

Carnal Confidence and Confidence of Faith

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon highlights the importance of living in the presence of God, and the dangers of carnal confidence, which leads to a hardening of the heart and a breakdown in the presence of God's power.

Scripture: Exodus 15:13, Numbers 17:10, John 6:37, Romans 2:5, Romans 5:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:18, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 2:1

Topics: "Confidence In God", "Grace and Holiness"

Description

John Nelson Darby addresses the contrast between carnal confidence and the confidence of faith, emphasizing that true confidence comes from recognizing our position before God and walking in His presence. He explains that many believers may experience a false sense of security, leading to despair when confronted with God's holiness, as seen in the Israelites' fear of approaching the tabernacle. Darby highlights the importance of understanding our identity as priests in God's sanctuary, which should instill holy confidence rather than fear. He encourages believers to embrace their relationship with God through grace, rather than relying on their own merits or assumptions. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper realization of being at home in God's presence, which brings true joy and assurance.

Transcript

CARNAL CONFIDENCE, AND THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

NUMBERS 17; and 18: 1

" Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying ? " When the children of Israel cried thus unto Moses, the feeling they expressed was not exactly dread of an unknown God-that which the sinner has naturally on his conscience when first awakened, but a dread resulting from haughtiness of spirit, the flesh having intruded itself into the presence of God. And this is what is constantly found where there has been a high bearing before God. The consequence of God shewing Himself to one in this state of soul is to cast him down into despair. The fear of the natural conscience when first awakened, on the other hand, though painful, most painful, is still salutary.

When there has been a going on altogether without God, I do not call this a high bearing before God, though it is so in another sense. We all know how many people go on carelessly, day after day, and year after year, without troubling themselves about God, seeking joy and pleasure in the world, sunk in

listlessness, oppressed with cares, or engrossed with business : a thousand things fill and occupy the natural heart to the exclusion of God. Sometimes it does cross the conscience that there is a God, but, so far from His being the object of their life, He is not their object at all-" God is not in all their thoughts." There may be these secret misgivings (God often works thus in the hearts of those whom He afterwards calls to Himself, although not producing fruit through it at the time) ; and, when the soul is converted, the remembrance of such appeals aids in bringing to a consciousness of the total and entire perverseness of the will of man. Where there is open and notorious sin, it is an easier thing to reach the conscience, just as the Lord said to the Pharisees, the religious people of the day, " The publicans; and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Often, in the course of a comparatively blameless life, there have been these calls, and God, in the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, has been despised.

When conviction of sin comes, when the Spirit of God sets a man in consequence in God's presence, he finds out both what he has been doing, and what he is. He finds out that he has been treasuring up unto himself " wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God " ; and more than this, he finds out also that his natural condition is a condition of sin and rebellion against God, and that he cannot remedy it. Now, whilst this state of soul is ever painful (and it often drives a man nearly to despair), it is salutary, a blessed thing. Wherever there is a clear sense of our position, there is to desire to go to God, though with the consciousness of having no title to be there. Just as with the poor prodigal-" I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." So also with Peter, at the feet of Jesus-" Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! " There is this consciousness Of unworthiness before God because of having recognised His holiness, and that He ought to be holy; but there is also the desire to go to Him-a seeming inconsistency, but that which is really of the Spirit of God. It is very natural, where the Spirit works, to desire to go to God, because we feel He is needed by us, although conscience says we are unfit to be there. The heart is turned to God ; it sees His holiness, sees that He ought to be holy, and so takes God's part against itself. There is no desire that He should be less holy, that it might, so to speak, slip into heaven ; and therefore it justifies God, instead of seeking to condemn Him that it may justify itself-that which many a poor sinner does, that which Adam did when he said, " The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Instead of justifying self, there is the justifying God and condemning self. Thus the heart is set right. It has not yet, it is true, learned redemption-what God has done for it in Christ; it is occupied with its state before God as a present thing, but this is salutary. There is not the peace that God does give and will give; still the heart is set right.

In grace God had raised up priesthood to meet the need of His people. But there was assumption on the part of these Israelites, that, because they were His people, they could take a place before Him otherwise than on His ground. They had abused the privileges conferred upon them-murmured against God - made the golden calf - said it was better to go back to Egypt - despised the promises ; there had been a long course of failure and rebellion, and at last it rises up to what is called the " gainsaying of Core." Whilst in this fleshly state, they assume that they can draw nigh to God. " And they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord ? " (See chap. 16). Here is haughtiness in the presence of God. And this is very apt to creep into our hearts-a taking up in the flesh the privileges of the children of God. It may not be manifested in the gross aspect of this scene ; but is there not often the feeling of being able to come near to God because it is our privilege to do so ? Now it is clearly our privilege, the privilege of all saints ; but it is a sad thing if as a consequence of that nearness, when the soul has got out of His

presence, it goes on haughtily and carelessly, still talking about its nearness.

