

Beloved Children Ephesians 4:20 - 5:2

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes our identity as dear children of God, the implications of Christ's sacrifice, and the call to live in love and obedience.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:20

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Walking in Love"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound relationship believers have with God as 'dear children,' highlighting the intimacy and love that comes from this identity. He explains that while we often view God as a judge, He desires to express His love and grace towards us, having dealt with sin through Christ's sacrifice. Darby encourages believers to embrace their new nature in Christ, which enables them to walk in love and reflect God's character in their lives. He stresses the importance of living in the consciousness of being loved by God, which empowers us to forgive and serve others selflessly. Ultimately, he calls for a life that mirrors the love of Christ, urging believers to awaken from spiritual slumber and walk in the light of His love.

Transcript

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What a wonderful place the Lord sets us in here, and sets us in the consciousness of it too (shows us how we get it, and the effects and fruits of it); and that consciousness is hindered by everything that is in contrast to God - worldliness, carelessness, or negligence - but 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 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 not what He has done to deliver us from condemnation; but when the sin is all gone out of memory to be remembered no more, He sets us in this relationship of dear children, and sets us in the consciousness of it. If He says to me, "Dear child," what a thought I have of Him and the wonderful condition I am in! Suppose a father says, "Dear child," the expression gives consciousness of the love. 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 Thy name unto them, 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 are accustomed to look at God as Judge, and a solemn truth in its place: "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look on sin;" but there is such a complete dealing with the whole question of sin according to God's glory (looking at the work of Christ), 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 this "grace wherein we stand."

Being justified by faith, I have peace with God (referring to poor sinners), and I can say, I am waiting for the glory; and besides that, I have access to this grace wherein we stand. It is of all importance for our hearts and affections that we should be there with God. We can't enjoy it fully if we allow evil, and even negligence dims our hearts. 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, when He says "dear." What is it says it? It is His heart - what He feels about us. We are all poor sinners, I know; 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 express it; and He reckons on our hearts walking in it. (How dismal it is if a child of a family does not walk in the affections of it. A stranger you can have done with, but with one of the family it is dreadful, like harassing raw flesh). It is the outgoing of God's good pleasure and delight; and I know I am His delight - poor, unworthy creature as I am (but it is not a question of worthiness - that is in Christ). In God's sight the sin has been so dealt with that His heart can go out. There is no feebleness in the spring of love in Christ. It took Him to the baptism. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." Till then the love could not go out freely; for His love He got hatred, but then His love could flow out in unmingled freeness.

Perfect love in the drinking of that terrible cup; now it is free to act - grace reigning 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 delight of His own nature. "He will rest in His love."

Now, as it were, God says, I am content; I have made that person as happy as he can be. You never get a word about the prodigal son when he comes to the father (a 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 here. 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 have 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," - you must take after your Father - "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," "after God created in righteousness and true holiness," and love too. Having the divine nature, we are in the presence of God, - sin put away, and we in the light as God is in the light. We are brought into the presence of God in a double way, and capable of enjoying it. It is not of human wisdom or knowledge, but of a pure heart. We have more and more every day if we are walking with the Lord; but it is not intellect. All the intellect in the world never knew what it is to be loved by - never found out God - never found God.

We learn Him by our wants. He who learns what strength is, and knows the comfort of strength, is a poor, feeble person who can't get on upon a rough road, and the strong one lends his arm. What a comfort strength is to him. The real wants, the need that we have, God has met in every possible way. "When we were without strength, in due time 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. That is one end (it is endless), but it takes me up to enjoy God Himself - comes down to the sinner where he is, and thus he 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.

As God was acting in this 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 get into positive relationship with God, - and sin outside (by faith I mean), and there we have to keep it.

Set 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 unsuspected bits of self and selfishness, and self confidence in us.

There is another element. We see we are brought to God. Not I as a poor human being having to do with God; I get Christ between - Christ revealed as man. He came down to where we were as poor sinners. He can reproach 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 in an intimate Object, and the nearer I get 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 one."

