

2 Corinthians 6

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on 2 Corinthians 6 emphasizes the importance of receiving God's grace genuinely and living a life that reflects His character amidst a worldly system.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:1

Topics: "Grace", "Co-Working in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the importance of working together as co-workers in Christ, urging the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain. He expresses concern for their spiritual state, highlighting that true reception of grace leads to genuine transformation and fruitfulness. Darby draws parallels from Isaiah, illustrating the call to recognize the significance of Christ's ministry and the urgency of the present time for believers. He stresses the need for believers to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects their ministry and relationship with God, while also warning against the dangers of worldly influences. Ultimately, he reassures that God desires a personal relationship with His people, calling them His sons and daughters.

Transcript

"Workers together with him." "With him" is not exactly right; the "with" is there, but not the "him." I believe the idea is that of workers with one another; they are companions or journeymen, because they work together. "We then as co-workers beseech that ye [Corinthians] receive not the grace of God in vain." They had all received it; but whether they had all received it in their hearts is another question. He looks at them as Christians, but he had become uneasy about them because they were going on so badly. It is no use trying to weaken these particular statements which we often find in Scripture. It is not bearing fruit merely, for if they did receive it in vain, they were not quickened at all. It is not that I have received grace to no purpose, if I am saved by it. I have received the gospel to a very great purpose if I am going to heaven. The grace of God comes to people, and then, as in Hebrews 6, they have tasted the good word of God; and in such cases as theirs it was not possible to save them after, because they had "fallen away." In the parable of the sower, it says "received the word." A man may receive a tract and tear it up, and throw it away; or if he reads it, he may treat the truth the same.

Isaiah 49 comes in here, because there we have their sin before Jehovah, and next against His Christ. "Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken, ye people, from afar; Jehovah hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name, and he hath made my mouth like a sharp

sword, in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me, and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." And then Messiah says, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain, yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah and my work with my God; and now, saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength." Then in verses 7 and 8 we come to the Redeemer of Israel, and God owning Messiah in resurrection glory, though Israel has rejected Him, and now is the accepted time when Christ has been heard though rejected. It is Christ who has been heard in an accepted time, and Isaiah applies it to the Jews at the end; but we come in between, and by the Holy Ghost come down we believe, though without seeing, and get heavenly things; they will believe and see and get earthly things. We have the better thing now. "I have heard thee" - Christ. Christ used the acceptable time in His ministry, though, if in Christ, we are accepted, of course.

344 In our chapter we must link together verses 1 and 3. Paul had the ministry of reconciliation, and he would give no offence lest it should be blamed. There were three things that came from God in Christ: God was reconciling; was not imputing trespasses; and did commit this ministry to Paul. Christ had to die first, of course, and this rest follows; but the agents should walk so that no slur could be put upon the ministry. He is here stating what his ministry was and what he went through in it. He stood there to represent God, and had to conduct himself so that nobody should have anything to say. But he had the devil against him and all things. An ungodly walk would bring reproach against the testimony of course, but here it is of ministry he is speaking.

It is better to leave out the "yets" in verses 8-10. Some looked on him as a deceiver, and some looked on him as true; "unknown and well-known; as dying, yet behold we live"; for a kind of 'yet' comes in here. It is the Holy Ghost in verse 6 and the power of God in verse 7. God acts by the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost was a direct manifestation of power and grace, yet He might be directing and guiding without apparent power. People have gone all wrong about the Holy Spirit; and we have not the signs now. In Galatians he appeals to all Christians, "received ye the Spirit?" etc. Instead of persons looking whether they have the Holy Ghost as they do now, he speaks to them as having the Holy Ghost; he is not speaking of tongues, but of what ought to be found now. I have no doubt Paul displayed the Holy Ghost in a way that we do not (I do not mean with signs); but we have grieved Him so that there are different degrees of the consciousness of the presence of God. For instance, in a gathering there is a solemnity at a time when not a word is uttered, and at another time they hold their tongues only because they have nothing to say. I have no doubt the presence of the Holy Ghost was much more sensible than it is now. At the present time how could you ask a number of persons, "How did you receive the Holy Ghost?" when they do not know whether they have the Spirit or not? I can shew you books by bishops and others who say that at first the church had the Holy Ghost; but now we have not, and so we have to go to college; and all that kind of thing.

345 The recompense in verse 13 refers to himself. There is a great deal in that condition of the apostle, which is very instructive. He represented God as he ought to do; his vessel was all smashed - all that would be reckoned in a man - and consequently the power of God could come out in him. The vessel is all done with, and God is there. That was so in Paul, and he approved himself as given here. This has nothing to do with signs, but is what should be now. "Confirming the word with signs following" was at the first, and was all provisional. Then the church lost power, when it gave up waiting for God's Son from heaven, though that, I believe, was ordered in God's wisdom. The church was never looked at as

continuing; we assume a false thing, in such a way, looking at it. Then, people say, the church was only set up for thirty years or so. Of course God knew about it, but He does not put it out as to continue, but to go and meet Christ and come back. They all slumbered and slept, but they ought not to have done thus. The fact is stated, yet it is sin. The church did go to sleep, but there is no pre-arrangement for its continuance; it is the same virgins who do go out to meet their Lord when they awake. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming," shews just the same; and it is the same servant who is punished. There is no arrangement made for continuing the church.

