

# A Christian- Who and What Is He Now and Hereafter?

by John Nelson Darby

---

*A Christian is a revelation of God's glory, and his position in Christ gives him a new hope and a new life, which he lives out as a pilgrim and a stranger in the world.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 15:27, Isaiah 53:11, Matthew 15:27, Romans 8:17, Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 5:25-27, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 1:3-5, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 22:3-4

**Topics:** "Christian Identity", "Grace and Redemption"

---

## Description

John Nelson Darby explores the profound identity of a Christian, emphasizing the distinction between who a Christian is now and who they will be in the future. He highlights that a Christian is currently the expression of God's power amidst evil, while hereafter, they will embody the results of that power when evil is eradicated. Darby reassures believers that their standing before God is based on Christ's work, not their own state, and that the love of God remains constant throughout both states. He encourages Christians to recognize their identity as heirs and joint-heirs with Christ, and to live in light of their heavenly position while navigating the challenges of this world.

---

## Transcript

### A CHRISTIAN- WHO AND WHAT IS HE NOW AND HEREAFTER?

It is rather a solemn thing to say what a Christian is, especially when we think of what it is that made him one. God is acting so as to glorify Himself. It is a solemn thing to be a revelation of that of which Christ is worthy-of the result of Christ's work ; as it is said, " He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied," Isaiah 53 : 11. It does us good to think of this, because it makes us judge ourselves, to see how far we are really that. Not that we ever shall be the perfect display of it until we are " like him " (i John 3 : 2), until we see Him as He is, and are conformed unto His image in glory. Still, if we bear Christ's name, we should seek to present a fitting result of His work in the world.

That is what a Christian is. Hence it becomes a solemn thing to say what he is. Still, whilst it is a solemn question, it is a matter of grace. There is such a comfort in this thought! Whilst most solemn, it is always happy, because it is of grace the free, full, and sovereign grace of God. This all helps us a little.

With regard to the question itself, there is a great difference between what a Christian is " now," and what he will be " hereafter." Not as regards the spring of life, redemption, etc., but now a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of evil ; hereafter he will be the expression of the result of that power which has put away the evil, when all the evil is put away.

Take us at our best estate now-a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of the prevalence of evil. A Christian will not be that exactly hereafter ; he will then be the expression of the result of God's power, in the highest sense, when the evil is put away. As to the foundation in Christ's blood, and the power of His resurrection, and the love of God, this as much belongs to his state hereafter as it is the basis of what he is now. God's love in Christ will be the spring of my joy then as it is now.

One thing that gives such settledness of peace (as it regards his own soul's peace) to the Christian is, that it does not depend upon what he is now, or will be then, but upon that which is common to both states. The ground of it is the same now that it will be in heaven. The thing displayed may differ; but the ground of confidence is the same now as hereafter. As to the source and spring of it in the love of God, His love is as true, and as perfect, and as complete, and as much manifested towards me now, as it will be when I am in glory; He cannot in His divine love go beyond the gift of His Son. The life also that I have now is not a different life from that I shall have then. No doubt the body hinders it. Its manifestation will be different ; but the life is the same.

And the ground of peace changes not. That upon which I rest for eternity is just as much now as it will be then. The blood of Christ has been shed and has been carried into the holiest ; Heb. 9, 10. Whatever our conflicts, our conflicts (properly speaking) spring from that ground being entirely settled. Whoever is in conflict as to that has not got to God, or otherwise has not understood the ground of his standing. Unsettlement of soul may arise from a man's not having seen the gospel simply ; but as to the ground of his standing, it is just as much accepted now as it will be then. There is not another Christ to die-no fresh blood to be shed. Nor is there another revelation to be made. There is not a love to spring up in the heart of God that has not been told out. There may be a fuller apprehension of that which has been accomplished, but there is nothing new either to be accomplished or revealed.

Whoever has not got upon that ground (has not had that question settled in his soul) has not got as yet upon simple Christian ground. God may be working in his soul ; but I do not call having life the getting upon simple Christian ground. There may be life without the knowledge of what God is as for us, of the perfectness of His love towards us, and of what He has done for us in Christ. Life may make me anxious, and hope, and have desires after God, and long to be assured of His favour, and the like; but, when we speak of a " Christian," we speak of what a Christian is in Scripture, and Scripture always speaks of him--of a believer in any state as to his standing. It is very necessary to see this.

