23 NKJV.

*For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom 3:22-23 NKJV.*

That is forensic, law-court, language; all fall short of the 'glory of God'.

## **this grace**

But now standing in 'this grace' we find Paul rejoicing in a restored hope of the 'glory of God'. That which was forfeited by the first man is now, potentially, restored through another man, Christ Jesus.

And the hope that Paul has is not wishful thinking, the work has already begun;

▼ Rom 5:5 NKJV

*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Rom 5:5 NKJV.*

Literally, there is no reason to blush because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts...

We have come again, in Paul's declaration, as in historical reality, to the era of the poured out Spirit. We are on familiar territory here. This is the language of Pentecostal effusions and of untrack-able winds. In Romans Chapter 5 we have moved into the consequences of the realised New Covenant.

## **The Achievements of the Cross**

Paul now recounts the reversal of Adam's sin. Adam, as the federal head of the race, sinned and that sin impacted all his race; all who are *in Adam*.

Now the Second Man enters the scene and achieves something in his death that impacts his entire race.

Adam, says Paul, was a pattern of Christ.

We have moved from law courts into the dynamic, life and families.

In Christ, the Old Man was decisively co-crucified with Christ. Our death he died, bringing to an end, for those *in Christ*, that whole Adamic racial solidarity. In Christ, we are finished with the Old Man and we put off his old ways;

▼ 2 Cor 5:17 NKJV.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Cor 5:17 NKJV.*

## How then do we get to be 'in Christ'?

If we are assured of his acceptance and know that 'God, him say, me OK' how do we move from Justification to Regeneration?

"If you are thirsty," said Jesus on one occasion, "come to me and drink."

There is no technique available here but only personal engagement with Christ himself.

▼ John 7:37-39 NKJV

*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-39 NKJV.*

The Spirit is now 'given'. This promise is now 'live'; the day has come.

## What do we mean by 'receiving the Spirit'?

There are often consequences to receiving the Spirit, some of which may be seen or heard, but we must not confuse the consequences with the Spirit himself. Some have so specialised on these consequences that they describe them as 'proofs' of the Spirit having been received, but this is a damaging confusion which leaves some people believing they have received the Spirit simply because there have been certain physical phenomena.



Correlation does not necessarily imply causation

There is an ancient description of receiving the Spirit that provides a valuable caution. It is in that famous chapter of Ezekiel where he describes the valley of dry bones. As he 'prophesies' there is activity;

▼ Ezek 37:7-8 NKJV.

*So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Ezek 37:7-8 NKJV.*

The word translated 'breath' here is the Hebrew word for 'spirit'.

## **A sobering and salutary description.**

There is clear response to Ezekiel's prophetic ministry; things are happening, dramatic things, noisy things, rattlings and shakings. For many in our current era this would be sufficient proof that the Spirit had arrived, but Ezekiel has more discernment; *but there was no Spirit in them.*

## **The 'son of man'**

The 'son of man', as Ezekiel is called throughout this passage, then speaks to the Spirit;

▼ Ezek 37:9-10 NKJV

*So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath/spirit came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Ezek 37:9-10 NKJV.*

There is an interesting parallel here with the ministry of the other 'son of man'. Christ brought the word of God and still does, there was much activity, dramatic things occurred and they still do. Bones were gathered together, sinews and flesh... but the body was still effectively a corpse until he ascended to the throne and 'spoke' to the Spirit.

It is Christ's unique prerogative to 'give the Spirit'.

If we are thirsty we must come to him and drink.

## **Why do we not see the power of the New Covenant more obviously in our day?**

In my view there are two particular reasons although in individual instances there are bound to be individual conditions. When Paul wrote his epistle to the Ephesians he twice refers to the way in which he was praying for them... and for any like them who might read the letter. We will conclude with a brief look at Paul's prayers for the saints; they cover revelation and realisation.

## **Revelation and Realisation**

### **Many live sub-standard New Covenant lives because they do not know any better.**

There is a clear link between faith and expectation and if expectations are low it is unlikely that faith will be any higher. It is challenging to see not only the way in which Paul prayed for the 'saints' but also to see what he desired for them.

