

# When is Christ Received?

by Walton Weaver

People are sometimes asked, "Have you accepted or received Christ as your personal Savior?" The question is a legitimate question because Christ is either accepted or rejected, and the decision to accept or reject Him is a personal decision, so that when He is accepted He really does become our Savior individually and personally. The one who asks this question often does not understand exactly what the Bible teaches on how Christ is to be accepted or received, and most people in our day who have "received Christ" have not accepted Him in God's appointed way. So this is a subject of paramount importance. Have you really received Christ? Let's consider for a moment just how it is that Christ is received.

Every living person should be given the opportunity to either accept or reject Jesus Christ. The line of separation between those who are Christians and those who are not is that the one has said "yes" to Christ and the other has said "no." Writing to the Christians at Colosse, Paul said, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. . ." (Col. 2:6). These people were Christians because they had "received Christ Jesus the Lord." Only Christians have "received Christ"; all others have rejected Him, and Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (Jn 12:48).

Just how and when does one receive Christ?

*1. One receives Christ when Christ's inspired messengers are received.* Let Jesus Himself speak: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (Jn 13:20). Jesus is not referring to Oral Roberts, or Joseph Smith, or Charles Taze Russell, Mary Baker Eddy, or any other person dead or alive who simply claims to have been sent by God. It is not God who has been speaking to Oral Roberts, folks. And he did not speak to Joseph Smith or any of the other so-called modern day prophets. but Jesus did send His inspired messengers out in the first century to bear testimony of the resurrected Christ and to reveal and make known His truth to the world. To receive Christ is to receive the testimony of these eye witnesses. To reject Christ is to reject their testimony.

The epistles of John were written to warn people against receiving the testimony of any except those who had actually seen and heard, and looked upon and handled the very life that was manifested, even Jesus Christ Himself. John warned, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1). We simply cannot receive Christ while at the same time we are receiving the teaching of false prophets. To receive Christ we must receive only what He has revealed through His own chosen, inspired and sent messengers of the first century, or, His inspired apostles and prophets (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 4:6; 14:37). John, who was himself one of these inspired men, said, "We

are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us" (1 Jn 4:6). In other words, to receive God one must receive the declared message, or the message revealed and made known by them. You simply cannot receive Christ without receiving those whom He has sent.

*2. One receives Christ when he receives His word as the truth of God and then assimilates it into his own life.* One is to be commended for having the honesty of heart to recognize the truth of God when he hears it and for having the readiness of mind to obediently submit to it immediately. Paul thanked God without ceasing for the Thessalonians because, he said, "when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God . . ." (1 Thess. 2:13). This word which they had received as the truth wrought a revolutionary change in the Thessalonians. It worked in them to bring about their conversion. Paul says when he commended them for having received the word of God as the truth, that that same word still "effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). In other words, God's word began to work in these people by turning them from idols to the living God, and it continued to work in them at the time Paul wrote this letter to them.

The word of God does not work in our lives until we receive it in our lives and change as it would demand that changes be made. Even if one recognizes the truth as the truth of God and does not allow it to work in him, he has not really received Christ. James says, ". . . receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). We have not received Christ until we have received His word, and we have not received His word until we have obediently submitted to it. The Corinthians received Christ, "having been called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9), having been "called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1:2), and having received the testimony of Christ which was confirmed in them (1:6). They had received Christ, but this involved the fact that they had received the gospel which Paul had preached to them (1 Cor. 15:1-2), and they had been begotten by the gospel which Paul preached (1 Cor. 4:15). All of this happened when "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

Christ is not received until the gospel message is received, and the gospel message is not received until it is obeyed. When one receives Christ in this way, important changes take place. The remaining points we shall consider will point out specifically what these changes are.

*3. One receives Christ when he believes on Jesus Christ.* Usually this is all we are told we must do to accept or receive Jesus Christ the Lord. But the discussion in the preceding section should be sufficient to discard that false notion. We are not saved by faith only (Jas. 2:24), or by any other single item involved in the whole process of conversion. Many of the rulers, John tells us, "believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (Jn 12:42). Did they receive Jesus Christ the Lord? Certainly not! But they believed on Him.

Therefore one does not receive Christ only by the act of believing on Him. That's the point. The very first change that is brought about when one begins to receive the declared message is faith in Jesus Christ.

*4. Christ is received when the declared message works repentance in our lives.* Repentance is a change of mind. Godly sorrow works repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). So when one is made to be sorry because he has been convicted of sin by the hearing of the declared message, he makes up his mind that he is going to turn from sin to serve God.

This is repentance, and no one can receive Christ without having this change wrought in him by the hearing of the word of God. It was preaching that brought conviction into the hearts of the Jews on Pentecost, and they wanted to know what they must do (Acts 2:37). They had been brought to believe that Jesus was both Lord and Christ (vs. 36), so Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized . . ." (Acts 2:38). They could not be saved, or receive Christ the Lord, without making up their minds to forsake sin and to serve the living God.

*5. One receives Christ when Christ is confessed to be the Son of God.* "For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation" (Rom. 10:10). What is one to confess with the mouth? "That if you confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus . . .," Paul says. Confess that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, that He is the Son of God (Acts 2:36; 8:37 and cf. Matt. 16:15-16). Jesus said, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). So when we have been brought to receive Christ by believing on Him and we have been brought to receive Him by making up our mind that we are going to change our life through repentance, we then publicly acknowledge our faith in Jesus as Lord, the Son of God. We have not truly received Christ until this is done.

*6. Finally, Christ is received when one is baptized into Christ.* As noted earlier, the Corinthians heard Paul's preaching, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8). They were baptized into the one body of Christ, the church (1 Cor. 12:13), just as those who "gladly received his word were baptized" on the day of Pentecost, and were added to the church as they were being saved (Acts 2:41,47). This shows that one cannot receive Christ without receiving His word, and that one cannot receive Christ's word without being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38,41) and into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41). We become the sons of God by faith (Gal. 3:26), "for (the reason being WW) as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). So one does not "receive Christ" at the very point of faith, but at the point in his faith when he arises and is baptized to "wash away his sins" (Acts 22:16), "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), to be "saved" (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), to get "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3) so that he may become "united together in the likeness of His death," "knowing that our old man was crucified with Him" in that we have died to sin (Rom. 6:5-7).

## CONCLUSION

Friend, have you received Christ as your personal Savior? Don't be misled into believing that all you need to do to accept Him is to simply put your trust in Him and ask Him to forgive you of your sins. Upon your faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, having been convicted of sin, you must make up your mind to turn away from sin (repent), acknowledge Him publicly, or before men, to be the Son of God (confession), and be baptized into Him that you may be saved. Unless all these changes are brought about in your life when you hear the declared message, or the the gospel truth, you have not received Christ as your personal Savior.

Obey Him today! Now is the accepted time (2 Cor. 6:2). Paul thanked God that though the church in Rome had been enslaved to sin, yet they "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). You must also obey the gospel message if you are to be saved. This is more than trusting in Jesus Christ. Saving faith is trust coupled with obedience. Faith does not save until faith obeys. You can be sure that when Jesus returns only those who have obeyed the gospel will be saved (2 Thess. 1:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:17). Your faith must lead you to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and then to be baptized into Christ.