

GREEK WORD STUDY ON “RECEIVING”

AND “ACCEPTING” CHRIST

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GREEK TERMINOLOGY

Two Greek words are used in the New Testament to denote “receiving” or “accepting” something: lambavnw (and its compounds ajpolambavnw, paralambavnw and proslambavnw) and devcomai (and its compounds uJpodevcomai, ajpodevcomai, prosdevcomai, paradevcomai, anadevcomai and ejpidevcomai).

Devcomai literally means “take” or “receive,” referring both to things physical and mental as objects. It is also used especially with persons as the object in cases of hospitality with the sense of “receive as a guest” or “welcome” (as the KJV translates in Jn. 4:45).^{1[1]} For example, “. . . if he come unto you, receive him” (Col. 4:10). In most cases, the exact determination of what kind of reception is implied by this word, whether mental, physical or both, is almost impossible. The word is used when Christ sends out The Twelve and The Seventy to describe their reception into the towns and villages (Mt. 10:14f; Mk. 6:11; Lk. 9:5; 10:8ff; etc.). Was Christ referring to a mental and spiritual reception of His disciples or a physical reception in the form of hospitality? The context would seem to include the concept of physical hospitality, as the disciples are given strict instructions about not carrying their own provisions and how to select lodgings when entering a village. The word probably refers to physical hospitality also in the case of Titus at Corinth (II Cor. 7:15) and Paul in Galatia (Gal. 4:14).

^{1[1]} Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 382.

Ujpodevcomai generally means “to receive (anything)” but more specifically it is used to mean “to entertain, harbour or shelter” as in all New Testament cases (Lk. 10:38; 19:6; Acts 17:7; Jas. 2:25)^{2[2]} and in the Shepherd of Hermas.

Ajpodevcomai usually means “to admit into the mind” or “receive favorably” as in Acts 2:41; 24:3. Lenski explains this word’s usage in the first of these references (“Then they that gladly received (apodevcomai) his word were baptized”) to mean “consenting to the word, giving it entrance” (C.K. 281).^{3[3]}

While most lexicographers give “to receive” or “to welcome” as the primary meaning for prosdevcomai^{4[4]} as in Luke 15:2 (Christ receives sinners), Liddell and Scott present the primary meaning as “to receive hospitably.”^{5[5]}

Paradevcomai seems to carry the sense of “acknowledge” or “recognize”, as in, “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans” (Acts 16:21). The “para” adds the tenor of “beside”, resulting in “to receive beside,” creating the picture of putting something in your pocket, carrying it along with you or beside you.

Ajnadevcomai may add to the nuance of singularity to the receiving: “receiving one by one, or one at a time.”

Ejpidevcomai can mean either “to receive as a guest” (III Jn. 10) or “to take along” (Acts 15:40).^{6[6]}

^{2[2]} James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1930), p.p. 656-657.

^{3[3]} Lenski, R.C.H., The Interpretation of Acts, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 111.

^{4[4]} Moulton and Milligan, p. 546, and Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 719.

^{5[5]} Liddell and Scott, p. 1505.

Though less distinct than *devcomai* and its compounds, *lambavnw* and some of its compounds are found to mean “receive” in a more passive sense. Lenski remarks, “Note that *lambavnein* has more of a passive sense, *bekommen*, ‘to get’ (B.-P. 730); *devcomai* suggests the idea of acknowledging the Gospel proclamation and hence means ‘to receive’ so as to be governed by this Gospel (C.-K. 379).”^{7[7]} We see this in II Cor. 11:4: “If he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive (*lambavnw*) another spirit, which ye have not received (*lambavnw*), or another gospel, which ye have not accepted (*devcomai*) . . .” Here the “spirit” is something that simply comes upon a person passively (he “gets” the spirit, as if it descends upon the person through no activity of his own, as one “receives” rain), as opposed to the gospel, which is more actively “accepted”. The King James Version here rightly differentiates between *lambavnw* and *devcomai* with its “received” and “accepted”. We also see this later in the same chapter where Paul reports: “Of the Jews five times received (*lambavnw*) I forty stripes save one” (vs. 24). Paul passively received these stripes. No one would suggest that he actively “accepted” the stripes, and neither would one suggest that he in any way had “faith” in the stripes.

We find a good example of the passive nature of *lambavnw* in I Cor. 4:7, “What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” *Lambavnw* is used in all three of these instances of “receive.”

