

WHAT IT MEANS TO RECEIVE THE WORD

The Scripture says in John 1:14 that the Word was made flesh. Certainly in the light of the first part of that chapter we recognize that this verse is talking about Jesus Christ. Acts 2:41 says "they that gladly received his word were baptized." Of course, we understand this to be the word spoken by Peter. However, these words were not Peter's own, but those inspired by the Holy Spirit, according to the first part of chapter two. Also, in John 14:26; 16:13 Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and bring all things to their remembrance. So, we conclude that the word which Peter spoke on Pentecost was the word of God, that which God would have them speak. Therefore, when we talk about them receiving "His" word we are in effect saying that they received "the" Word or that they received Christ.

Today we hear people talking about "receiving the word" or "receiving Christ," who have an entirely different concept of what that involves than what the Scriptures indicate is involved in receiving the word.

What was involved in "receiving the word" on the day of Pentecost? They first heard the word as Peter preached to them. When they heard what Peter said it is obvious that they believed those words because they were "pricked" in their hearts, that is, the word had an effect on them and as a result of this effect, they wanted to know what to do to be saved. In response to this request, Peter said to them "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...." Then they that "gladly received" His word were baptized. Involved in receiving the word then, is obedience to the commands contained in the word. In the Greek the words "gladly received" are actually one word and it means to accept without reservation. This is certainly what these people did. When one receives the word without reservation they receive ALL of it. If you receive the passive part of the word (faith) and yet reject the active part (works) you haven't really received it because James says that faith without works is dead Jas 2:20. These Pentecostians not only received the passive part of the word (which is really not passive at all in its fullest sense because Jesus says that believing is a work of God Jhn 6:29) they also acted on the commands. They repented and were baptized. As a result then, of this obedience they were added to the church Acts 2:47.

When one receives the word it necessitates their giving up error. These people on Pentecost had to give up their former beliefs, because they were the ones guilty of having Jesus crucified. Peter said "that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." They believed this truth, hence the phrase "pricked in their hearts". Jesus tells us in Jhn 17:17 that the word is truth. Therefore, they could not retain their error and receive the word at the same time. When Paul received Christ (the Word) he gave up his previous beliefs. In Phil 3:4-7 Paul lists his credentials but he says those things that were gain to him he counted as lost for Christ. Receiving the word necessitates giving up everything that is contrary to Christ, the word which is truth Jhn 17:17.

Some who say they want to receive the word really don't, because the cost is more than they are willing to pay. There is an example of such a one in Matt 19:16-22. When this man heard the cost involved in following (receiving) Christ he went away sorrowful because he was not willing to pay the price.

For individuals to be eternally saved they must "receive the word" in the same way these people on Pentecost did. They must not only hear the word, but also understand and act upon what is heard. This is what is referred to as obedience to the Gospel or obeying from the heart that form of doctrine and being made free from sin Rom 6:16-18. But, of course, this is not the end of our obedience; it is just the beginning. The word receivers on Pentecost continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine Acts 2:42. The Corinthians had received the Gospel and were standing in it 1Cor 15:1,2 and Paul admonishes them to be steadfast 1Cor 15:58. We must continue to work for the Lord, to be faithful to the end Rev 2:10.

When a person receives the word they accept without reservation and act accordingly, giving up all that is contrary to the word. In light of what it means to receive the word, ask yourself this question: HAVE I RECEIVED THE WORD?

(JLH)