We find another instance of haughtiness in the presence of God, in the case of Cain (Gen. 4). When God said to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he replied, "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" answering God flippantly. But the moment God shewed Himself as God, saying, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground, and now art thou cursed from the earth," in came despair. Wherever there is haughtiness of heart before God, and God shews Himself, there is despair; the language of the heart is, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish." We get here a great principle: even in the man who is a Christian, there is no realised ground of confidence, and the heart sinks down in despair.

A Christian has always the ground of being perfectly happy before God, because he is perfectly saved. This is the right state of a Christian—that of confidence, not in the flesh (carnal confidence), but confidence and joy before God. A state of want of confidence and of uncertainty as regards himself is a state in which the Christian may be found; he may pass through it, and that even because of a certain work produced on the soul by the Holy Ghost, but it is not his proper state. What the Holy Ghost gives is certainty. Wherever there is uncertainty, it results from the working of our own hearts, even though in connection with (and, in a sense, grounded upon) what is really the work of the Spirit. I may believe that God is holy, and seeing sin in myself, may begin to reason on my own worthiness, as to whether I can, or cannot, come to God; whether I can have anything to say to God. There may be the desire to go to Him, but then I do not know whether He will accept me. This is not faith; and yet it is constantly the state of soul in which Christians are found. It is not properly a Christian state; it is reasoning upon things known by faith, things found out through faith, but it is not faith. We find in the word of God, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin—that by the blood of the cross He has made peace—that our sins and iniquities are remembered no more—and, if faith is in exercise, we are happy, we get peace. Faith is the simple-hearted reception of what God has said.

Unbelief is not a Christian state. It is, alas! that into which the Christian may fall, but it is not a Christian state. Uncertainty cannot be therefore recognised as a proper position of the soul, admitting that it may pass through it, and indeed, that it generally does. But then Christian certainty is certainty in, and not out of, God's presence. Inasmuch as it is certainty founded on faith in what He has said, it is, always certainty in His presence. Faith is at rest there. All else that comforts, strengthens, gives us liberty in what we do in the world, is based on what we are in the presence of God. The blood is placed there—on the mercy-seat—in God's sight; and therefore, because we know this, we can say that we are justified from all things, that it is impossible God can impute sin to us. The blood is under His eye, and not our sins.

But there is quite a different state of soul from this, a confidence out of God's presence. The soul may think and reason about the ground of Christian confidence, and Christian privilege, just as did these Israelites that they were owned of God. Theirs was a carnal confidence. It was just the taking up of general principles of truth as to God's dealings with His people, and then going on in fleshly assumption. This brought them to murmur and rebel. They came up with confidence that the Lord was with them; but the Lord gave directions respecting Korah, Dathan, and Abirain, and interfered in judgment upon their ungodliness. And then we read, "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord," (v. 41).

Now what is the remedy of the Lord for this? He sets up priesthood, as the only ground on which He can go on with them. He says, as it were, 'I must have clear and plain evidence what My power is, in order to make cease from Me the murmurings of the children of Israel; but then, if I give this evidence of My power,

it must be in grace ; to deal with them on any other ground than that of grace would be for destruction.' And such must always be the case. If the Lord were simply to come by the power of His actual presence, it would bring confusion into the soul. Sometimes we see this on a death-bed for a little moment. In what the Lord thus does in bringing the soul into His presence, He puts it under a shade of the power of that which Christ went through-just a shade of it.

The truth is, that, in the way in which many believers are occupied in daily life, they little realise the presence of God. It is not that they have not peace, but that they never fully estimate what the flesh is before God. One learns this from intercourse with Christians, and specially with those who have been long Christians. They know very little what it is to find themselves face to face with God. They may have been awakened under convictions of sin (perhaps terrible convictions), and have got peace to their souls ; but since that there may have been the going on comfortably with certain things, without a realising of the presence of God, so that if it were to come on them, they too would be " consumed " with terror. It is well for us to remember that certainty as to salvation is the proper, the normal state of a Christian. I repeat this here, just to shew that what I am now saying is not meant to deny it at all ; but still I say that if God were to meet such persons, real Christians though they were, in the present power of what He is as God, it would produce trouble and distress. This ought not so to be. It is quite clear that, if it is the case, we are not really living in His presence, and that is the place where we are privileged to be. There is a constant tendency in our hearts, when out of it, to be taken up with certain things that are grounded upon what is truly our relationship to God, and to carry on these things without realising His presence. Now, if confidence goes along with this, it is a most hardening thing. Confidence, I repeat, ought always to be the portion of the believer-the confidence of faith. God does not withdraw this, but we may lose it. Whilst there is a going on with confidence, and we are not walking in the presence of God, the conscience not being sincere, there exists that which is mining the very foundation. We may go on in joy, but if that joy is not joy in the presence of God, there will be a breakdown some time.

