

Christ's Cross and God's Due Time

by John Nelson Darby

The gospel is the revelation of God's love towards us after He has estimated our need, and it is the only means by which we can be saved from our ungodly and powerless state.

Scripture: Romans 5:6

Topics: "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound truth of God's grace as revealed through Christ's sacrifice at the appointed time, highlighting that humanity, in its ungodliness and lack of strength, is fully reliant on God's grace for salvation. He explains that the gospel is not about what man can do, but rather about what God has done for man, showcasing His love by sending Christ to die for sinners. Darby stresses the importance of recognizing our true condition before God, which leads to a deeper understanding of grace and the necessity of faith in Christ for righteousness.

Transcript

CHRIST'S CROSS, AND GOD'S " DUE TIME "

ROMANS 5 : 6-8

In the last verse of this chapter we have, in fact, the summing up of the great principles and ways of God's dealings with man in this principle of the gospel, " grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The result of what the apostle has been speaking of as to God's dealings, dispensational and personal, is, that all is grace. " When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly," v. 6. " God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," v. 8. It is grace that did everything ; v. 15-21. " By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," and they may have gone on sinning and setting aside the authority of God; but by Christ's obedience " shall many be made righteous." " Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And in the sum of the whole matter grace reigns.

That which gave the apostle so much confidence in this was, that it was consequent upon the discussion of the whole condition of man, as looked at in every way and in every shape. The blessed result was, not something that came in, and the discussion after ; but after the discussion of the whole condition of man

(that having been gone through), God takes His own place, and manifests what He will be and is towards the sinner in Jesus Christ. Now that is properly speaking the gospel. The gospel is not what man is, or what God requires from man, but what God is after He has thoroughly revealed what man is. When received in simplicity it leaves no possible question in the mind. It is the revelation of God made after He has estimated all our need. The gospel, we repeat, is the revelation of what God is, when what man is has been thus fully revealed. " When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die ; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Peace of soul is constantly hindered through our not recognising that God has taken full cognizance of what we are. The gospel begins consequent upon His having made a full estimate. He knew from the beginning what man was and would be ; but after, in his history, He had brought out and demonstrated in ways and conduct what man was under all the possible circumstances in which he could be placed-when He had demonstrated him to be entirely lost, and that He could not trust him in any way or in any measure, He begins, and says, I cannot trust in you : you must trust in Me. Hence the reason there is often a long and painful conflict, because of our not being brought down, in conscience, to the point where the gospel begins. A man may acknowledge himself to be ungodly, but then he hopes to cease to be ungodly; and God perhaps lets him struggle on thus for some time, until in his own soul he is brought to the place where the gospel begins. It is not that the gospel is not simple, but that in conscience we are not in the conditions where the gospel sees us. The work must be in the conscience. We read (Matt. 13) of a man hearing the word, and anon with joy receiving it, yet of his not having " root in himself " ; evidently no work in the conscience (it is not that he is insincere) but only in the intellect ; he has never been brought in guilty before God ; " for," it is added, " when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended." Whereas, if he knew that his own soul was lost without Christ, surely he would say with the disciples, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life! " (John 6 : 69). It is a great deal harder to believe that we are " without strength " than that we are " ungodly." Many a soul believes the one, that has not as yet been brought to believe the other. God has given us His history of the world from Adam to Christ. There was a " due time " for the death of Christ, a " due time," that is, in the history of the world. So is there the " due time,"* of the individual heart ; not that the same feelings pass through the minds of all, but each must be brought to the result given us by the history of man previously to the death of Christ.

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It is true, many a person admits himself to be ungodly that has not been brought to feel the full meaning of the word. It is wonderful how our moral distance from God has rendered us incapable of judging of this. If a man say that God is holy, and that he is a sinner, as judged of by his natural conscience, yet not admit that he is shut out from the presence of God, but reply, " Oh, I hope not," he has not the power of apprehending His presence. On the one side God is " of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," on the other man is a sinner ; but he has no sort of conscience or consciousness that he is in the presence of God. There is not a single individual that would not put off being there. Our conscience can never naturally bear it ; the whole secret of their hopes is, that we have never been in the presence of God. In one sense we are always in His presence, but I speak now of being brought near in conscience. A man may be living absolutely without God, and yet be accounted a very good man after all. If he hurts his fellow-man it is another affair. In judging of right and wrong in the world God is always shut out. There is no surer proof of the way man has cast off God than his judgment of right and wrong; he calls " wrong" that which injures

man, but the divine presence and claims are shut out. It all shew this first great truth, that men are "without God."

