

As Dear children.' Ephesians 4:20 - 5:3.

by John Nelson Darby

We are called to be 'dear children' of God, to walk in love as Christ loved us, and to manifest God's love in our lives.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:32 - 5:1

Topics: "Intimacy With God", "Walking in Love"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound relationship believers have with God as 'dear children,' highlighting the importance of understanding this intimacy and the implications it has for our lives. He explains that while we often view God as a Judge, through Christ's work, we are invited into a loving relationship where we can experience His grace and love. Darby encourages believers to put off the old self and embrace the new creation in Christ, which allows us to walk in love and reflect God's character in our interactions with others. He stresses that our conduct should be rooted in the love of Christ, who gave Himself for us, and that we are called to forgive and love others as God has forgiven us. Ultimately, Darby calls for a life that honors God as our Father, living in the light of His love and grace.

Transcript

Christian Friend, vol. 13, 1886, p. 169.

What a wonderful place the Lord sets us in here, and sets us in the consciousness of it too, showing us how we get to it, with its effects and fruits; but that consciousness is hindered by everything that is in contrast to God - worldliness, carelessness, or negligence. Still it is where God has really set us, and we are to be "followers of God, as dear children." To think that such a word should come out of His mouth to us, calling us "dear, children." We are familiar with the thought of being sons of God, "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" but when we think of the nearness and intimacy of this, and His revealing Himself to us, and acting as such, it is wonderful. It is not what He has done to deliver us from condemnation; but when the sin is all gone, to be remembered no more, He sets us in this relationship of "dear children," and in the consciousness of it. If He says to me, "Dear child!" what a thought I have of Him, and of the wonderful condition I am in: the expression draws out the consciousness of the love in the place. He may have done all kinds of things for me, but the very word conveys to me where I am. If we come to think of it, and measure it, we have to think of Christ. He says, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." He dwells in us to be the power and enjoyment of it, and attracts down from the Father's heart what He feels for Him and for us, and

that is shed abroad in our hearts.

We have been accustomed to look at God as a Judge - a solemn truth in its place. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity; but there is such a complete putting away of sin. Looking at the work of Christ, there is such an entire putting away of sin according to God's glory, that I get into the light, and the only thing it shows is that I am as white as snow, leaving the heart free to enjoy the present "grace wherein we stand." Being justified by faith, I have peace with God. I can say I am waiting for the glory, and besides that, I have access to this present grace. It is of all importance for our hearts and affections that we should be there with God; we cannot enjoy it if we allow evil, and even negligence dims our hearts, and prevents our apprehension of it.

We get the doctrinal part before, and now He says, "You are my dear children;" it is not a mere doctrine, but the address of God to us. When He says "dear," what says it? It is His heart, what He feels about us, poor creatures as we are; but He says it because He feels it. He is expressing Himself and reaching us, and that is what is so thoroughly blessed. A child is to be obedient and dutiful, and all that; but it is so wonderful that God should say this, and He reckons on our hearts walking in it. This is the outgoing of God's good pleasure and delight, and I know I am His delight, poor unworthy creature as I am; it is not a question of worthiness, that is in Christ. The sin has been so put away, in God's sight that His heart can go out. Christ's love took Him to that baptism - "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Till then His love could not go out freely, but then it could flow out in unmingled freeness; perfect love in the drinking of that terrible cup, now the love is free to act. Grace reigns because righteousness is accomplished. His whole love can go out through grace. I get, through the work of Christ, God free to satisfy His love, all the purposes and delights of His own nature. The love is free to flow out in all its fulness. You never get a word about the prodigal when he comes to the father (a great deal about him when he is coming); but you hear about the father, and his joy in having him. The poor prodigal was happy enough, but it is not "meet to make him happy;" he had the best robe, but it is "meet to make merry, and be glad; for this my son was lost, and is found." He tells it to us that we should know it. It was meet that He should make merry, and have all glad around Him, because this poor sinner had come back. There is no hindrance to the full satisfaction of His soul, His own joy to have this one in.