We must not confound the exercises of a Christian with the standing of a Christian. The ground of his standing is God's work. In his exercises there comes in himself; his flesh, his ignorance, and many other things alas! may be working. But it is entirely according to God's thoughts, and not according to my thoughts, that my standing is to be judged of. Moreover the exercises of my own soul are never the same as God's judgment about them.

When I am thinking of these, it is my actual state that occupies me ; but were God to take notice of my actual state, He must condemn me. What He has regard to is the work of Christ for me, and my union with Him, not in this respect my actual state at all. It is always important to recollect that, because my own

judgment of myself ought to be as to my actual state.

Whatever his exercises, however these may vary, the Christian, in one sense, is just the same, because he is in God's sight as Christ. Christ being the perfectly accepted man at God's right hand, the Christian is looked at by God in the same position (Eph. 2 : 6), sitting in heavenly places " in Christ." In that sense there cannot be any difference ; and the ground of our acceptance cannot ever be imperfect. I repeat, we must not confound the movements of life with the ground of our acceptance. We can never have this too simple and clear. It does not make one despise the first actings of life, its first movings and breathings, however feeble and imperfect: I do not despise my child because he is not a man.

In the Ephesians (where what a Christian is is fully brought out), men are viewed as the " children of wrath " in their very nature (necessarily heirs of wrath, because God is what He is, and man is what he is.) Every other distinction is lost sight of, because, in his character of a sinner, man is brought fully into the light of God. But having thus told us what man is, the apostle does not stop with man ; he turns round and begins at the other end ; he now tells us what God is, that He is " rich in mercy," and (as the effect of this) that He has set us in heavenly places in Christ.

But when we come a little more to detail, I would recall the distinction which I made at first-that a Christian is now the expression of the power of divine life and the divine presence (divine life, I mean, aided by the power of God), in the midst of evil that he knows ; but hereafter he will be the blessed expression of the result of God's power when evil is put away. So with Christ (there was no evil of course in Him ; yet, speaking abstractly, it was the same thing ; in Him it was perfect) when here ; He was what He was in the midst of evil. There cannot be any increase in it in itself ; but the manifestation of divine power in us is capable of an indefinite increase.

Redemption, however, precedes everything else (I do not mean by this that it precedes the counsels of God), First, Christ " loved the church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish," Eph. 5 : 25-27. Redemption precedes the washing. Washing may go on, but it comes after redemption. He makes her His, before He sets about making her what He would have her to be. There may not be a clear thought as to it ; but the thing is done nevertheless. Redemption being accomplished, the Lord sets about producing in us the effects and fruits of His grace in conformity to Himself.

The first effect of divine life in the midst of evil is not merely to see, but to have the conscience exercised about, certain things. The moment life begins to work, we get the consciousness of evil inside, as well as of evil outside ; that is, it gives the judgment of evil in ourselves. Not that the instant Christ is presented to the soul in grace, the soul sees the evil plainly; it may see the grace and blessing, knowing evil in a general way, without being exercised about it through any definite application of what Christ is to the man within; there may be rather the loveliness of Christ attracting than any deep work in the conscience. I can quite understand that. But then, before we get into a properly Christian state (the process may be longer or shorter), the necessary effect of life working is to give us the judgment of what man is, in the main bearing of his present condition, as looked at by the Holy Ghost. It brings in the consciousness of what we are in the presence of what Christ is. Then we get the man brought down into the distinct consciousness that it is all over with him. And it is all over with him. I mean by this, not merely that he has sinned and there is condemnation, but that he has no right or title or claim to anything now that he has, either to the promises of God or to anything else. Now that is the place the soul has to be brought to (so hard to come

to), to find out what it is in God's presence. He may hope to get out of the scrape if he thinks he has any right to the promises, because these may help him; but it is no use talking of God's promises when God is talking of what I am and of judgment. If I am thinking about what I may be some time or other, promises have their place, they come in most beautifully ; but if it is what I am, promises do not touch that. The Syrophenician woman (Matt. 15) will serve as an illustration. No promise could meet her condition ; for as a Gentile she had not any claim to the promises. The Lord says, " I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." If you come to me as an Israelite, I may do something for you ; otherwise " it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto dogs." But when she replies, " Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table," she in effect says, God is rich in mercy; and Christ cannot say He is not-that there is nothing in God for a poor sinner.