### **Paul's first prayer in Ephesians is for 'revelation';**

▼ Eph 1:17-18 NKJV

*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; Eph 1:17-18 NKJV.*

By revelation he means an inner insight into truth. In the epistle to the Colossians his prayer is for 'spiritual understanding'. He is praying that men and women will 'see' what God has had in mind.

He subdivides this Ephesian 'prayer list' into three sections and asks that they may 'know'...

1. the hope of Christ's calling,
2. the riches of Christ's inheritance in the saints,
3. and the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe.

It is quite a list. The word 'know' implies to 'see with the eyes' or to 'perceive'. Perhaps they were already 'seeing' it but he is praying for the process to continue.

### **The hope of His calling?**

That you will go to heaven when you die? Oh, more, much more. Your calling is to be an image bearer of Christ himself. The hope is that the 'mystery/secret' would be expressed in the lives of God's people, that Christ would be 'in them' 'the hope of glory' as Paul describes it to the church at Colossae.

This was Adam's original calling, to be in the likeness and image of God; to reveal the nature of God in flesh and blood. God has never given up on this project; it is why we were created.

## **The 'riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints'?**

The language of 'inheritance' always echoes the land promised to a covenant community. The saints are Christ's inheritance in answer to the prayer 'ask me and I will give the nations for your inheritance'. The New Covenant community is his, Christ's. Certainly we have an inheritance of our own to look forward to but this is not that, this is Christ's inheritance; it is 'Christ's inheritance' in the saints. He wants them to see that the purpose of their calling is to be Christ's own people.

It is the New Covenant fulfilment of an ancient promise.

▼ Ex 19:5-6 NKJV

*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* Ex 19:5-6 NKJV.

## **The nature of the power that works within them.**

Then what of the third point on the list? He prays that they may see the nature of the power that is at work in them. He says it is nothing less than the power that was at work when Christ was raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand. What a journey that was! From the grave to the throne.

This is the same power that is at work in God's people, not just to save them from hell but to give them a share in his death, his resurrection and his glory. If the power of God could raise Christ from a grave to a throne, what can it do in me?

Is the New Covenant too good to be true or can God deliver what he has promised?

## **Paul's second prayer in Ephesians is for 'realisation';**

Paul's second prayer list moves from the revelation to the reality, and its real-isation in the saints.

It is vital that we see what God has done and is doing but the truth must become true in me too.

▼ Eph 3:14–20 NKJV

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Eph 3:14–20 NKJV.*

## **Christ made real in the heart**

His prayer here focuses again on the work of the Spirit. It is through the power of the received Spirit that Christ is made real in the heart.

When he walked on the earth and even when he was raised from the dead he was 'with' them, but his great promise had been that the one who had been 'with' them would soon be 'within' them.

The indwelling Christ is the consequence of the indwelling Spirit. This as we have seen in our journey was one of the key elements in the New Covenant; a new heart and a new spirit and God's own Spirit indwelling, and the law written on the heart.

The word 'energy' is a union of two words; en and ergon, it is an inward working.

The word is used often in the New Testament in its different forms. It is part of a sequence of truth that we also find in the word for power '*dunamis*'. *dunamis* is not external power but essential, inward or inherent power. That word is often translated 'ability' and appears twice in Paul's second prayer list. First he prays that *they may be strengthened with 'ability' through His Spirit in the inner man.* (Eph 3:16)

He knows that only by the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit can Christ inhabit the heart in reality.

## The 'able' God

Later, in the same prayer, he *refers to*

▼ Eph 3:20

*Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Eph 3:20.*

It is because God has the ability/*dunamis* to 'do' that we can have the ability to 'be'.

The transformed life of the New Covenant is not the result of greater effort but of greater grace. Paul, speaking by the Spirit, piles superlative on top of superlative here. He is not only able to do... above all that we ask or think, he is able to do 'abundantly' above all that we ask or think... and not only that but 'exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we can ask or think'.

Language can take us no further. This is all the fulness of God's power available to fulfil all the promises of a New Covenant and to accomplish it 'according to the ability/*dunamis* that is working in' (*energeO*) the saint.

## Glory in the Church by Christ Jesus

And to what purpose is all this provision of God given?