But there is another truth stated here-they are also "without strength." When a man is really brought to himself, it is always a question of present standing. An ungodly man will think (it is the natural thought) of meeting God some time, of what He will be in the day of judgment. But if His presence be revealed to the heart, it is His presence now that occupies it. Whilst there is merely the thought of going to God, there is another question : man thinks about how he can make up with God-time is before him, in which he can make his peace with God. He is either unconscious of the state he is in, or is looking to something by which he hopes, at a future day, he may be able to stand before God. He has no real thought of God but as a judge. Now hoping for mercy so, is no more than saying (and many mean nothing but this), that God is not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, that He can let a little pass.

As to the first point, the state of the Gentiles was thorough ungodliness ; Rom. I. The apostle, after looking at man in every way (proud as man is of himself), brings all in guilty. But men have a natural conscience, and they are afraid to do in the light what they do in the dark. When in the outward darkness of Satan and ungodliness, they "work all manner of uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4 : 17-19), worshipping stocks and stones, etc. Christianity makes men ashamed to do in the light what they did before in the dark (the profession of it, I mean ; in that sense, it is borrowed light). Being in this condition, his own lusts are his springs of action, the slave of Satan and of his own lusts, gratifying his mere natural wicked inclinations, that was a clear case. It did not become a holy God. It was plainly ungodliness.

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But this went much farther. I may have my mind open to see and estimate the spirituality of the law, and not be merely a carnal Jew : where does that bring me ? Into the consciousness, not merely that I have failed, and broken the law without, but of a principle within-a "law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," Rom. 7 : 23. If I am put under a law, the better that law, the worse my case. It may be said, "Why then did God give the law ?" "It was added," we are told, "because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made," Gal. 3 : 19. To what end ? "The law entered [perfect as it was] that the offence might abound." "What could the law enter for, to man already a sinner and having this law in his members ?" "The law entered that the offence might abound, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful," Rom. 7 : 13. This was the way God took to convince man that he was "without strength." And in that sense it was mercy. What is more difficult than to convince man of this ? The judgment right and the affections right, still there was this law in his members ; and the law, while it discovered and brought out this, imparting no strength, added to the character of the sin. For then was another thing; it made every act which was the result of this evil of our nature "transgression"-a thing done in despite of His authority. "Sin by the commandment became exceeding sinful," Rom. 7: 13. Now clearly a thing that makes sin "exceeding sinful" is not the way to make me a sinner, have any righteousness before God!

What is man without the law? what with it? Man without the law is out of the presence of God ; with it, he has failed in responsibility, and is a breaker of the law. And when Jesus came, the witness of the

goodness of God, he rejected Him; John 15 : 24, 25. Man has been tried in every way, and found utterly wanting. Wherefore ? Was God ignorant of his condition ? No ; law was for the discovery of it to himself. God is now bringing home to his conscience that which He knew from the beginning; Rom. 3 : 19.

A word here as to the triple form the law took. First, there was the perfect standard of what man ought to be; secondly, the prohibition of what man was disposed to, a positive standard of what God required, and the prohibition of that to which man was inclined ; and, as a third thing, an adjunct of certain ordinances and ceremonies " imposed until the time of reformation," Heb. 9 : 9, 10. What did God do all this for ? On the one hand, to demonstrate that man was not righteous ; and, on the other, to point out One who (holy and righteous) should suffer " the just for the unjust."

What did man ? He took, to make out a righteousness for himself before God, the thing God had sent in to demonstrate him a sinner ; and then, in order to fill up the gap in his own heart, sought to eke out his righteousness through these ceremonies-types and prefigurings of Jesus, the substitute for the sinner.