Now that is what I mean by " carnal confidence "-not the confidence of an unconverted person : there is that, but I do not mean it : I mean the confidence of one whose peace and hopes are rightly based, but maintained without walking in the presence of God. It is a right peace, right hopes, a thing rightly founded, that which is really his own (the proper condition of a Christian is always to have it) ; but still it assumes a carnal character in the heart when it is carried on without God ; that is, when it is not continued in by walking in His presence. The consequence is , , that the moment the Lord appears, no matter in what way, let it even be in grace, His presence comes to be terrible. These people had not realised the power of it in God's presence, and therefore they broke down in despair, and said, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish."

Now I do not say that it will come to this point in our hearts, but (the same thing in principle) it will be for discouragement, for loss of confidence, and for distrust of God. Suppose you, a real Christian, had been going on in carelessness, and carrying this carnal confidence along with it; and one were to speak to you even of the intercession of Jesus, if there was a sense of God's presence through this to your soul, it would not be a cheering and strengthening but rather a discouraging thing, and the soul would break down. Our place with the Lord is to walk with joy, but it is joy in the Lord. Enoch " walked with God." Can you say you are walking with God ? I do not ask if you are doing that which is openly wrong ; but would the presence of God alarm and distress you? Our confidence, if we have any, is a fleshly thing, when that is the case.

Do not rest in such a condition : it is not what God has called us to. He is all grace, grace to us according to our need ; but it is with Him, and in His presence, that we find and enjoy His grace. Moses sang (Exod. 15 : 13), " Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed. Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." And that is what He has done for us. He has brought us home to Himself And what then ? He has put His Spirit into our hearts, that it may be our home. You know what it is to be at home : we act so differently there-no other place is like it. We are at home when the Spirit is working in our hearts, giving the joy of our portion in the presence of God. We may have to go forth into the world to labour, to exercise ourselves, and to be engaged in a thousand different ways ; but when we get back again, how great the change! We only go out to come back. There we are at home. How comforting, how establishing the thought! It is a terrible thing to be saying, instead of this, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish; whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die "-when God's presence, in the place of being the home of our hearts, is terror and distress. I have no doubt, that you will find hundreds of Christians, who, instead of feeling away from home when they have got out of God's presence, are at ease. But it is, I repeat, a terrible thing, not merely because it is a wrong thing, but because God is grace. We are called to be " at home " with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, when about to go back to heaven, said to Mary, " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God." We ought to be as much " at home " in spirit there as He. Was it not with joy, with confidence, that Jesus said He was going to the presence of His Father? He came forth from God's presence to act in love in the midst of this ruined world, and He went back when He had finished the work that had been given Him to do. And was it not, in a certain sense, with the feeling of going home ? But He says, " unto my Father and your Father; to my God and your God." What a blessed thought! That is the church's place; we are called to be cc at home " with our God and our Father-to the blessedness of His house. No matter what the world may be, we should be there at home-happy home!-as truly there in spirit, and as happy there, as Christ.

If that is what is given us in Christ (and God gives nothing less), do our souls realise it ? We may be measuring fitness, but God cannot measure fitness. If He receive at all, it is for Christ's sake ; our title is based upon what Christ has done. We may be going through many an experience; but God does not rest on our experience. Nay, He has not to do, in that sense, without experience at all. If He receive us, it is for Christ's sake, it is as Christ, it is all Christ. It can be nothing less, and nothing short of that. Having adverted to this, let us now turn to God's answer.

After all the murmurings of the people, after the rebellion and gainsaying of Korah, this is the manner in which the Lord takes away the murmurings, by priesthood in grace. 'I must conduct them' (He says) 'by Aaron's rod (not by the rod of Moses) to Canaan. This people have not only been found in bondage in Egypt, but in rebellion and sin in the wilderness ; and therefore the only way in which I can deal with them is by priesthood.' There is no possible hope of leading us up into the heavenly Canaan except we are put under the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and therefore it is said that Christ is a " Son over his own house."

It is " his house " ; that is the first thing. How does He deal with it ? Suppose we find a house that is not ours to be a bad, dirty house, we may bear with it-not so if it is our own house. The way that Christ deals with that which is His house (it is His interest, so to speak, to do so) is to have it clean. We are put under the priesthood of Christ; this is God's arrangement for the purpose of dealing with sin in the " house." " If any man sin," a Christian man: what then ? He is guilty and gets condemned? No such thing. That would be the reasoning of the heart where there had been cc carnal confidence " ; it would get alarmed and

uneasy, and say, " We die, we perish," but what is the truth ? "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sin sets Christ to work ; that is the effect of it, not to leave it there (of that we are quite sure), but on the same principle that, if we find uncleanness in our house, it would not make us reject the house but get rid of the uncleanness, so Christ is occupied in love in removing the sin. It is the priesthood of Christ that leads us up into the heavenly city.

