

Death to the Believer 2 Corinthians 5

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in living the Christian life.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:1

Topics: "Redemption", "Confidence in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that redemption brings believers into peace and rest in God's presence, highlighting that true Christian life stems from this relationship. He explains that while we are called to walk in obedience, it is through recognizing our death with Christ that we find true liberty and power to overcome sin. Darby encourages believers to live in constant dependence on divine power, understanding that our life in Christ enables us to face judgment with confidence. He stresses the importance of being manifest before God, which leads to an active conscience and a deeper relationship with Him. Ultimately, he reassures that through Christ, we have the promise of eternal life and glory, urging believers to focus on their heavenly calling.

Transcript

Redemption sets us at rest and in peace in the presence of God. The whole character of Christian life flows from being brought back to God, and thus we are called to walk with God. To believe that we are brought back into the presence of God is not presumption; it is faith. It is presumption to think that we can be saved in any other way.

The character of our life is that of constant dependence on divine power. If we are "troubled on every side" without being distressed, it must be because the power of God is working. If "perplexed" without being in despair, it is because the power of God is there. But then I must hold myself entirely as a dead man as regards nature, and in the possession of a new life in Christ. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body," 2 Cor. 4:10. With Paul the flesh was not allowed to interrupt the power of this divine life, so that it flowed on in an unhindered way. This is a blessed state, and we should know it in our measure. Whenever the life is in activity it always rests on its object; while the character of the life is that of perfect obedience and simple dependence. The obedience of Christ is very different from our thoughts of obedience, which often imply a will opposed to God, and moreover it involves in us much that is to be abstained from, as well as many claims to be yielded to. With Christ the Father's will was the motive, the only motive for whatever He did or

suffered. Hence the motive I have in acting, as far as I am a new creature, is the doing of God's will.

It is an important fact that sacred scripture never tells me to die to sin, for this I never could do. But the scripture tells me that I am dead, having died with Christ, and this is Christian liberty. I begin with being dead with Christ. For I cannot die to sin, when sin is the character of my whole life apart from Christ. But how then have I this death? I have another life; I am alive in Christ. I am to mortify the flesh most surely, but then it is only in the power of this life which I have in Christ that I am able to do that; and God's dealings with us will help us therein. But when I look at self, this is not faith: I cannot indeed see what the life is which I have got, it is all so marred. But when by faith I look at Christ, faith's object, I see it all - love, joy, patience, obedience. And we are partakers of this life, as Christ said, "Because I live ye shall live also." And again, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." I thus get confidence with Him, and then His perfectness, which shines as light, shews me all my inconsistencies; and the more I see of them in the light of Christ's perfectness, the better.

261 In the power of this life I find myself practically dead, and I see my house in heaven, as it is expressed in verse 2. This makes me groan. But why do I groan? Because I have seen and tasted the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in person I am not there yet. The groaning is not from disappointment, but from earnest desire, "Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (v. 2). As yet we are not in the positive possession of this glory, but longing to possess it; for faith rests on the ground of our position in that deliverance which has been wrought for us. Hence there is no Christian, however weak, but has a title to long for the glory to which he has been predestinated. It is true of every believer, that "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

But we must not think that the earnest of the Spirit is the earnest of God's love. It is the earnest of the inheritance, the earnest of glory; as in Ephesians it is said, "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of his glory."

What God has done to save, He has done perfectly. He has loved us also perfectly, and because of this "we have boldness in the day of judgment." Not only have we boldness before the throne of grace, but "boldness in the day of judgment."

Christ also, into whose presence we go, if we depart, and before whose tribunal we are to appear, gave Himself for us, as the apostle says, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." He gave not His life only, nor merely His word, but all; His affections, His heart, all that constituted Himself. We have not a thought of blessedness in Him, but He has given it to us. For though we are the subjects of redemption, He who has wrought redemption has an eternal interest and stake in it; as it is said, "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied."

262 There is no kind of hesitation or fear about himself or about believers when Paul says, "We must all appear," or, as it might be read, "We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ." Faith realises this manifestation before God as a present thing, and this is most healthful to the soul. It is that which gives activity to conscience, which is a most necessary thing in our daily walk with God and before men. Paul's conscience was always at work. He exercised himself day and night to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men. His was a purged conscience, still it was an active and an exercised one; and it was manifest before God.