The moment there is spiritual understanding, when grace is not understood, the only effect is to make the soul miserable it finds no strength. The more it understands the law to be what it should be, the more it feels justly condemned, and incapable of fulfilling it, or of delivering itself from its condition. " O wretched man that I am! " is its cry, and " Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? " (Rom. 7 : 24). All that is merely the question, " What is man ? " Man is ungodly and without strength ; and his history is summed up in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, have we been brought to the acknowledgment of the result of this history ? Had we simplicity to receive by faith what God shews us man to be, we should have no thought of his being under a state of probation. For four thousand years man was under a state of probation, and, as the result of the trial, no good is expected from the bad tree. The gospel is come on the ground of man's being no longer under probation of God. He has given up looking for fruit. " A sower went forth to sow," etc. (Matt. 13). The natural thing was for Jesus to seek fruit ; but there was none there : all had become verjuice.

Man having been put to the test, now God comes in. It is quite evident that, unless it be for everlasting condemnation, we must give up the thought of appearing before God as a Judge ; Rom. 3 : 19, 20. " Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." The more I know of myself, the more I know that. The love of Christ only puts me into a darker judgment of myself. Is God to pass by judgment, as if there were no difference between good and evil? Impossible! There is just the beginning of wisdom. We cannot stand before God: what is to be done ? A man must, in that sense, have done with himself. I cannot trust God in anything I ever have been, or can be ; God cannot trust in me : now can I trust in God ? What God is was before sin. If I begin to reason, I am under law ; I cannot reason about God being grace to me : if I could reckon on it, it would not be grace.

Where shall I find the revelation and testimony of what God is ? In Christ. What was this blessed witness for God here ? Never anything but grace. With the Pharisees He shewed that their righteousness was only the adding of the sin of hypocrisy to their other sins. But whenever a man was before Him without any pretence to righteousness, let him be the vilest of the human race-a thief, an adulteress, a woman of the city, who was a sinner-whatever else, He was grace and nothing but grace. I want to know what the God with whom I have to do, as a sinner, is ; and what is He ? Grace. Perhaps I say, If I go to Him, I shall find Him gracious ; but that is not all the testimony. Jesus came to us. " In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," I John 4 : 9, 10. In the coming of the Son of God, I have the positive certainty of what God is to me, assuming that I believe Him to be the Son of God ; I have the perfect certainty of His love. " When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." From His mouth (if I am to take His testimony) I shall never bear anything but " Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." If I am in the truth of my sins, I shall find Christ in the truth of His grace.

God has right to be sovereign, and there is the reign of grace (v. 31). But God is righteous ; and therefore grace is to reign " through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." In the grace of God reigning, He has given His Son to be the proof of His love ; but then God is righteous, and could not introduce the sinner in his sins into His presence, and therefore He gave His Son to bear the sins. God's righteousness is displayed in all its truth and power. The Lord Jesus died for the ungodly. He was obedient at all costs : He bore everything, and went down into the dust of death, man's hatred, God's desertion, and Satan's power ; we find Him there at the cost of everything. Everything that was against us was done away. By one man's obedience many are made righteous.

God's righteous wrath against sin has been exhibited. Where do I learn it ? In the cross of Christ. Was it in holily sparing His Son? No! I see the wrath of God against my sin executed in that cross. The judgment of God against sin, the thing I dreaded, is now my salvation : " Out of the eater has come forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness " ; the head of Goliath, so to speak, has been taken off with his own sword. The Lord Jesus Christ has risen again as having borne the judgment. But more, He stands in living righteousness before God. Righteousness is there for ever under the eye of God.

The blood of Christ shed in death-death as the wages of sin-is ever under the eye of God. I do not say that it is ever under my eye, but it is under God's eye. He is the judge. Never shall we feel about it as we ought ; but sure I am He feels about it as He ought. He sees the blood. " When I see the blood, I will pass over." The blood is of infinite value with God. But there is another thing, He Himself is there-" Jesus Christ the righteous." He who has obeyed, who has accomplished all, is there. There may be chastisement from the Father (Heb. 12), and a great deal of painful discipline for our good ; but righteousness is ever there, the righteous One in the presence of God for us.