But the next thing to be noticed is, we are priests in God's house, and the thing therefore which we have to bear is the iniquity of the house. " And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood." This is true of all the church. We are God's sanctuary-" the house of God " (I Tim- 3 : 15). So of the individual saint, " What ? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own ? " (I Cor. 6 : 19). It was not allowed to have anything defiled in the camp, much less in the " sanctuary." We are brought now to dwell in the sanctuary of God-to minister in the priesthood of God. This involves responsibility. Thus have we to judge about sin; and not as though we were under law. This is where God has brought us-the position in which we stand towards God, and what we have to bear. It is no matter of attainment or of maturity in Christ: you may have been converted yesterday, or you may be a father " in Christ, and therefore able to understand it better but that does not affect the question : there might have been a young priest or an old priest in the sanctuary, but the young priest would have to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary and of the priesthood, as much as the old one-as much as Aaron himself.

God, in the riches of His grace, has made us His " sanctuary; our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost; we are priests in His house ; and iniquity must therefore be judged accordingly. If the sense of this does not produce joy in our hearts, we cannot be on our right ground. If we do not know what it is to be in the sanctuary of God, we do not know what it is to be a Christian. I do not say we are not Christians, but we do not know what it is to be a Christian. If we do not know what it is to be priests unto God, we have never yet got into our proper place before God.

There is another remark. Suppose we have, through grace, the consciousness of being priests, I ask, Is there not, as a necessary consequence of this (not the feeling, " Behold, we die, we perish," but that which takes the place of it), holy confidence, confidence before God ? He says, I will not deal with those who come into my house as a judge, as though they were under law; it is " you and your sons," etc. If God has people in His house, He will have them there as priests. If we are saying, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die," we have got back under law. We are listening to the reasoning of our own hearts, and that is not faith. The moment we begin to reason thus, we are under law; faith is not in exercise, and therefore we must be under law. This " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die "-is all law. Now what is the Lord's word, or rather what is the silence of His word about it ? It does not know such a man as the one who is saying this : his doing SO Is just a proof that he is not a " priest " at all. He does not know what righteousness is, in coming into the presence of God ; he does not know what grace is ; he will neither come into the house, nor perish-he is not in a condition to do either.

If the Spirit of God is working in the heart, He produces a sense of dread in bringing out of that condition : but if we then distrust God, we shall never get into His presence on that ground. There is no answer to us, except that we are in a wrong and untrue condition altogether. God may bring us out of it, but He does not own us in it. Let us remember that it was " carnal confidence " that had produced, as we have seen, the feeling here ; and it may be that the same thing is working in our hearts. Where there is " carnal

confidence," it takes us from under the consciousness of grace, and puts us for the time under the power of law. Nothing meets us there, nothing can meet the case, no, not even the intercession of Christ.

To conclude : we are brought, through wondrous grace, into the sanctuary of God, we are made priests unto God ; and that is the way in which we are to judge of good and evil. We are always to judge of good or evil, according to the condition in which a man is ; we do not expect our servants to be sons ; neither our sons to be servants. And if we are merely judging of good and of evil according to natural conscience, we are not going on Christian ground at all. This is the question we have to ask ourselves : What is it that becomes a man who is God's temple ? what is it that becomes a man who is God's priest ?

Do we shrink from being set in this responsibility ? If we cannot say that we like to be there, or that we have such an interest in God's glory that we desire it, if we are speaking about our weakness, we have not the confidence of grace ; we are saying in a little degree, " Behold, we die, we perish." It is the same thing in principle : I speak not of the extent of it. Why is it that we are thus afraid ? Just because our hearts are not strong in the full and simple confidence of grace-present grace : as it is said, " Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Though Christ has died and put away our sin, yet we have not full confidence in God's grace, we think He is not all grace; that is what is meant by the " present grace." God loves us with the most perfect love ; He cannot deal with us on any other ground; He loves us at this moment, just as much as when He gave Christ to die for our sins. He is love, and nothing else, to us. He is not double-hearted. What we are standing in is grace. When the soul is confident of that, ' O now' (it says) ' let me have this holiness, let me enjoy this holiness of the sanctuary.' If it is all grace, it does not say " we die, we perish." How can we die, where all is grace ?