All the power and grace in Him, but we all brought to this like condition. "I go to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God." And the One I can be familiar, and intimate, and at home with, I find engaged with myself.

He expects our affections, expects our interests in His glory. If you thought of My happiness, you would be glad that I am going to My Father, away from this troublesome earth. "If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice because I said I go unto the Father." In our hymn we get -

"O 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, and that is where He comes so near.

There is great comfort in putting off the old man. Practically in power I have put it off (I have to fight it every day); I have put it off altogether. We have a right to say, through the efficacy of Christ's death, "I have put off the old man and put on the new." I get complete deliverance. I may forget it, and let the old man come in, 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 may be made 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 God's work and doing, and I have done with the other man.

I am after His nature, or else I could not enjoy God. You can't get an animal that eats hay to eat meat. Christ has become our life, and the new creation in me is after God, according to what He is. He has not created anything inconsistent with Himself. In that life I am to live. That is another thing. We are feeble and weak: if we have it, it is in virtue of Christ's work, and He being glorified, we have the Holy Ghost. Being sprinkled with the blood, I receive the Holy Ghost; He comes and dwells in me. I get a nature capable of enjoying God; and He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to me. He stirs me up, leads, guides, and corrects, and rebukes my conscience if necessary. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." Don't grieve Him. "We know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit that He hath 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 at the right hand of God, the Holy Ghost comes down and says: "This is your place. He is gone to His God and your God, to His Father and your Father, and you are all dear children." The blessed Spirit of God dwells in us, and we are not to grieve Him.

We have the new nature, and the Holy Ghost to keep our minds alive to the consciousness of it. And He takes of the things of Jesus and shows them to us. My sins are gone, and I am as white as snow. Dead with Him. He has stepped in and charged Himself with the whole thing - drank the cup. I am dead and risen, and I get consequently this - the present grace, and the earnest of what I shall have when He comes. I have it in a poor, earthen vessel, and am learning to discern good and evil, learning a deal about myself and about God; but learning it as a dear child.

It may be very humbling, as it was to Israel in the wilderness, but they could never have learned it in Egypt. In the wilderness they had many humbling things to learn, and so have we; but we are walking in the light as He is in the light, and we have "boldness in the day of judgment," because as Christ is so are we in this world before God. Not as Christ was, because He was absolutely sinless. Wonderful to say, as He is in glory, as He is because grace has put us in Him before God. Then the Holy Ghost comes as the earnest. I am standing as an earthen vessel between the accomplished redemption and the glory He has won. 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 I am not your Father, there is no sense in the thing.

As brought to God, I have learned what God is as to His ways of grace (verses 31 and 32): "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Did God come and clamour against you in justice? He sent His Son to give Himself for you, and has forgiven you. There is a man that wronged me; I am going to forgive him, as God forgave me, and (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." There we see the preciousness of Him who brought it so close to us, as "Christ hath loved us, and given Himself for us," &c. 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? Did He not give Himself up - no light thing? Yes! Then you go and give yourself up! He did not merely give a great deal to us (He did give us everything), He gave up Himself: The law requires the measure of your love to yourself to be that of your love to your neighbour; grace requires you to give up yourself entirely. In a sinful world, I want something more than the former. 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 perfectness of love is measured in self-sacrifice. We may fail in that, 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 us 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 (you may "be angry and sin not" - righteous indignation at evil - but if it boils up that won't do), Christ was the expression of unavenging righteousness: "If ye do well and suffer for it," etc.

One word as to carrying this through. "Walk in love," etc. (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. 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 has its motive in itself for God, its object in God - and that kept it steady in the path.

You get further in the chapter: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." You find light brought in, the full light of Christ into the conscience, and the full love of God into the heart, and then you will go right. Our consciences kept alive, and walking in the undisturbed consciousness of that word of God, "Dear children" - the way He addresses us - 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 you see 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; it never says he hears or speaks (he may dream). "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 can't say "Abba," and go to Him with the sense that He will say, "Now, my dear child, go and follow Me." And we ought to be walking in it! J. N. D.

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