The Holy Ghost was to convince the world of righteousness, because Jesus had gone to the Father ; John 16 : 7, 10. Righteousness is to be found in the presence of God, and it is He who has borne my sins.

And let us remember that this cannot be a question of hope. My soul may be looking to Jesus and hoping that He will speak a word of peace ; but I do not hope that Christ will die for me ; I do not hope that Christ will rise again for me and accomplish this righteousness ; I believe. It is a simple question of the value of the Person, and blood, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the Christian life. The first thing is to begin our conduct with God. Do not let us talk about what we shall be. If we come to God with our present in our hand, the first question is, What are you ? Man is a sinner, and no present in the hand of a sinner is accepted. Where there is really truth in the heart, the conscience takes notice of its present condition, and will never dream of putting off. It is, I have seen Thee: what shall I do ? Job was a godly man, but a reasoner ; yet the moment he sees God, he says, " I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." He sees God, and that ends the whole question.

There is another point. It is not merely the efficacy of the work as regards the past, so that I stand before God without fault, but I am there in Christ. I bless God for many means in helping me on in my walk; but as for my standing with God, were there anything whatever needed, it would be saying, I was not already perfect in Christ. Faith says, Christ has presented me in the presence of God, according to the mind of God, and I have nothing to seek. This is what the apostle means by " holding the Head," Col. 2 : 19.

Another thing flows from this : as grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, realising my position by virtue of being united to Him, the life in which I am one with Christ will shew itself down here in my living to Christ. The principle of the Christian's position is just this :-You have died with Christ, and, to be living as those who are " alive from the dead," you cannot have a single principle in common with the world. I am one with Christ (if I am a believer), and consequently as Christ before God, " I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," Gal. 2: 20. So again, " Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body," 2 Cor. 4 : 10. It is not the demand of a certain amount of human righteousness, or the removal of certain evils that hurt the conscience and offend society ; it is the living display of what Christ is before men. We should never be content when we fail to display Christ before men: as Christ is righteousness for me before God, so is He the example and standard of righteousness before men: as Christ is for me before God, so ought I to be for Christ before men. This is the way for the Christian to judge of right or wrong. We may be humbled because of failure, but we must not lower the standard.

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Well now, have we been brought to the acknowledgment of the result of this history ? Had we simplicity to receive by faith what God shews us man to be, we should have no thought of his being under a state of probation. For four thousand years man was under a state of probation, and, as the result of the trial, no good is expected from the bad tree. The gospel is come on the ground of man's being no longer under probation of God. He has given up looking for fruit. " A sower went forth to sow," etc. (Matt. 13). The natural thing was for Jesus to seek fruit ; but there was none there : all had become verjuice.

Man having been put to the test, now God comes in. It is quite evident that, unless it be for everlasting condemnation, we must give up the thought of appearing before God as a Judge ; Rom. 3 : 19, 20. " Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." The more I know of myself, the more I know that. The love of Christ only puts me into a darker judgment of myself. Is God to pass by judgment, as if there were no difference between good and evil? Impossible! There is just the beginning of wisdom. We cannot stand before God: what is to be done ? A man must, in that sense, have done with himself. I cannot trust God in anything I ever have been, or can be ; God cannot trust in me : now can I trust in God ? What God is was before sin. If I begin to reason, I am under law ; I cannot reason about God being grace to me : if I could reckon on it, it would not be grace.

Where shall I find the revelation and testimony of what God is ? In Christ. What was this blessed witness for God here ? Never anything but grace. With the Pharisees He shewed that their righteousness was only the adding of the sin of hypocrisy to their other sins. But whenever a man was before Him without any pretence to righteousness, let him be the vilest of the human race-a thief, an adulteress, a woman of the city, who was a sinner-whatever else, He was grace and nothing but grace. I want to know what the God with whom I have to do, as a sinner, is ; and what is He ? Grace. Perhaps I say, If I go to Him, I shall find Him gracious ; but that is not all the testimony. Jesus came to us. " In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our

sins," I John 4 : 9, 10. In the coming of the Son of God, I have the positive certainty of what God is to me, assuming that I believe Him to be the Son of God ; I have the perfect certainty of His love. " When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." From His mouth (if I am to take His testimony) I shall never bear anything but " Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." If I am in the truth of my sins, I shall find Christ in the truth of His grace.