If you say, Then are we not right to help ourselves as best we can? I reply, Very well, go and make apostles, then. People say that the church is competent like every other society: it all sounds plausible. I know of no prohibition against carrying about the mass, and the "Corpus Christi," or whatever you call it. Some do make elders; but why do they not make apostles too? That is what I said once, and they felt the folly of it; but they could make only an imitation of elders. We have certain things which guide us as to practices; there are young widows as well as old widows; and all such directions are available for the present time. What is said about bishops would be guidance for those who have it on their hearts to exercise oversight. It was this that broke them down at Geneva. When I went there, three brethren would not speak to each other. They were called pastors, and I asked who made these three pastors. They had chosen them and would have them. "Oh," I said, "you assumed the power to make them, and now you must take the consequences." Yet we find ample provision for godly men, but appointments must fail. Suppose it said, There must be order among you here, whom are you going to put in authority? In 1 Peter 5 the elders are not ordained. It is a more general use of the term there. I see no elders among the Jews; elders might be known very well without official appointments.

346 They were not straitened in Paul's heart (v. 12). Paul's affections were as large, and full, and free as could be. The same thought is in what our Lord says, "how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" Then come verses 14-16, etc., giving the relative position of believers, and as the temple of the living God. Unbelievers, as amongst them, are not alluded to here, though there might have been such. The coming out is from the world. It would embrace anything where you have to act in common. The "unclean thing" was the heathen world then, no doubt, but it is much more than that now. You could not apply this to Protestantism and Romanism; for we are perfectly warranted in treating Protestantism as the world. Popery is a different thing. In Sardis Protestants are treated as the world, for we find there, "I will come on thee as a thief," which is what it was said He would do to the world in writing to Thessalonica; but He says He will overtake them so. They have the responsibility of Christians, and are treated as the church in responsibility, and yet they are dealt with as the world.

Verse 14. It is a new subject altogether; but if a Christian gets into the world, the heart gets narrowed, and then into deeper sin. The "world" is a great system, which the devil has built up round man, to give men their sphere of enjoyment. We have a beautiful expression at the end of the chapter: "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." That is added here to what is quoted from Isaiah. Lord and Almighty are the two Old Testament names of God. He was "Almighty" to Abraham, and "Lord" to Israel; and now He says "Father" to you, and ye are My sons and daughters. Isaiah could say, "doubtless thou art our father," and it may be in that general way that He will be as father to the remnant. "Belial" is a word that means wickedness. The separation applies to everything. Not to those who are married; we have instruction elsewhere about such, not to leave the one the other: "for what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

347 2 Timothy 3 would apply to Protestantism now; and to more that is not Protestantism - wherever we find the form of godliness, but the power denied, and from all such we are to turn away. It is not merely open wickedness, it is more; it is a form of godliness. I think people ought to have a great tenderness towards Protestantism; they do own the word of God. They may be the more guilty, having the more light, and not acting up to it: but they systematically, at least, own God's authority in His word, while many others put the church in its place. Romanists say positively, quoting from Augustine, they would not receive the gospel if the church had not given it to them. They say you must have the church to authenticate the words, and that is denying the direct authority of God over the conscience, unless somebody else comes in to give authority. The priest will ask you, How do you know it is the word of God? and in that way they always take infidel ground. Such is their principle. There is an utter denial both of the truth of the word and of its authority; and beside that, they have put in the Apocrypha - have corrupted the word of God. If any will not believe the word of God, unless the church says it, it is not the word they believe as such, but the church. It is under the power of Satan, I doubt not, that there is brought in not merely a denial of authority in the word, but also the setting up of the right of private judgment. Now this is meddling with God's rights. If I send a message to my servant, and you will not let him have it, you are not meddling with the servant's rights so much as with mine. And God has sent this message to those who call themselves Christians; but if you will not let them have it, that is meddling with God's rights, and not merely with man's. In a certain sense, man has no right to the word of God; he is a vile sinner, and has not a right to anything. But if I set up and judge the word of God, this is open infidelity. I take the ground that the word of God judges us, not we it: otherwise it is clear that there is no owning the word of God as His word. The moment it is said, I must judge, I am in the place of authority, and in the place of the word. I have nothing to do with judging.

348 If I were asked how I know it is the word of God, I should reply as I once did to a priest: I asked him, if I took a knife, and gave him an awful gash in his arm, how would he know that this was a knife I had. He could not say the same of the Maccabees: no one dare say that. And I will tell you why: because the writer himself, at the end of the book, says, "If I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired; but if slovenly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto." And again, he says something like this: It is not good to be always drinking wine, but to drink sometimes a little water.

As to teaching children the word of God, I have often said that it is like coals in a grate where there is no fire; but it is known that coals make a fire, and if a fire is wanted, the coals are not thrown out, but they lie there all ready. So with the knowledge of the word of God in people and children too, though we know very well that educational knowledge of the word is not faith. And in using the word of God, we should try to deal by it, and not reason about it. I remember once a man in a coach saying to me, "You use that book, but I do not own it." I said, "That is all very well, my friend; but I have a well-tempered sword, and it would be no use for an opponent to say whether he owned it or not." The point for us is not the rejecting of the word, but using it. I told him, "I believe God loves me perfectly; but supposing there is no God at all, you have done heaps of things that your conscience condemns." He owned that, and said he was very unhappy.

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