Note how the compound *paralambavnw* is contrasted with *devcomai* in I Thes. 2:13: “When ye received (*paralambavnw*) the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received (*devcomai*) it not as the word of men . . .” The Word of God simply fell upon them and they passively sat under its influence (“which effectually worketh also in you that believe”), but they acknowledged its authority (one would have hoped that here the

6[6] Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 292.

7[7] Lenski, R.C.H., The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 1243.

KJV translators would have utilized “accepted” rather than “received”, as they did in II Cor. 11:4).

However, *lambavnw* takes on an active meaning, such as “take in, receive, welcome, entertain a guest,” in Johannine references where *lambavnw* may replace *devcomai*,^{8[8]} which is used only once, Jn. 4:45, in the entire Johannine corpus. It seems that John substitutes *lambavnw* and in so doing uses an uncommon definition of the word: “receive someone into one’s house” (as in II Jn. 10; Jn. 19:27; 14:3; III Jn. 8). Closely related to this, however, is “receive someone” in the sense of recognizing his authority, as in Jn. 1:12; 5:43 and 13:20.

Proslambavnw, which occurs only in the middle voice in the New Testament, has as one of four possible meanings “to receive into one’s home” or “accept in one’s society.” Thus *proslambavnw* is a compound which seems to make the usually passive *lambavnw* (except in the Johannine corpus) more active. For example, in Romans 14:1,3; 15:7 *proslambavnw* refers not to hospitality alone, but more to “accepting in one’s society.” Acts 28:2 is a definite case of hospitality employing the word.^{9[9]}

There is no evidence that either *devcomai* or *lambavnw* has the meaning of “faith” or “believing in.” For example, in Heb. 12:6 we read, “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth (*paradevcomai*).” No one would argue that God has faith or believes in human beings. Or again, consider John 14:3, where Jesus says, “I will come again, and receive (*paralambavnw*) you unto Myself.” Jesus is, of course, not implying any faith on His part in His disciples, only indicating hospitality. Jesus said in the previous chapter, “He that receiveth (*lambavnw*) whomsoever I send receiveth (*lambavnw*) Me.” Thus if faith were “receiving,” one would have faith in their evangelist as well as in Christ. In Luke 9:11 we see a case of Christ “receiving” (*devcomai*) the people following Him, and later in vs. 48 Jesus talks about people “receiving” (*devcomai*) a child in His name.

^{8[8]} *Ibid.*, p. 465.

^{9[9]} *Ibid.*, p. 724. See also Phm. 12, 17.

IN REGARD TO CHRIST

Probably the most well-known and frequently quoted passage of Scripture referred to by synergists in their use of the terminology “receiving Christ” to refer to having faith in Christ as an act of human free will is John 1:12: “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.” In examining this verse, the context is all important. The verse preceding reads: “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” As a body, the Jewish nation rejected Christ and sent Him to the Gentiles to be crucified. They did, as a body, not even give Him a hearing. They were inhospitable to Him, not acknowledging Christ’s message as even being worth paying attention to. The nation as a whole was as the hard path that the seed of God’s Word would not even penetrate. They would not even so much as “open the door” when He stood at the door knocking and calling to them (Rev. 3:20). However, there were some individuals within “His own” (the Jewish nation) that were exceptions to this rule, who did “receive” Christ, who did extend an hospitable welcome to Him and did listen to His message. They did open the door to Him when they heard Him knocking and calling, and He went in to them and supped with them. They had ears to hear, and they heard. To them He gave power, the power of the Holy Ghost, working through that Word, “to become the sons of God.” Through that divine power they came to “believe on His name.” And to put to rest any remaining thoughts of synergism, the succeeding verse adds, “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

We observe this same concept later in John when Jesus said to these same obstinate and inhospitable Jews who were turning a deaf, disdainful and scornful ear to Jesus, “Ye receive Me not”(5:43). Jesus is not telling these Jews that they made a decision to not believe in Him, but that they rejected even acknowledging that His message was from God the Father. They would not receive Him even as a prophet, let alone the promised Messiah and Son of God. Notice that Jesus said in vs. 24, “He that heareth My Word, and believeth on him that sent Me,” showing that the hearing is

separate from and precursory to the believing. Jesus continues to talk about hearing His voice in vs. 25 and vs. 28.

Jesus defines what this inhospitable rejection of Him means later in Jn. 12:48: “He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words.” Thus, in Biblical terminology, to “receive Jesus” is to “receive His words.” By contrast, the few that did give Jesus a listen with an hospitable welcome, Jesus refers to in Jn. 17:8: “I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received (lambavnw) them.” Thus to “receive” Jesus is to “receive” His words, that is, hear them. But the faith that follows is worked through that word by God Himself.