What we want is the full blessed, clear apprehension that we stand in grace. Our hearts will then have joy and courage. That which will enable us to act aright is, not what we have called carnal confidence, the going on in the common-place joy of certain truths, but the certainty and joy of God's presence. Do we know God's presence as the practical home of our hearts ? Oh what joy is there in this! Of one thing be sure: coming to Him in the name of Jesus, you will find it to be the real , blessed, secure home of your hearts.

For ever blessed be His name, He has said, " Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

[Go to Table of Contents](#)

[Return to the Main Page](#)

CARNAL CONFIDENCE, AND THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

NUMBERS 17; and 18: 1

" Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying ? " When the children of Israel cried thus unto Moses, the feeling they expressed was not exactly dread of an unknown God-that which the sinner has naturally on his conscience when first awakened, but a dread resulting from haughtiness of spirit, the flesh having intruded itself into the presence of God. And this is what is constantly found where there has been a high bearing before God. The consequence of God shewing Himself to one in this state of soul is to cast him

down into despair. The fear of the natural conscience when first awakened, on the other hand, though painful, most painful, is still salutary.

When there has been a going on altogether without God, I do not call this a high bearing before God, though it is so in another sense. We all know how many people go on carelessly, day after day, and year after year, without troubling themselves about God, seeking joy and pleasure in the world, sunk in listlessness, oppressed with cares, or engrossed with business : a thousand things fill and occupy the natural heart to the exclusion of God. Sometimes it does cross the conscience that there is a God, but, so far from His being the object of their life, He is not their object at all-" God is not in all their thoughts." There may be these secret misgivings (God often works thus in the hearts of those whom He afterwards calls to Himself, although not producing fruit through it at the time) ; and, when the soul is converted, the remembrance of such appeals aids in bringing to a consciousness of the total and entire perverseness of the will of man. Where there is open and notorious sin, it is an easier thing to reach the conscience, just as the Lord said to the Pharisees, the religious people of the day, " The publicans; and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Often, in the course of a comparatively blameless life, there have been these calls, and God, in the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, has been despised.

When conviction of sin comes, when the Spirit of God sets a man in consequence in God's presence, he finds out both what he has been doing, and what he is. He finds out that he has been treasuring up unto himself " wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God " ; and more than this, he finds out also that his natural condition is a condition of sin and rebellion against God, and that he cannot remedy it. Now, whilst this state of soul is ever painful (and it often drives a man nearly to despair), it is salutary, a blessed thing. Wherever there is a clear sense of our position, there is to desire to go to God, though with the consciousness of having no title to be there. Just as with the poor prodigal-" I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." So also with Peter, at the feet of Jesus-" Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! " There is this consciousness Of unworthiness before God because of having recognised His holiness, and that He ought to be holy; but there is also the desire to go to Him-a seeming inconsistency, but that which is really of the Spirit of God. It is very natural, where the Spirit works, to desire to go to God, because we feel He is needed by us, although conscience says we are unfit to be there. The heart is turned to God ; it sees His holiness, sees that He ought to be holy, and so takes God's part against itself. There is no desire that He should be less holy, that it might, so to speak, slip into heaven ; and therefore it justifies God, instead of seeking to condemn Him that it may justify itself-that which many a poor sinner does, that which Adam did when he said, " The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Instead of justifying self, there is the justifying God and condemning self. Thus the heart is set right. It has not yet, it is true, learned redemption-what God has done for it in Christ; it is occupied with its state before God as a present thing, but this is salutary. There is not the peace that God does give and will give; still the heart is set right.

In grace God had raised up priesthood to meet the need of His people. But there was assumption on the part of these Israelites, that, because they were His people, they could take a place before Him otherwise than on His ground. They had abused the privileges conferred upon them-murmured against God - made the golden calf - said it was better to go back to Egypt - despised the promises ; there had been a long course of failure and rebellion, and at last it rises up to what is called the " gainsaying of Core." Whilst in this fleshly state, they assume that they can draw nigh to God. " And they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the

congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord ? " (See chap. 16). Here is haughtiness in the presence of God. And this is very apt to creep into our hearts-a taking up in the flesh the privileges of the children of God. It may not be manifested in the gross aspect of this scene ; but is there not often the feeling of being able to come near to God because it is our privilege to do so ? Now it is clearly our privilege, the privilege of all saints ; but it is a sad thing if as a consequence of that nearness, when the soul has got out of His presence, it goes on haughtily and carelessly, still talking about its nearness.

We find another instance of haughtiness in the presence of God, in the case of Cain (Gen. 4). When God said to Cain, " Where -is Abel thy brother ? " he replied, " I know not: am I my brother's keeper ? " answering God flippantly. But the moment God shewed Himself as God, saying, " The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground, and now art thou cursed from the earth," in came despair. Wherever there is haughtiness of heart before God, and God shews Himself, there is despair ; the language of the heart is, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish." We get here a great principle : even in the man who is a Christian, there is no realised ground of confidence, and the heart sinks down in despair.