We get two great truths - the work of Christ that was needed to put away sin, and open out this love; there is a new creation, and we are dead. We are to put off the old man and put on the new. Then the love is perfectly free, and I get hold of another thing - what did it all come from? what have I got into? It comes from God; the very nature is of God. "Of God are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We are of God, and the righteousness of God; all is of God, and according to God, and we have a nature capable of understanding it, and of enjoying all God is. All is free and full, and this nature can let itself out to me in love. The thing I am brought to enjoy is of God, and all my intelligence for conduct and feeling and everything is of God. Paul could say, "Be followers of me;" but the Spirit here goes up to the source, and says, "Be ye followers of God;" "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him," etc.; "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," and love too.

Having the divine nature (sin put away) we are in the light as God is in the light, brought into the presence of God, and capable of enjoying it. It is not of human wisdom or knowledge, but of a pure heart; we learn more and more every day if we are walling with God, but it is not intellect. All the intellect in the world never knew what it is to be loved, never found out God; found wills and lusts, but never found God. We learn Him by our wants. The one who learns what strength is, and knows the comfort of it, is a poor feeble

person who cannot get along a rough road, and a strong one lends his arm.

What a comfort strength is to him. The real wants of the soul God has met in every possible way. "When we were without strength . . . Christ died for the ungodly." The perfectness of His love came out, in that when we had no strength to get out of our state He says, I must come down to you. It takes me up to enjoy it in God Himself. He comes down to the sinner where he is, and the sinner learns there is love enough to reach from the holy throne of God to him, and to take his poor heart up to the throne of God.

Not wisdom or intellect, but God revealing Himself; and as He thus acts in love, I get the very spring of it, and the root from the beginning to the end as I know Him. The light comes into my conscience, and makes everything manifest, and the love comes too. We have to learn more of the treacherousness of our hearts, of the wiles of Satan, and of the world; but I am in positive relationship with God, and sin outside (by faith, I mean), and there we have to keep it. In the heavenly places as to doctrine, then we get the practical power.

He sends us out from Himself to the world that men may know what He is. How close we have to keep to Him, and to judge ourselves, learning utterly unsuspected bits of self and selfishness, and self-confidence in ourselves. There is another thing - we are brought to God, but not I as a poor human being having to do with God. I get Christ, God revealed in man; He came down to where we were as poor sinners. He can say to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

God did not want to exalt Himself; but there was one new thing with God, to come down to us. The love that came down to be near us (as a man, but the divine nature breaking through the lowliness), so that when I talk to the carpenter's son I find the Son of God, the most lowly, humble minister of goodness to me. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Poverty was the new thing with God, and the poverty was that He came among us.

I know God by it, I get it by an intimate object; the nearer I get to Him, the more I see the divine majesty. He is close to us, reaches us, touches us; nay, He is become our life. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in Him." So near us - not physically, though He was that - that "He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one." All the power and grace in Him, but we brought into this like condition. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; to my God, and your God."

The One I can be intimate and at home with I find engaged with myself; and He expects our affections, expects our interest in His glory. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father." We often sing -

"Jesus, Lord, 'tis joy to know

Thy path is o'er of shame and woe."

He expects us, while worshipping and adoring Him, to have our part in His joy.

There is great comfort in putting off the old man, practically in power. I have put it off altogether, though I have to fight it every day; but I have a right to say, though the efficacy of Christ's death, "I have put off the old man, and put on the new." It is complete deliverance. I may forget it, and let the old man come out; but ye have "put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Morally, it is

