

Grace, the Power of Unity and of Gathering

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes that the power of unity and gathering is always grace - love, and that real holiness separates from evil and separates to God.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16, John 15:12-13, Romans 5:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:6, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:14, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that grace, defined as love, is the true power that gathers believers in unity, rather than mere separation from evil. He warns against the dangers of focusing too much on evil, which can lead to a treacherous mindset and diminish spiritual power. True holiness is not just about separating from evil but also about being separated to God, which fills believers with good and allows them to abhor evil without being consumed by it. Darby asserts that the church's history shows that grace is the formative power of unity, especially when Christ is acknowledged as the center. Ultimately, he encourages believers to focus on God's goodness to maintain spiritual vitality and unity.

Transcript

What I think important to be understood is, that the active power that gathers is always grace - love. Separation from evil may be called for. In particular states of the church, when evil is come in, it may characterise very much the path of the saints. It may be, that through many acting under the same convictions at the same time, this may form a nucleus. But this in itself is never a gathering power. Holiness may attract when a soul is in movement of itself. But power to gather, is in grace, in love working; if you please, faith working by love. Look at all the history of the church of God in all ages, and you will find this to be the case. Grace is the formative power of unity, where it does not exist. I take for granted here that Christ is owned as the centre. If evil exist, it may gather out of that evil, but the gathering power is love. The paper which I would pass under review is a tract, which, from circumstances, is not unknown: "Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity". ...

Is not holiness the principle on which Christian fellowship is based? And the tract is really and simply that. But two other points I believe it important to bring out along with that - one, in relation to man; the other to the blessed God. The first is this: human nature we all own, and in a measure know, is a treacherous thing. Now separation from evil, when right, which I now assume, still distinguishes him who separates from him from whom he does so. This tends to make one's position important, and so it is; but with such

hearts as we have, one's position mixes itself up with self - not in a gross way but in a treacherous one; it is my position, and not only so, but the mind being occupied with what has been important (justly so in its place) to itself, tends to make, in a measure, separation from evil a gathering power, as well as a principle on which gathering takes place. This (save as holiness attracts souls who are spiritual by a moving principle in them) it is not.

There is another danger: a Christian separates from evil, I still suppose, in a case in which he is bound to do so. Say, he leaves the corruptest system in existence; on this principle, it is the evil acting on the conscience of the new man, and known to be offensive to God, which drives him out. Hence he is occupied with the evil. This is a dangerous position. He attaches it, perhaps anxiously, to those he has left, to give a clear ground why he has done so. They conceal, cover over, gloss, explain.

It is always so where the evil is maintained. He seeks to prove it, to make his ground clear; he is occupied with evil, with proving evil, and proving evil against others. This is slippery ground for the heart, to say nothing of danger to love. The mind becomes occupied with evil as an object before it. This is not holiness, nor separation from evil, in practical internal power. It harasses the mind, and cannot feed the soul. Some are almost in danger of acquiescing in the evil through the weariness of thinking about it.

At all events power is not found here. God separates us surely from evil, but He does not fill the mind when it continues to be occupied with it; for He is not in the evil. It is quite true that the mind may say, Let us think of the Lord and drop it, and get a measure of quiet and comfort; but in this case the general standard and tone of spiritual life will be infallibly lowered. Of this I have not a shadow of doubt. The positive evil will not be actually acquiesced in; but God's horror of it is lost in the mind, and the measure of divine power and communion just proportionately lost, and the general path shews this.

The testimony fails and is lowered. This is the widest evil - where there is conflict with evil not maintained in spiritual power - and creates the most serious difficulties to extended unity; but God is above all. The new nature, when in lively exercise, because it is holy and divine, revolts from evil when it comes before it. The conscience, too, will then be in exercise as responsible to God. But this is not all, even as to holiness. There is another, which in many (I may say, at bottom, in all) cases distinguishes real holiness from natural conscience, or conventional rejection of evil.

Holiness is not merely separation from evil, but separation to God from evil. The new nature has not merely a nature or intrinsic character as being of God. It has an object, for it cannot live on itself - a positive object, and that is God. Now this changes everything; because it separates from evil - which it abhors, therefore, when it sees it - because it is filled with good. This does not enfeeble its separation. It makes its abhorrence of it lively when it has to be occupied with it, but it gives another tone to that which is abhorrent to it, the possession of good sufficient, when it is not forced to think of evil, to put it quite out of mind and sight.

Hence it is holy, calm, and has a substantive character of its own, apart from evil, as well as abhorrent of it. With us this can only be in having an object, because we are and ought to be dependent only so far as we are positively filled with God in Christ. We are occupied with good, and hence holy, for that is holiness; and, therefore, easily and discerningly abhorrent of evil, without occupying ourselves with it. It is God's own nature; He is essentially good; delights in it in Himself: and therefore He is abhorrent, in virtue of His goodness, of evil; His nature is the good, and hence in His very nature He rejects the evil. He will do so authoritatively, no doubt, in judgment; but we now speak of nature.

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