

A Reading on Ephesians 1

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on Ephesians 1 explores the themes of faithfulness, Christ's dual nature, and the richness of God's grace in our lives as believers.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Identity in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Ephesians 1, emphasizing the significance of being 'faithful' and 'saints' as a reflection of one's faith in God and Christ. He highlights the dual nature of Christ as both Son and Man, which is foundational to understanding our relationship with God. Darby explains that believers are chosen to be holy and blameless, and that our blessings are found in Christ, which are both spiritual and eternal. He discusses the concept of adoption and being accepted in the Beloved, underscoring the richness of God's grace and the hope of our calling as joint-heirs with Christ. The sermon concludes with the assurance of the Holy Spirit as a seal of our inheritance until the redemption of God's purchased possession.

Transcript

You get that word "faithful" added in the first verse of Ephesians and Colossians. "Saints" means that God has sanctified them; but "faithful," that is what they were; they were in the exercise of faith towards God and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is having faith, but at the same time it practically comes to being faithful to the position we are in. Faithful is that they have the faith. It is a great principle, not merely here that they were consistent in everything, but that they were characterized by walking in the faith. "The life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." You will find that that is a principle of conduct all through ordinary life. "I live by the faith," because it gives a different spring, and character to the whole life. "We walk by faith, not by sight." It is not that each person is exactly consistent in everything, but their life was a life of faith, an object before them which governed their lives. It is an object outside the heart and outside the world, and therefore it carries the heart through the world independent of it.

Then we get Christ presented distinctly in a double character - as Son of the Father and as Man - and that lies at the root of our whole condition too. He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ as Man, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as Son. That runs all through. "My Father and your Father." During His life He always said Father, because He was a Son. On the cross, when He was dying, drinking the cup, He said, "My God;" but in Gethsemane He said "Father;" and at the end He says, "Father, into thy hands I commit

my spirit." But after He is risen (John 20) He uses both together - "My Father . . . my God" - as if He would say, "I have brought you in righteousness to God, and into the place of sons with the Father." And it is the first time He calls them "brethren." When the disciples found He was risen they were not gathered at all; it was Mary's message that practically brought that out. They were then gathered, and Christ with them.

You get here "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then the apostle goes on to unfold Christ. In Heb. 1:8 you find Him first addressed as God - "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" and then, when He is looked at as Man in the next verse, it is, "God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows," and then what makes it wonderful is that He brings in others as His companions - "fellows:" addresses Him as God in one verse, and calls us His companions at the end. You get Christ in these two characters, as Man and as Son. Being a Son, it is of great moment to us that He is a Man; He did not take up angels, but the seed of Abraham. In Eph. 1 these two names are brought out, verse 4 the name of God, and verse 5 the name of Father. God has "chosen us in Him . . . that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" Christ was holy, blameless in His ways, and He is love - just what we are before God. Then in verse 5 it is as Father; both names used for the character in which we are before God. But we must not pass over verse 3. There we find the best kind of blessings, in the best place; they are in Christ, and they are all there. We have temporal mercies assuredly, but that is just a kind of passing thing, and not our portion. Here it is all that we shall be in heaven. The Holy Ghost being here, we get them all in spirit now, everything. Verse 3 is true now in measure according, as we know the power of the Spirit, though of course we have to wait for our bodies; but what is moral is real to us now.

In Ephesians we get it all as it is in the mind of God. In Romans it is just the opposite; it begins with man's responsibility. The only fact you get at all in the Ephesians is, that Christ was raised up to the right hand of the Father, at the end of chap. 1 (you get the blessings of course); chap. 3 is special, because it gives Paul's administration. By giving the truth to us as it is in the mind of God, we get it in its absolute perfectness.

