

Lecture on Colossians 1

by John Nelson Darby

This sermon explores our profound identity in Christ, the transformative power of grace, and the call to live a life worthy of our calling as believers.

Scripture: Colossians 1:12

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound relationship believers have with the Son of God, highlighting that we are members of His body and are intimately connected with Him through grace. He explains that through Christ's sacrifice, we are forgiven, justified, and made complete in Him, allowing us to enjoy a relationship with God without fear of judgment. Darby encourages believers to walk worthy of the Lord, focusing on spiritual growth and the importance of being filled with the knowledge of God's will. He reassures that while we are on earth, we are already reconciled to God and have the hope of glory through Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a life of gratitude and dependence on God's grace as we navigate our journey in faith.

Transcript

It is a wonderful thing, and becomes still more wonderful to us, the more we know and think of the way in which we are associated with the Son of God; we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, i.e., of Him who is the beginning of the creation of God. We are "in him."

When He says, He is one with the Father, then He adds, "Ye in me, and I in you." The more we dwell upon this, the more wonderful it is. All is of grace that, in the ages to come, God might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us by Christ Jesus. This is the way the angels, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, will learn the exceeding riches of God's grace. They will see the poor thief, and the woman in the city that was a sinner, and us also, in the same place with God's Son. And more, God has brought us into the present intimacy of it. By giving us the Holy Ghost, and by giving us life in Christ, He has brought us into the closest intimacy with Himself in this relationship. The more we rest in it, the more wonderful it is. "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Think of the Son of God saying to us, "that is your place"! It ought to be peaceful joy to us, as that which is simply a settled thing in our souls. And the one who is dwelling in it, and is at home in it, is just the one who will feel and know how wonderful it is. We cannot understand the kind of place it is, if we are not

dwelling in it; but when we do get inside, we begin to be conscious of what it is.

God has shewn us that the flesh with all its fruits has been put away completely at the cross; so that, in raising up the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who stood in the place of death for us, and in setting Him in glory, and in giving us the Holy Ghost, we learn that sin and all that is of man has been put away. When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. It is blessed to think that by His work on the cross, He has cleared away everything that once stood between us and God. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Thus, as I have often said, there should not lurk a single suspicion in our minds. Looked at as sinners, we are forgiven; as defiled, we are cleansed; as guilty, we are justified. He wants to have us where we can enjoy His life, and therefore we must not be left to be afraid of judgment. God has brought us in Christ to Himself, that is where He has set us; and He has given us the consciousness of this by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. This is, as having Christ and life. It is not possessive in full; in that sense, we have nothing but the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and therefore everything else is to faith. This makes the riddle of the Christian. We have everything in Christ - glory, eternal life, forgiveness, justification; and Christ in us is the hope of glory.

224 That is the reason the apostle says, "We have been saved in hope." The work is complete, and we are quickened so as to have part in it; but we have nothing yet as regards possession, save the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and the present hope of being absent from the body, present with the Lord.

The twofold effect of having the Holy Ghost is that, as regards our place and title, we are accepted in the Beloved; but, as regards our home, we are wandering very far from it in this world.

God gives us the consciousness of being in Christ so that our hearts rest in His love; and we have nothing to desire as to what God has already given us. He has given us His own Son, and in His love He has put us in Christ, the very best place that can possibly be conceived; in that respect, He has left us nothing to desire.

But God has also placed us on this earth, both to be exercised and tried, and to learn His faithfulness and grace. Consequently, in this chapter, we find the way in which growth and the supply of strength are spoken of, as well as the total separation of these from the question of our meetness for heaven. We may speak of title to heaven, but Scripture never speaks of there being any need for the Christian to be made meet for heaven. There is, and there ought to be, growth; and God will chasten us if we go wrong; these ways and dealings of God with us are carefully disconnected from meetness for heaven. And wherever this is not practically known (I do not mean as to mere words), or wherever there is a lack of clearness as to this in our souls, it hinders peace, because the fulness of divine love is not seen, nor our association with the glory; and accordingly the standard of walk is lowered. Instead of being occupied with Christ's heart, we are occupied with our own heart's state. For a person to be thus occupied with himself, is the greatest mischief in the world.