I do not believe that a person gets upon right Christian ground (one has to make allowance for ignorance, but there is no true, no solid ground, as to simple and abiding peace), until the soul has been brought to the consciousness that it has no claim whatever or title to promise.

Having been brought down to this by what goes on within, there may be attraction ; but the first full effect is that the man is judged, he sees what he is, and becomes entirely hopeless as to what he is, and is turned over entirely to the thought of what God is. We have only to say, " What hath God wrought! " I am now upon new ground, namely, upon that of what God is towards a sinner who is altogether vile. If the sinner is perfectly vile, God is perfectly good. Further, I come to see what He has done because He is so. It is not that He has taken him out of the world. " I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world," etc. He will do that by-and-by.

The first thing in this new life, inasmuch as it is all in Christ, is, that He is raised from the dead. We have to look at what God has done in Christ. I find Christ dead because of sins (our sins) ; and then I find the quickening life-giving power of God coming in and raising Him from the dead. I should separate this entirely from the heavenly standing of the saints. We have all been too much accustomed to confound these two things, resurrection-life, and heavenly standing. What I see as the effect of resurrection-life is this :-a man quickened and raised with Christ becomes a pilgrim down here. This is not the whole of a Christian. But it is the power of divine life in the new creature moving in a world that does not belong to him, and to which he does not belong. The Christian begotten by the resurrection of Christ is a distinct thing to consider from a Christian sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. Though the same individual is both, they are distinct things to consider.

In 1 Peter i we read, " Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath [not, " blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," as in the Ephesians ; but] begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ; to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time," v. 3-5. I find here persons begotten unto a lively hope, and what is their hope ? are they sitting in heaven ? No, they are hoping for it. Therefore the apostle says (chap. 2 : i i), " Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." It is the Christian on his pilgrimage that is contemplated. He is a stranger here. He has an inheritance in heaven ; when he is in his inheritance, he will be no stranger ; but he is not there, he is going towards heaven. He is a resurrection-man on earth, walking through the world with new affections and feelings, going on towards his inheritance, but he is not there ; an Israelite in the wilderness, redeemed from Egypt, and a stranger, but not in Canaan. And there comes in the trial of faith. The apostle goes on to say, " Wherein ye greatly

rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations : that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Where do I find the Christian in Ephesians ? Not going a journey at all ; he is sitting down ; and where ? " In heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is what I am doing now ; I am sitting in heaven, settled there. And, Christ being Heir of all things," the inheritance is not heaven. The inheritance of Ephesians is different from that in Peter; it is all that Christ possesses, and therefore earth comes in. The inheritance of " all things " is the heavenly man's hope ; but heaven is his home, his position. In Peter heaven is his hope : he is going towards heaven as his home, and towards his inheritance which is in heaven. There I get a very different condition.

Both these things are true of the same person-both are true of the Christian. It is good to have the trial of faith, it supposes faith to be there ; it is good to sit down with Christ-, where no trial is, and it is good to come down into trial. But these are different conditions. The place of Christ on the mount, when with Moses and Elias (Luke 9), was different in the midst of the excellent glory from that in which He stood when He came down from the mount, and had to meet the crowd, and then cast out the devil. My true position as a heavenly man is to sit in heavenly places in Christ ; but on the other hand, as begotten to a new hope by the resurrection of Christ, it is simply going through the world, but it is through the world that I am going. Here I am, a new creature, quickened and raised up with Christ; and what a world am I in! So with regard to Christ's coming; if walking on earth, I am waiting for Christ, the hope of the coming of Christ, and His appearing to set things right here ; but if sitting in heaven, I am there in Christ, and wait to be there with Christ actually, and there enjoy Christ fully. The Lord's coming is not spoken of in the Ephesians ; the saints are viewed as sitting in heaven.

I get these two elements of a Christian's position ; and in one sense I do not call one more important than the other. I may look at the Christian at the springhead of peace, in full enjoyment of heavenly places, and in settled peace with God, and fighting for Him in conflict with Satan. But I cannot have him fighting for God in Canaan till I get him into Canaan; I may have him in Egypt under the enemy's power, but that is not conflict with him. It needs redemption by God. But this places him in the wilderness, a second element of his Christian life.