A Christian has always the ground of being perfectly happy before God, because he is perfectly saved. This is the right state of a Christian-that of confidence, not in the flesh (carnal confidence), but confidence and joy before God. A state of want of confidence and of uncertainty as regards himself is a state in which the Christian may be found ; he may pass through it, and that even because of a certain work produced on the soul by the Holy Ghost, but it is not his proper state. What the Holy Ghost gives is certainty. Wherever there is uncertainty, it results from the working of our own hearts, even though in connection with (and, in a sense, grounded upon) what is really the work of the Spirit. I may believe that God is holy, and seeing sin in myself, may begin to reason on my own worthiness, as to whether I can, or cannot, come to God ; whether I can have anything to say to God. There may be the desire to go to Him, but then I do not know whether He will accept me. This is not faith; and yet it is constantly the state of soul in which Christians are found. It is not properly a Christian state; it is reasoning upon things known by faith, things found out through faith, but it is not faith. We find in the word of God, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin-that by the blood of the cross He has made peace-that our sins and iniquities are remembered no more-and, if faith is in exercise, we are happy, we get peace. Faith is the simple-hearted reception of what God has said.

Unbelief is not a Christian state. It is, alas! that into which the Christian may fall, but it is not a Christian state. Uncertainty cannot be therefore recognised as a proper position of the soul, admitting that it may pass through it, and indeed, that it generally does. But then Christian certainty is certainty in, and not out of, God's presence. Inasmuch as it is certainty founded on faith in what He has said, it is. always certainty in His presence. Faith is at rest there. All else that comforts, strengthens, gives us liberty in what we do in the world, is based on what we are in the presence of God. The blood is placed there-on the mercy-seat-in God's sight; and therefore, because we know this, we can say that we are justified from all things, that it is impossible God can impute sin to us. The blood is under His eye, and not our sins.

But there is quite a different state of soul from this, a confidence out of God's presence. The soul may think and reason about the ground of Christian confidence, and Christian privilege, just as did these Israelites that they were owned of God. Theirs was a carnal confidence. It was just the taking up of general principles of truth as to God's dealings with His people, and then going on in fleshly assumption. This brought them to murmur and rebel. They came up with confidence that the Lord was with them; but the Lord gave directions respecting Korah, Dathan, and Abirain, and interfered in judgment upon their

ungodliness. And then we read, " But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord," (v. 41).

Now what is the remedy of the Lord for this ? He sets up priesthood, as the only ground on which He can go on with them. He says, as it were, ' I must have clear and plain evidence what My power is, in order to make cease from Me the murmurings of the children of Israel; but then, if I give this evidence of My power, it must be in grace ; to deal with them on any other ground than that of grace would be for destruction.' And such must always be the case. If the Lord were simply to come by the power of His actual presence, it would bring confusion into the soul. Sometimes we see this on a death-bed for a little moment. In what the Lord thus does in bringing the soul into His presence, He puts it under a shade of the power of that which Christ went through-just a shade of it.

The truth is, that, in the way in which many believers are occupied in daily life, they little realise the presence of God. It is not that they have not peace, but that they never fully estimate what the flesh is before God. One learns this from intercourse with Christians, and specially with those who have been long Christians. They know very little what it is to find themselves face to face with God. They may have been awakened under convictions of sin (perhaps terrible convictions), and have got peace to their souls ; but since that there may have been the going on comfortably with certain things, without a realising of the presence of God, so that if it were to come on them, they too would be " consumed " with terror. It is well for us to remember that certainty as to salvation is the proper, the normal state of a Christian. I repeat this here, just to shew that what I am now saying is not meant to deny it at all ; but still I say that if God were to meet such persons, real Christians though they were, in the present power of what He is as God, it would produce trouble and distress. This ought not so to be. It is quite clear that, if it is the case, we are not really living in His presence, and that is the place where we are privileged to be. There is a constant tendency in our hearts, when out of it, to be taken up with certain things that are grounded upon what is truly our relationship to God, and to carry on these things without realising His presence. Now, if confidence goes along with this, it is a most hardening thing. Confidence, I repeat, ought always to be the portion of the believer-the confidence of faith. God does not withdraw this, but we may lose it. Whilst there is a going on with confidence, and we are not walking in the presence of God, the conscience not being sincere, there exists that which is mining the very foundation. We may go on in joy, but if that joy is not joy in the presence of God, there will be a breakdown some time.