225 Sometimes, we have to be occupied with ourselves; there are failures which we must judge, and we have to see to it that not only there should be no evil allowed, but that there is growth; still, if we are much occupied with self, self takes the place that Christ ought to have; therein is the mischief. A person will come and tell me a long story of what is in his heart, and of course a great lot of evil, but if I ask him what is in God's heart, he cannot tell me a word.

Do you think that a good state? Certainly, we shall get into scrapes if we do not judge ourselves, but, if I am close with God, and in communion with Him, the judgment of self is a simple thing, though requisite. If, however, I am away from Him, prying into my own heart, and into all that is there - why, the evil is still there, unjudged.

This chapter sets before us an amazingly high standard: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with fulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (vv. 10-12). It is when we get into "the light" that we can talk of meetness, and of giving thanks to the Father. And then it is, that we can look for growth, and for a walk worthy of the Lord, for we have learnt that we are completely associated with Him "which hath made us meet," etc.

Do you think the thief was "meet" to go into Paradise? What made him meet? He went there, but surely he did not go unmeet? He went there, because Christ was there. We have to get clear and distinct about this in our souls. "Ye are complete in him"; this is where He has put us; and then the apostle goes through the various things a Jew might reckon, circumcised or not, a philosopher or not, and so on; but the believer has everything in Christ. It is very beautiful to see in chapter 2 that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the (Godhead bodily" (v. 9); all the fulness of the Godhead is in a Man, i.e., in Him bodily; and we are complete in Him.

All the fulness has been brought close to us down here in Christ, but if we look up and see Christ there, we see that we, too, are complete in Christ before God. A wonderful place indeed this is; sovereign grace alone could think of such a thing for us; and the more we know the place thus given, the more wonderful it becomes to us.

226 If we want to know God the Father, where are we to learn Him? "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Have our hearts ever looked at Christ as an object, and said, while looking, "I have nothing more to seek"? Just think, what it is to look at the Lord, with the power of the Spirit of God, and to see in that poor despised Man, One who was God walking on the earth, so that, when one sat down by His side and told Him his sin, he was telling it to God! Is that the thought we have about the Lord Jesus Christ? And He is the same now. God has come to us in Christ, and says, as it were, "Do you not know me?" In a certain sense, Jesus was just like a man, and yet, in another sense, He was not in the least like a man. Not one single motive that governs man ever governed Him; the blessed manifestation of a divine path with a Man in it was seen in Him. This was a perfectly new thing in the world.

And He made those who were with Him burn in their hearts, while they walked with Him, not only by the outward miracles that He performed, but also by His ways and His words. On the other hand, we can look up to God and say, we "are complete in him." I have committed sins and the like, but I say, I am not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; I am in Christ, and I know it, as He said Himself, "At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you." And thus I find that my place is in Christ before God, and that I am myself before Him, and, further, that God is glorified by that which has brought me there. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him."

It is now that we can give "thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." True, we have not yet got the inheritance, and we have to learn our weakness and failure, and the like; but this casts no cloud upon our hearts as to what our place is before

God in Christ. "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing [that is, for the glory] is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." And are we to suppose that God has wrought us badly? Do we not think God has done His work well? To be sure He has.

227 What peace this gives to the soul! This is the reason we can say, "giving thanks unto the Father," etc.

But the moment it is a question of our meetness, let anyone look into his own heart and ask, "Is that meet for God?" And when does he expect to be meet? I do not doubt that such a one desires holiness, but it is a mistake to look within in order to reach holiness, even as a present thing.

There is no mistake in my saying that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, otherwise I do not know God at all, but the question is, how am I to get this holiness?

God chastens us, not exactly that we may be holy, but that we may become partakers of His holiness.