Verse 4 is God's nature, and I see that the thought of God is to have me answering to His nature and in His presence. We are to be before Him according to His own nature, and we are in His presence. We have a nature capable of enjoying this, and are in the presence of an object that is ever to be enjoyed - God in fact. It is just what Christ was; He was "holy, and without blame," and always before God. We shall have it perfectly when we are before God, but it is our place now by the Spirit. Then in the next verse you get the Father, and to give it its full character He says "to Himself;" and there is another thing very beautiful in this verse: it is "according to the good pleasure of His will." He did not say that in the previous verse, because it is not His will to have an unholy being before Him (there are lots of unholy beings before Him of course); and that therefore hangs on the nature of God, and so He does not say, "According to the good pleasure of His will." But in verse 5 it is this special kind of love that makes us "children." Always in Scripture we find we are predestinated to something; it is some plan God has to bring us into blessing. We have it here twice (vv. 5 and 11). This is a wonderful passage, because we get Christ before God, holy and without blame, and we get Him as Son; and He takes us into both these places. And that is what He calls "the glory of His grace" (v. 6), to bring us into His presence in Christ, according to what Christ is. You get more in the English word "adoption," for it is putting us into the place of sons; but the way we get into the place of sons is by being born of God. Generally John speaks of being children. The nature is children, but when you get sons in the general it is used for grown-up children. Children is a more tender word. In this passage we have nothing to do with children as distinct from sons. It is having a part with Christ that makes us sons, and the Holy Ghost gives us the consciousness by which we cry "Abba, Father."

The difference between counsel and purpose is, that purpose is more the intention of the will, and counsel the wisdom of the mind. All these thoughts and purposes are "the glory of His grace," and then He says, "Wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." He does not say "in Christ," but "in the Beloved;" for we are loved as Christ is loved. And only in verse 7 does He come to what met our responsibility and ruin. After he has put us completely in the place as it is in God's mind, then he says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." It does not say "the glory of His grace" here, but "according to the riches of His grace;" it is given to us according to the wealth of God. When we come for this redemption we must come according to our wants; but our wants are not the measure of what we have got in the cross. There we have God spending His own Son for us according to the riches of His grace. When I do come to Him, I find I have forgiveness according to what God is, and not merely according to what I wanted. He meets our poverty, but He meets it according to His own riches. It is striking how every word has its weight in this passage. I am "accepted in the Beloved," not merely that the sins are blotted out.

That closes the position, and then he comes to the dispensation; and he refers to that at the end of the chapter. "The hope of His calling" (v. 18) is what we have been upon now. Then you get that this grace is not merely redemption, and forgiveness, and so on, but that, having put us into this place of perfect blessing, He unfolds all His intentions as to Christ Himself. He has caused this grace to abound (v. 8), not merely in redeeming us, and now He says, "You will be able to comprehend my plans about Christ." (vv. 9, 10.) Then he tells us we are joint-heirs with Him. The "hope of His calling" is the first part of the chapter, and then, after He has stated what His plans are with regard to Christ, we get the second thing - the inheritance. His plan in Christ is to collect everything (not merely people) under Him who is the Head of it, and in this we are joint-heirs with Christ. It is God's inheritance. (v. 18.) If you think of Israel, you will understand it; for God would not allow the land to be sold for more than fifty years, "for it is mine," He says. Israel was God's land, and yet He inherited it in Israel; and so He inherits all things in the saints. Jacob was His inheritance, because it was an earthly thing down here. He always takes an individual position. (v. 18.) He does not say the Church is heir. The "mystery" involves for us the Church; but "the mystery of His will" involves the gathering together of everything under Christ, the Church being His body when that takes place. In Colossians you get the reason. There are three reasons why Christ takes everything in Scripture. First, because He created everything (Col. 1:16), and then (v. 18), "He is the Head of the body, the Church." He is Head over the things, but He is Head to the Church; and that word "filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23) is not simply as God, but "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things." He fills all things in the power of redemption. That is the first ground of his possessing the things, because He created them all. But in Heb. 1 you get another title (v. 2), "Appointed heir of all things," and then the third title is in Heb. 2:6, 7. He possesses them as man. Those three titles come in as creating everything, as being Son He is heir, and being man He is the object of God's purpose, because He has set man over them. And another thing comes in because it is in redemption. Till you get Christ glorified on high you do not get the Head, and so you cannot get the Body.

"Who pre-trusted in Christ." (v. 12.) The Jews when they see Him will only get the earthly blessing, but those who pre-trusted will get the heavenly thing. Those who trust before they see Him get the blessing. Verse 13 refers to the Gentiles being sealed, as a sign that they were brought into the same blessing. Verse 14 brings in His glory; they have got into it all. "The gospel of your salvation" (v. 13); that is, that the sovereign mercy which visited the Gentiles had given them salvation. I do not believe people get sealed who only believe in Christ's Person. Salvation applies to the two things: "Ready to be revealed in the last time," and then, besides that, the work by which we are already saved. The Spirit (v. 14) is the earnest of

our inheritance which we have not got yet, "until the redemption of the purchased possession;" that is, "to the praise of His glory."

It is a great thing to see it is "the gospel of our salvation;" for it is a big word.

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