▼ Eph 3:21 NKJV

*That there might be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Eph 3:21 NKJV.*

## Just the Beginning...

What we have examined may be breathtaking, but it is only the beginning. This New Covenant has made it possible for God's ancient longings to be fulfilled. Perhaps it is appropriate to let Paul have the final word...

▼ Eph 3:21 NKJV

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Eph 3:21 NKJV*

## Conclusion

In this final chapter we discovered that there is no formula that guarantees success but that the persistent appeal of the Bible is that we come to Christ when we are thirsty. We see that this speaks not of an evangelical formula but of personal encounter with a personal Saviour. No one can prescribe an infallible route but these promises stand, that those who seek shall find, and those who come will never be turned away.

It is God's 'ability to do' that gives me the 'ability to be'.

Thank you, for your company and fellowship on this journey of 'The Better Covenant - revisited'. If you have reached this point you have shown remarkable persistence. Thank you. If you would like to send us comments it will be a help for any future projects. Thank you, all.

So it remains for my to give my thanks to my companions in labour (sunergoi)

Mike Coles, from [newliferadio.co.uk](http://newliferadio.co.uk) who invited me to do a regular series for weekly publishing and has nursed me through the whole project and provided technical support.

and Robert Wurtz, the co-host and webmaster of [biblebase.com](http://biblebase.com) without whom biblebase.com would be a distant memory.

I can't begin to thank you adequately for all your willing labours in this project.

without these faithful brothers and your prayer this would have founded long ago.

▼ Appendix 1: Receiving Christ

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 four 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, however, 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 counselors or personal workers may 'go through the motions' and then declare that the seeker has 'received Christ'. This then becomes like a Catholic sacrament that 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 a 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 'counseling 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 to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* John 1:11-13 NKJV. 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 counseling format became the means of 'accepting Him' and the consequential blessings that followed. The reasoning was 'they received Christ' and became 'sons of God'; so you too may 'receive Christ' and 'become a son of God'. The pattern spread and became the norm for evangelical Christianity; to follow the counseling 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 labeled '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 the few sentences quoted earlier; *That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.* John 1:9-11 NKJV. 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 2: 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 its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.* Luke 6:44 NKJV. and again... *And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.* Luke 24:35 NKJV. It means much more than acquiring information. The world did not 'recognise' Him. Was this ignorance or defiance? We sometimes use the language of 'recognition' 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 vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance."* Matt 21:38 NKJV. 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 RSVB 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 RSVB 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 that 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 uses the word twice, the second time will give us some idea of what 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* John 14:3 NKJV. We 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 about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.* Matt 1:20 NKJV. 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. In the main his people resolutely refused to do this. 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 they '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 true 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; 1 Jo 1:5; 1 Jo 1:7-9; 1 Jo 2:10.

The second section... *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. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 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 NKJV. 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 judgment 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 whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* John 3:16 NKJV. 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 whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:14-15 NKJV. 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, *take away the serpents from us*; 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, and 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 that 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 a 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 earlier 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 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 is 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 they 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 judgment,* says John, *that Light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil.* The judgment 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 judgment 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.* 1 Jo 1:5-7 KJV The effectiveness of Christ's cleansing sacrifice is linked inseparably to 'walking in the light as 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 everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 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 3:20-21 NKJV. 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 scuttle back into the shadow or come to the Light.

It is Christ as the Light, God's Witness, that those earlier references in the gospel of John were addressing. Those who received His testimony/witness, 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 who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.* John 3:31-33 NKJV. The older versions have 'he who has received His testimony/witness has set his seal to it that God is true.' To *set to his seal*, is to give personal recognition, approval and full-hearted consent to The Witness. Those who received the Witness added their signature in endorsement. 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 70 years now I have believed that the Rolls Royce is the finest car in the world; I received this truth from my father who was an engineer, and I have never wavered 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 putting of 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 that '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 that 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 with it he can hold up the traffic. A weigh-lifter has *dunamis*, and with it he can hold 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 accomplish 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 a process, 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 'Him 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 that 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.* 1 Jo 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 an 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 eyewitnesses 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 *paralambano* 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'.

#### ▼ Appendix 2: 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 are all translations of the one Greek word.

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 a 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 that 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 he 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'.