A person acting under the consciousness, and in terror, of Satan's power, fearing he may be lost if left there, is sometimes more in earnest than when he has got peace ; but I do not trust this energy. He has not learned what the flesh is, though he may have learned what Satan's tyranny is. It is when he has to say to God that he will find out what the flesh is. A man will always go fast enough if he finds Satan behind him. The Israelites travelled faster when Pharaoh was at their back, than they did afterwards in their stages in the wilderness. There was no murmuring because of the way when Pharaoh was behind them; but then it was afterwards in the wilderness that they were put to the test. Then came the question, Is Christ sufficient, or is the manna " light food " ? If a man is not spiritual, he must get something to satisfy his craving. All this is put to the test ; put to the test, not when a man is flying from Pharaoh, but when he is walking with God.

And there comes in the mediation of Christ. In this wilderness state I get Christ between me and God-" if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous " ; but this is not union with Christ : I am looked at in myself ; we get individualised. A man may be floundering about, through not having his eye simply fixed on Christ, not knowing how to get to the end ; but he finds a thread let down

from heaven to bring him to the place exactly where he ought to be, while he is only thinking of the mud, or judging himself for not having valued Christ enough. There are a thousand thoughts and feelings and affections brought out, and into play, as the result of our having resurrection-life. We get the constant loving care and tenderness of Christ brought home to the soul ; and there is a necessary character of intercourse with Christ which heaven itself will not give.

This is one part of a Christian. He is a pilgrim and a stranger in the power of resurrection-life, with the mediation of Christ carried on, not to procure for him life, but to maintain his intercourse and communion with God in the light on the footing of what Christ is there. On the footing of that, himself imperfect, he is maintained in intercourse with a perfect God. Everything that the heart of man can be exercised about is met by the fulness of God through the mediation of Him who is both God and man.

The other thing is this (where there is no question or trial at all), the Christian sitting in heavenly places. And there, let me say, it is not yet the church, though in touching on it we touch the church's position. As resurrection-life did not take a man into heaven, so taking him into heaven does not in itself put him into the church. That is, it may be viewed as an individual thing. When I get into heaven, I am getting wonderfully close to the truth of the union of the church with Christ; still I may look at myself as a single individual in heaven, without at all taking in the unity of the body which is the church.\* I can speak of the " children of God," and of " joint-heirs," without bringing in the idea of the body. I take the Christian sitting in heavenly places. As an individual Christian I have done with conflicts when I get there ; it is no longer the journey in exercise of heart. I shall still have conflicts with Satan, but these are for God. I may too have daily to judge my flesh in these conflicts; but judging the flesh is not conflict for God ; it is a different thing to have conflict for God, and to be judging the flesh as hindering. When in heaven I am in the result of God's work.

\* The difficulty of separating these two things in the mind is this : the moment I talk about " sitting in heavenly places " I must bring in Christ, because it is " in Christ " that I am there ; and thus, also, the whole church is sitting in heavenly places in Him.

In the Book of Joshua, before a single conflict, there was a table spread, and they had done with the manna. God had spread a table for them in the presence of their enemies (chap. 5). When they got across the Jordan, they sat down and ate the " old corn of the land." The manna (the provision for the wilderness) had ceased, and they were eating the " old corn of the land " ; they had Christ looked at as indigenous to heaven. It is not for my wants that I have Christ in heaven ; I have no wants there, I have Him there to enjoy Him, to sit down at God's table and feed with everlasting delight upon what God delights in. It is the " old corn of the land " that I sit down to there. And mark the difference as regards the passover. They did not eat it with the blood upon the doorposts, as in Egypt ; they were there enjoying the results of redemption in the consciousness of the quiet security of the land. The aspect of the blood in Egypt was that of keeping God away as a judge. They were sitting down too in the plains of Jericho, in the presence of that great city, the type of all the power of the enemy ; and there they ate the " old corn of the land " (Jericho's land in a certain sense), before one bit of conflict began. So with the Christian.