association with Himself. Who is the righteous one? God. And the holy one? God. Well, you are "after God;" no lower measure and standard. Even when He chastens us it is that "we might be partakers of His holiness." (In us it is a new creation, in Him it is eternal.) That is what I am before God, and according to what God has wrought, and I have done with the old man. I am after His nature, or else I could not enjoy God. We have the new nature, Christ is become our life; and the new creation in me is "after God," according to what He is. He has not created a thing inconsistent with Himself. In that I am to live. We are weak and feeble, but we have it in virtue of Christ's work. He being glorified we have the Holy Ghost. Being sprinkled with the blood we receive the Holy Ghost. He comes and dwells in us, takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He stirs us up, leads, guides, and corrects, and rebukes if necessary.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." (v. 30.) Don't grieve Him. "We know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." There I get not only a nature to enjoy, but power suited to my capacity, whether as a babe or father in Christ. Christ having taken His place as man at the right hand of God, the Holy Ghost comes down and tells me, "This is your place, and you are all dear children." The blessed Spirit of God dwells in us, and we are not to grieve Him. All my sins are gone, I am as white as snow. He has stepped in and charged Himself with the whole thing, drunk the cup, and I am dead and risen, and get consequently this present grace, and the Holy Ghost the earnest of what I shall have when He comes. I have it in a poor earthen vessel, and learn to discern good and evil, and a deal about myself - about God too, but I learn it as a dear child. It may be very humbling, as it was to Israel in the wilderness, but they could never have learnt it in Egypt. In the wilderness they had a great deal to learn, and very humbling things too, and so have we; but we are in "the light as He is in the light," and "as He is so are we in this world" - before God. Not as He was, because He was absolutely sinless; but, wonderful to say, as He is in glory. As He is, because grace has put us in Him before God. There I am between accomplished redemption and the glory He has won. The Holy Ghost comes as the earnest, and we are dear children, and He speaks to us as such. The spring as to conduct is, "You, as my child, honour your Father." If He is not my Father there is no sense in it. As brought to God I have learnt what God is as to His ways of grace. (vv. 31, 32.) Did God come and clamour against you in justice? He sent His Son to give Himself for you, and has forgiven you. You go and do so to others. You are a dear child, go and manifest what God is, He has forgiven you. There is a man who has wronged me; I go and forgive him as God forgave me, if I am near enough to God to do it, to show out what we have been learning is the joy of our souls.

"Walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us." There we see the preciousness of Him who brought it so close to us. Don't you know what that means? Have you not understood what Christ's love to you as a poor creature was? Have you not learned for yourself that He gave Himself - no light thing - up? Then you go and give yourself up. He did not give a great deal for us (every thing in one sense), He gave up Himself. The law requires the measure of your love to yourself to be that of your love to your neighbour. In a world like this I want something more than that. I have to do with people who wrong and insult and harass and outrage me. Christ did more than love us as He loved Himself - He gave Himself up entirely. The perfection of love is measured in self-sacrifice. We may fail in it, but there is no other measure. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Was not God manifested in Christ? Is not Christ your model? He, the blessed Son of God, walking through this world, manifested God with a divine superiority over evil. It is put away between me and God, and I am to be above it between me and man - the power of good in the midst of evil. If you see unrighteousness, and your spirit boils over, that won't do; you may "be angry and sin not" - righteous indignation at evil. Christ was the expression of unavenging righteousness - doing well, and suffering, taking it patiently.

One word as to carrying this through verse 2. I give myself up for others, but to God. If I give myself to others, I may not go right, for they may not go right; but the lower and worse the person I give myself up for, the higher it is. The principle of Christ was - He gave Himself to God, but for the vilest. It was a sacrifice of love - love that had its motive in itself for God, its object in God, and that kept it steady in the path. Further in the chapter (v. 14) you get light brought in - the full light into the conscience, and the full love into the heart, and then you will go right. There our souls should be - walking in the light, our consciences alive, and our hearts in the undisturbed consciousness of that word of God, "Dear children," the feeling of affection going out from His heart. So that when I go to Him there is not only the love that sought the sinner, but the love now in the relationship that finds delight in expressing itself. Wherever the world or selfishness gets in (evil too, I need not say), that is not after God, but after the world, and after the devil. That is like a man asleep. He does not hear or speak, he may dream, and the word is, "Arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." If my heart goes with the things of the world, Christ is not shining into it. There may be glimmerings, but I cannot say "Abba" and go to Him with the sense that He will say, "Now, my dear child, go and follow me." J. N. Darby.

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