Now that is what I mean by " carnal confidence "-not the confidence of an unconverted person : there is that, but I do not mean it : I mean the confidence of one whose peace and hopes are rightly based, but maintained without walking in the presence of God. It is a right peace, right hopes, a thing rightly founded, that which is really his own (the proper condition of a Christian is always to have it) ; but still it assumes a carnal character in the heart when it is carried on without God ; that is, when it is not continued in by walking in His presence. The consequence is , , that the moment the Lord appears, no matter in what way, let it even be in grace, His presence comes to be terrible. These people had not realised the power of it in God's presence, and therefore they broke down in despair, and said, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish."

Now I do not say that it will come to this point in our hearts, but (the same thing in principle) it will be for discouragement, for loss of confidence, and for distrust of God. Suppose you, a real Christian, had been going on in carelessness, and carrying this carnal confidence along with it; and one were to speak to you even of the intercession of Jesus, if there was a sense of God's presence through this to your soul, it would not be a cheering and strengthening but rather a discouraging thing, and the soul would break

down. Our place with the Lord is to walk with joy, but it is joy in the Lord. Enoch " walked with God." Can you say you are walking with God ? I do not ask if you are doing that which is openly wrong ; but would the presence of God alarm and distress you? Our confidence, if we have any, is a fleshly thing, when that is the case.

Do not rest in such a condition : it is not what God has called us to. He is all grace, grace to us according to our need ; but it is with Him, and in His presence, that we find and enjoy His grace. Moses sang (Exod. 15 : 13), " Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed. Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." And that is what He has done for us. He has brought us home to Himself And what then ? He has put His Spirit into our hearts, that it may be our home. You know what it is to be at home : we act so differently there-no other place is like it. We are at home when the Spirit is working in our hearts, giving the joy of our portion in the presence of God. We may have to go forth into the world to labour, to exercise ourselves, and to be engaged in a thousand different ways ; but when we get back again, how great the change! We only go out to come back. There we are at home. How comforting, how establishing the thought! It is a terrible thing to be saying, instead of this, " Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish; whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die "-when God's presence, in the place of being the home of our hearts, is terror and distress. I have no doubt, that you will find hundreds of Christians, who, instead of feeling away from home when they have got out of God's presence, are at ease. But it is, I repeat, a terrible thing, not merely because it is a wrong thing, but because God is grace. We are called to be " at home " with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, when about to go back to heaven, said to Mary, " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God." We ought to be as much " at home " in spirit there as He. Was it not with joy, with confidence, that Jesus said He was going to the presence of His Father? He came forth from God's presence to act in love in the midst of this ruined world, and He went back when He had finished the work that had been given Him to do. And was it not, in a certain sense, with the feeling of going home ? But He says, " unto my Father and your Father; to my God and your God." What a blessed thought! That is the church's place; we are called to be cc at home " with our God and our Father-to the blessedness of His house. No matter what the world may be, we should be there at home-happy home!-as truly there in spirit, and as happy there, as Christ.

If that is what is given us in Christ (and God gives nothing less), do our souls realise it ? We may be measuring fitness, but God cannot measure fitness. If He receive at all, it is for Christ's sake ; our title is based upon what Christ has done. We may be going through many an experience; but God does not rest on our experience. Nay, He has not to do, in that sense, without experience at all. If He receive us, it is for Christ's sake, it is as Christ, it is all Christ. It can be nothing less, and nothing short of that. Having adverted to this, let us now turn to God's answer.

After all the murmurings of the people, after the rebellion and gainsaying of Korah, this is the manner in which the Lord takes away the murmurings, by priesthood in grace. 'I must conduct them' (He says) 'by Aaron's rod (not by the rod of Moses) to Canaan. This people have not only been found in bondage in Egypt, but in rebellion and sin in the wilderness ; and therefore the only way in which I can deal with them is by priesthood.' There is no possible hope of leading us up into the heavenly Canaan except we are put under the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and therefore it is said that Christ is a " Son over his own house."

It is " his house " ; that is the first thing. How does He deal with it ? Suppose we find a house that is not ours to be a bad, dirty house, we may bear with it-not so if it is our own house. The way that Christ deals

with that which is His house (it is His interest, so to speak, to do so) is to have it clean. We are put under the priesthood of Christ; this is God's arrangement for the purpose of dealing with sin in the "house." "If any man sin," a Christian man: what then? He is guilty and gets condemned? No such thing. That would be the reasoning of the heart where there had been carnal confidence"; it would get alarmed and uneasy, and say, "We die, we perish," but what is the truth? "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sin sets Christ to work; that is the effect of it, not to leave it there (of that we are quite sure), but on the same principle that, if we find uncleanness in our house, it would not make us reject the house but get rid of the uncleanness, so Christ is occupied in love in removing the sin. It is the priesthood of Christ that leads us up into the heavenly city.