And here comes in the connection between our sitting in heavenly places and our passage through the world. I should be manifesting distinctly what is heavenly here, and thus be practically a heavenly man, in the midst of worldly men. I should be a heavenly man, as one that is there and at home there, shewing out what I have learned and enjoyed there. Christ was, while walking and acting on earth, " the Son of man which is in heaven." He manifested towards the world the blessedness of the spirit and tone and character

of heaven. He could not be Messiah for the Jews without being the Son of God for men.

If a Christian man is not walking in the Spirit, if the flesh is not subdued, he cannot display to the world the temper and spirit and character of heaven-he is manifesting something else. But the conflicts of the heavenly places (Eph. 6 : 12) are not merely conflicts in the subduing of our flesh; they are conflicts carried on in realising and laying hold of the things in Canaan that belong to ourselves and others. If Joshua and the Israelites took cities in Canaan, it was because they were in Canaan. Our enemies are there, and there it is we should meet them. There are things in which we have to be faithful on earth ; but there are also things that belong to us because we are sitting together in heavenly places in Christ. A man may be consistent in the one, without displaying the heavenly man. You may see some tolerably consistent on earth, whose souls are not seeking to realise what is theirs in Christ : Satan's effort is ever to hinder our doing that. We cannot carry the flesh into the heavenly conflict. If my flesh is not mortified, I cannot wield the weapons of that warfare. The flesh always brings in Satan's power, who has got a title against it; and God can never act with the flesh, or display His power for us against our enemies, where it is allowed. If we were walking as born of God, and as having on the whole armour of God, the flesh being habitually mortified, he could have no effect; we should be able to go on in the simplicity of our own service, and he could not come in with his wiles, as in the case of Achan (Josh. 7), and of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9). The moment we get upon heavenly ground, as soon as ever Joshua is in Canaan, I see the Lord's sword drawn, and the question is, " Art thou for us, or for our adversaries ? " So with us, there is the drawn sword. The moment we get into heavenly places, the Canaanites are against us. The church of God should be seeking to realise by faith whilst down here all that belongs to it as sitting there in Christ. As soon as Joshua crossed the Jordan, it was Canaan; but Canaan and conflict. All this has the character of the power of God brought in where evil is.

As Christians we have to be pilgrims in consistency with our condition in the wilderness. The Lord may give us palm trees and wells of water (Exodus 15 : 27) ; the ark may go before us to search out a resting place (Num. 10 : 33) ; but if we are not prepared to go with the cloud whenever it moves, we are not pilgrims and strangers, and we in heart go back to Egypt. But the heavenly man, besides his being a man with resurrection-life and the pilgrim of faith, is to be the manifestation down here in the world of that which is heavenly. It may be in the power of hope, but the thing which he presents is that which is his now. He shews plainly and distinctly that he is Canaan, and acts upon the ground of being there. If the land was not as yet cleared of its inhabitants, whose abominations defiled it, still Joshua knew what was suited to it ; and therefore, when he had taken the kings and hanged them, he did not leave them there after the sun went down; Josh. 10. He could not allow God's land to be defiled.

As to what the Christian is " hereafter," it may be said he is a risen man still, a heavenly man still. Hereafter, as an individual, he will be the perfect result of the power of God, not in the midst of evil, but of the power of God that has put aside the evil. " There shall be no more curse ; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads," Rev. 22 : 3, 4. It is not another man, but the same man, in the perfect enjoyment of blessedness in the midst of good. There are many points of view in which who and what a Christian is now and hereafter might be taken up. The question is far from being exhausted.

One branch of the subject, not touched upon as yet, divides itself into two parts-heirship, and reigning with Christ. A Christian is an heir, as well as a child, an "heir of God" and a " joint-heir with Christ," Rom. 8 : 17. Again, he will reign with Christ; and it may be of use to see what the part in our life here is corresponding to that of reigning. The inheritance is connected with our being children, " if children, then heirs," etc. The

moment a person is in the position of a child, there is an heir. The reigning part we find connected with suffering: " If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Both these things are no doubt spoken of the Christian; still this is the principle, " if we suffer with him," etc.

Again, there is another character which this statement suggests to the mind, and that is his priestly character. I only refer to this now. We are kings and priests unto God. In taking up this it would be interesting for us to see the present intercessional character of priesthood ; for in reigning by and by it will be as a royal priesthood, rather than intercessional.

J. N. Darby

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/a-christian-who-and-what-is-he-now-and-hereafter/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**