God has right to be sovereign, and there is the reign of grace (v. 31). But God is righteous ; and therefore grace is to reign " through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." In the grace of God reigning, He has given His Son to be the proof of His love ; but then God is righteous, and could not introduce the sinner in his sins into His presence, and therefore He gave His Son to bear the sins. God's righteousness is displayed in all its truth and power. The Lord Jesus died for the ungodly. He was obedient at all costs : He bore everything, and went down into the dust of death, man's hatred, God's desertion, and Satan's power ; we find Him there at the cost of everything. Everything that was against us was done away. By one man's obedience many are made righteous.

God's righteous wrath against sin has been exhibited. Where do I learn it ? In the cross of Christ. Was it in holily sparing His Son? No! I see the wrath of God against my sin executed in that cross. The judgment of God against sin, the thing I dreaded, is now my salvation : " Out of the eater has come forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness " ; the head of Goliath, so to speak, has been taken off with his own sword. The Lord Jesus Christ has risen again as having borne the judgment. But more, He stands in living righteousness before God. Righteousness is there for ever under the eye of God.

The blood of Christ shed in death-death as the wages of sin-is ever under the eye of God. I do not say that it is ever under my eye, but it is under God's eye. He is the judge. Never shall we feel about it as we ought ; but sure I am He feels about it as He ought. He sees the blood. " When I see the blood, I will pass over." The blood is of infinite value with God. But there is another thing, He Himself is there-" Jesus Christ the righteous." He who has obeyed, who has accomplished all, is there. There may be chastisement from the Father (Heb. 12), and a great deal of painful discipline for our good ; but righteousness is ever there, the righteous One in the presence of God for us.

The Holy Ghost was to convince the world of righteousness, because Jesus had gone to the Father ; John 16 : 7, 10. Righteousness is to be found in the presence of God, and it is He who has borne my sins.

And let us remember that this cannot be a question of hope. My soul may be looking to Jesus and hoping that He will speak a word of peace ; but I do not hope that Christ will die for me ; I do not hope that Christ will rise again for me and accomplish this righteousness ; I believe. It is a simple question of the value of the Person, and blood, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the Christian life. The first thing is to begin our conduct with God. Do not let us talk about what we shall be. If we come to God with our present in our hand, the first question is, What are you ? Man is a sinner, and no present in the hand of a sinner is accepted. Where there is really truth in the heart, the conscience takes notice of its present condition, and will never dream of putting off. It is, I have seen Thee: what shall I do ? Job was a godly man, but a reasoner ; yet the moment he sees God, he says, " I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." He sees God, and that ends the whole question.

There is another point. It is not merely the efficacy of the work as regards the past, so that I stand before God without fault, but I am there in Christ. I bless God for many means in helping me on in my walk; but as

for my standing with God, were there anything whatever needed, it would be saying, I was not already perfect in Christ. Faith says, Christ has presented me in the presence of God, according to the mind of God, and I have nothing to seek. This is what the apostle means by " holding the Head," Col. 2 : 19.

Another thing flows from this : as grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, realising my position by virtue of being united to Him, the life in which I am one with Christ will shew itself down here in my living to Christ. The principle of the Christian's position is just this :-You have died with Christ, and, to be living as those who are " alive from the dead," you cannot have a single principle in common with the world. I am one with Christ (if I am a believer), and consequently as Christ before God, " I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," Gal. 2: 20. So again, " Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body," 2 Cor. 4 : 10. It is not the demand of a certain amount of human righteousness, or the removal of certain evils that hurt the conscience and offend society ; it is the living display of what Christ is before men. We should never be content when we fail to display Christ before men: as Christ is righteousness for me before God, so is He the example and standard of righteousness before men: as Christ is for me before God, so ought I to be for Christ before men. This is the way for the Christian to judge of right or wrong. We may be humbled because of failure, but we must not lower the standard.

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