Notice in Acts 2:41 that the receiving of the Word comes first, “Then they that gladly received (ajpodevcomai) his word were baptized” (see top of page 2). There are some that consent to the Word, who give it entrance, but then there are others who close their ears to it, and it is the latter who do not “receive” Jesus.

As to the passage in Col. 2:6 (“As ye have therefore received [paralambavnw] Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him”), the passive nature of lambavnw must be understood here to grasp the meaning. Lambavnw is better translated “get” than “take.” The Holy Ghost is here saying, “Since you have gotten Jesus, so continue to live in Him.” Do not lose what you have gotten, indeed, what has been given you as a gift by God.

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me” (Mk. 9:37 and Lk. 9:48). Here, also, Jesus must be referring not to faith (lest how would he say “receiveth not Me” but the Father) but to giving ear to His message as being divine. In the same verse Jesus speaks of also “receiving” one of His disciples, and thus means the Word that the disciple brings.

In the parable of the sower, Christ spoke of both those represented by the way side and the good ground as having heard the Word, but those who are the good ground “receive” the Word, and those who are the way side have it “immediately” taken away by Satan (Mk. 4:15, 20). In other words, the believers, when they came into contact with the Word, gave it hospitable entrance so that it could do its work, whereas the unbelievers,

when they came into contact with the Word, would not even give it a hearing. In Matthew's account, we read concerning the stony ground, "He that received (spareivV, literally "had it sown upon him") the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth (lambavnw) it," thus indicating that there was joy when the Word was heard, even before it was believed, as lambavnw would indicate the passive nature of the receiving.

The only other Scripture verses that mention "receiving" Christ are Lk. 9:53 ("They did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem") and Jn. 4:45 ("When He was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received Him, having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast") which are obvious cases of hospitality or inhospitality, not faith.

There are no other passages in Scripture that refer to "receiving" Jesus Christ.

IN REGARD TO THE WORD, THE HOLY GHOST, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, ETC.

When Jesus speaks of "receiving not our witness" (that of Himself and His disciples, Jn. 3:11) He is referring to an inhospitable rejection of His Word, not even giving it a respectful hearing. This is the true meaning of "receiving not" when used in the New Testament. Later in the same chapter John the Baptist says of Jesus, "No man receiveth His testimony. He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true" (vss. 32f). The problem comes, John is saying, when a person will not even listen to Jesus, rejecting even the notion that He speaks the truth of God. This is synonymous with not "receiving Jesus."

In I Thes. 2:13 God says the same of the Thessalonian Christians, "When ye received (paralambavnw) the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received (devcomai) it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Paul is not here crediting the Thessalonians with synergistically bringing themselves to faith in Christ, but is saying, "When you got the Word, you listened to it as God's Word, not man's word, and it worked in you faith in Christ. This could not have happened if you would have tuned it out as just being another man's opinion."

When Jesus says to His disciples in Jn. 20:22, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” He is not asking them to manufacture faith in the Holy Ghost within themselves, He is simply announcing that the Holy Ghost is about to descend upon them and they will receive it as ground receives rain, a gift from above. The same is true in Acts 2:38, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive (lambavnw) the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

When Jesus says, “Whosoever shall not receive (devcomai) the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein,” He is not speaking of faith in Him, for that is the entering into the Kingdom of God itself, but is speaking of the hospitable, humble openness to the Word of that Kingdom when it comes to a person. That Word of the Kingdom, if allowed to enter the ear, will work faith and entrance into the Kingdom itself.

In conclusion, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior , worked by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace, is continuous, whether the believer be awake or asleep, whether he be an adult or child, whether under normal circumstances when he is conscious of his faith or in the severest hours of trial when he imagines that he has lost his faith. The believer has faith even when it resembles a smoking flax, for it is a gift of God, not of his own working.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

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10[1] Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 382.

11[2] James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1930), p.p. 656-657.

12[3] Lenksi, R.C.H., The Interpretation of Acts, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 111.

13[4] Moulton and Milligan, p. 546, and Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 719.

14[5] Liddell and Scott, p. 1505.

15[6] Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 292.

16[7] Lenski, R.C.H., The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 1243.

17[8] Ibid., p. 465.

18[9] Ibid., p. 724. See also Phm. 12, 17.