It may be that there is no outward or allowed evil, but there is something in every heart which we cannot help knowing that we are sparing, something that is not Christ in us. But we must be manifested before the tribunal of Christ. All is indeed grace, but the present working of grace is to exercise the conscience. The effect of grace is now to bring into the light and to make manifest. Having salvation in Christ, and being seen in Him, and righteous too in Him, and consequently having peace of conscience and rest of heart, I can afford to judge myself: to judge myself in the light which makes all things manifest. The Lord grant us deliverance from every reserve in our poor hearts! For there is power of life in Christ to enable us to triumph over sin and death, and to live not unto ourselves, but unto Him who loved us, and died for us, and is now seated at the right hand of God. We are already risen in Him and are to be manifested with Him in the glory. Shall I then allow any wretched object or idle vanity to occupy me instead of Christ? It may be perhaps some folly, or some piece of self-importance, or some evil disposition, or even the cares of this life! All this grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and the consequence is, that the eye is dimmed and the power is gone. Of the good Shepherd it is said, "He restoreth my soul": and therefore our hearts should not be satisfied to go on at a distance from the Lord, or in a state that will not bear to be manifested by the light. When life acts, it acts upon its object; and just as far as I am occupied with an object outside of myself, I get rid of self. This is true even naturally.

The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God; and hence I do not measure sin by breaking commandments merely, though that of course is sin, but rather by the presence of the Holy Ghost in me; as it is said, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." If I grieve the Spirit I lose my discernment, and sin dims my power of sight, and deadens my spiritual senses; so that the Spirit of God is obliged to bring me to the miserable work of being occupied with my sin (as Peter was) instead of being occupied with all that is precious and joyous in Christ. It is very grievous that, instead of doing the work which it is His delight to do - even revealing Christ - He is obliged to reveal our sins to us, till we weep like Peter over our self-confidence and departure from the Lord. All is manifest unto Christ.

263 For a moment look back on all your ways from your youth upwards (but you cannot bear to do this if you have not settled peace), look at them all, and look at them all in the light of God's word and Spirit. Look at your sins before conversion and after conversion: how many there are! By this review, again and again, as humbled and led of the Spirit, I get a special increase of blessing. I retrace the foolishness and sinfulness of my doings and the patience and long-suffering of my God. I see Him guarding me here, teaching me there, lifting me up when I was ready to fall, and comforting me when I only expected punishment; and hence I adore and praise Him the more! But if it be thus in looking back now, how much more will it be in the moment when set in the glory! I shall then know Him and see Him, and trace all His ways in the fulness of that light which now, in the measure of it I possess, manifests Him and myself in contrast. For surely it is just in the measure in which I can judge my ways in His presence, that the effect is adoration and praise.

It should always be remembered, that Christ is not our life without being our righteousness; and that neither is He our righteousness without being our life. If this be surely grasped, it will enable the soul to look at the judgment-seat of Christ with perfect calmness; and only, as has been stated, to use the thought of our being manifested there to give present activity to conscience if thinking of oneself, or if thinking of others to persuade them, if haply they may be brought now in grace, into the light in which all will be manifested ere long for judgment. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." And then the apostle immediately adds as regards himself, "But we are made manifest unto God" This is a present

thing. It is the light in which he is already manifested, and in which he seeks to walk. The knowledge and power of the life we have will bring us peace in the place of terror, for Christ is the object of this life. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." This fulness of glory, the glory of God Himself, we have as the treasure in our own souls, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Paul goes on to resurrection, and comes back again to the object of his faith, and then sees himself in the glory. I look to attain to this resurrection (Phil. 3), and would have my conversation in heaven. In result we get a double truth the power, the expectation working in us, and the blessed fact that He will Himself receive us into the glory. The doctrine of all this is found in the last verse of the chapter. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

264 Confidence is founded on His being made our righteousness, who was made sin for us! But there is another thing which is exceedingly sweet to me, a profound consolation, a wonderful depth of joy, namely, to look on Christ, and to say, He is my life. Death has no power over the life of Christ. Divine power, working in life, swallows up death, and brings entire deliverance from what sin has wrought. The same divine power which wrought in Christ, in raising Him from the dead, is now working in us and will raise us up by Jesus. And then how plainly do we see, that God does not take counsel of man! He takes His own thoughts and executes His counsels in the riches of His grace. The prodigal's own thought was to be made "a hired servant." But the father received him according to his thoughts, robed and fed him according to his thoughts.

So the Lord has set us in His place as man. As He said when on earth, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The world gives something out of itself; but Christ brings us into Himself - into His joys, into His peace, into His glory. If Christ comes, mortality will be swallowed up of life; if He does not come, I shall give up mortality. We shall all appear before the judgment-seat, but before that we shall be up in the glory; received there by Christ, as He says in John 14: "And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Can I then be afraid of the tribunal? No. The more we learn of God's ways, the more we shall delight in God's ways. It is an amazing and solemn thought, that we are made manifest unto God! But faith realises this position, namely, our position in the presence of God. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord," what then? Is he afraid? No! But the knowledge gives activity to love. "We persuade men." Paul stood in the presence of God, and manifest to God; and if we thus stand in the presence of God, we shall find out how little the heart knows of "bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus." We do not find it out, unless we are thus in the light.

265 The right effect of the judgment-seat is, not what shall be disclosed by it in future, for that is Christ, and I have solid peace because it is Christ in whose presence I shall appear, but the present power to be before it, making it the test of conscience now, and the standard by which we try our thoughts and ways. May we each know it, and walk in it!

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