But the next thing to be noticed is, we are priests in God's house, and the thing therefore which we have to bear is the iniquity of the house. "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood." This is true of all the church. We are God's sanctuary-"the house of God" (I Tim- 3 : 15). So of the individual saint, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Cor. 6 : 19). It was not allowed to have anything defiled in the camp, much less in the "sanctuary." We are brought now to dwell in the sanctuary of God-to minister in the priesthood of God. This involves responsibility. Thus have we to judge about sin; and not as though we were under law. This is where God has brought us-the position in which we stand towards God, and what we have to bear. It is no matter of attainment or of maturity in Christ: you may have been converted yesterday, or you may be a father "in Christ, and therefore able to understand it better but that does not affect the question: there might have been a young priest or an old priest in the sanctuary, but the young priest would have to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary and of the priesthood, as much as the old one-as much as Aaron himself.

God, in the riches of His grace, has made us His "sanctuary; our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost; we are priests in His house; and iniquity must therefore be judged accordingly. If the sense of this does not produce joy in our hearts, we cannot be on our right ground. If we do not know what it is to be in the sanctuary of God, we do not know what it is to be a Christian. I do not say we are not Christians, but we do not know what it is to be a Christian. If we do not know what it is to be priests unto God, we have never yet got into our proper place before God.

There is another remark. Suppose we have, through grace, the consciousness of being priests, I ask, Is there not, as a necessary consequence of this (not the feeling, "Behold, we die, we perish," but that which takes the place of it), holy confidence, confidence before God? He says, I will not deal with those who come into my house as a judge, as though they were under law; it is "you and your sons," etc. If God has people in His house, He will have them there as priests. If we are saying, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die," we have got back under law. We are listening to the reasoning of our own hearts, and that is not faith. The moment we begin to reason thus, we are under law; faith is not in exercise, and therefore we must be under law. This "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die"-is all law. Now what is the Lord's word, or rather what is the silence of His word about it? It does not know such a man as the one who is saying this: his doing so is just a proof that he is not a "priest" at all. He does not know what righteousness is, in coming into the presence of God; he does not know what grace is; he will neither come into the house, nor perish-he is not in a condition to do either.

If the Spirit of God is working in the heart, He produces a sense of dread in bringing out of that condition : but if we then distrust God, we shall never get into His presence on that ground. There is no answer to us, except that we are in a wrong and untrue condition altogether. God may bring us out of it, but He does not own us in it. Let us remember that it was " carnal confidence " that had produced, as we have seen, the feeling here ; and it may be that the same thing is working in our hearts. Where there is " carnal confidence," it takes us from under the consciousness of grace, and puts us for the time under the power of law. Nothing meets us there, nothing can meet the case, no, not even the intercession of Christ.

To conclude : we are brought, through wondrous grace, into the sanctuary of God, we are made priests unto God ; and that is the way in which we are to judge of good and evil. We are always to judge of good or evil, according to the condition in which a man is ; we do not expect our servants to be sons ; neither our sons to be servants. And if we are merely judging of good and of evil according to natural conscience, we are not going on Christian ground at all. This is the question we have to ask ourselves : What is it that becomes a man who is God's temple ? what is it that becomes a man who is God's priest ?

Do we shrink from being set in this responsibility ? If we cannot say that we like to be there, or that we have such an interest in God's glory that we desire it, if we are speaking about our weakness, we have not the confidence of grace ; we are saying in a little degree, " Behold, we die, we perish." It is the same thing in principle : I speak not of the extent of it. Why is it that we are thus afraid ? Just because our hearts are not strong in the full and simple confidence of grace-present grace : as it is said, " Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Though Christ has died and put away our sin, yet we have not full confidence in God's grace, we think He is not all grace; that is what is meant by the " present grace." God loves us with the most perfect love ; He cannot deal with us on any other ground; He loves us at this moment, just as much as when He gave Christ to die for our sins. He is love, and nothing else, to us. He is not double-hearted. What we are standing in is grace. When the soul is confident of that, ' O now' (it says) ' let me have this holiness, let me enjoy this holiness of the sanctuary.' If it is all grace, it does not say " we die, we perish." How can we die, where all is grace ?

What we want is the full blessed, clear apprehension that we stand in grace. Our hearts will then have joy and courage. That which will enable us to act aright is, not what we have called carnal confidence, the going on in the common-place joy of certain truths, but the certainty and joy of God's presence. Do we know God's presence as the practical home of our hearts ? Oh what joy is there in this! Of one thing be sure: coming to Him in the name of Jesus, you will find it to be the real , blessed, secure home of your hearts.

For ever blessed be His name, He has said, " Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/carnal-confidence-and-confidence-of-faith/>

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