Having shewn us the ground upon which we are set, viz., is that we are complete in Christ, and are made meet for the inheritance, and that we have been brought into heart-association, by faith, with all this, the apostle turns next to the question of our walk.

We must walk worthy of the Lord to whom we have been brought - proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

God has given us a place in His own Son, and He has given His Son a place in our hearts, the hope of glory; He who is the heir of glory has a place in our hearts, and that is true even as to us Gentiles, who had no title to anything; and so we have to walk worthy of Him because we are thus associated with Him.

How completely does it shew us that it is all of grace! Take the case of the Jew who was looking for Messiah to set up the glory in a carnal way. That is not at all our case, for we are Gentiles; the difference is this, that the Gentiles had no promises, but the Jews had, and they had forfeited them, and now they are thrown entirely upon mercy, as we see in Romans 15. "Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." He takes up these two points. People talk of promise to Adam, but there was no promise to Adam. God made a statement upon which Adam could rest, but that was not a promise made to Adam. A promise to Adam would have been a promise to man in his sin. There was also judgment pronounced on the serpent "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

228 There was a promise to the seed of the woman. But the second Man, and not the first man, is the seed of the woman. Christ is pointed out as the One to whom all the promises were made. Meanwhile, Abraham and the Jews got them. The Jews took them under the law, i.e., conditionally, and thus they lost them. God will yet accomplish His promises, in spite of all; but the Jews had to be cast aside. And what of the Gentiles? What had they got? Nothing! Nothing!! It is true there still remained Christ, but mark the case of the poor Syrophenician woman. She was one of the very people under the curse of a city of which the Lord had said, if the mighty works He had done there had been done elsewhere, they had repented long ago. Its very name stood thus for hardness of heart.

Well, our Lord goes out of Israel, and this woman comes and speaks to Him of her want.

"Let the children first be filled," i.e., the Jews. "Yet," says she, "the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." "I am only a poor Canaanite, with the curse upon me, and I am entitled to nothing

else but that.' But there is goodness in God even for such. Could Christ say there is not? Impossible, for it would not have been true. "O, woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And her daughter was healed. The result of blessing not being promised, is to bring out the way in which God is above all sin. There is blessedness in God brought in to meet the want and wretchedness of sinners.

The moment I see this, I find grace is above it all. Christ having made propitiation, this grace now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God has come in, and has risen above dispensation in order to reveal Himself in grace, and to have souls redeemed, cleansed, justified, and brought back to confidence in Himself. And thus we can say that we know God, as a Jew under law and promise never could have known Him, and just because we have no right to blessing and that we have no right to anything, and yet we have been brought to God. And here, the apostle adds, "Christ in you" is, not the crown of glory, but, "the hope of glory."

This was altogether a new thing, that Christ should be among Gentiles; it was bringing in, not the glory, but the hope of the glory that was to come, and also of the heavenly glory.

229 By this complete grace shewn thus to sinners, we learn what God is in Himself, both in love and also in righteousness. These act together in our favour; and they give us that which grace in righteousness is entitled to give us, and also that to which we are now entitled, i.e., "the hope of glory"; "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Then the double character of the work of the Holy Ghost is seen, in that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts, for the Holy Ghost is there, and He is likewise the earnest of the inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. The glory is our portion, and we are therefore strangers and pilgrims here, "until the redemption." As regards our relationship with God, that is all settled; we have died with Christ, we are risen with Christ, and we are thus viewed while we are still on this earth.

There is this difference between Ephesians and Colossians: in the Colossians, we are looked at all through as upon earth, with the hope of the inheritance; while in the Ephesians, we are seen as sitting in the heavenly places, not with, but in Christ.

Now, having shewn us our place in Christ, Colossians puts us upon earth, and tells us what is our path here; it is not a question of our being made meet, but of the path of those who are made meet.

Let us turn again to this verse: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." "Worthy of the Lord," is the measure given of what we are to be. It is not walking worthily of a man who has a high opinion of himself. We should never be found doing anything worthy of a man, but only what is worthy of the Lord. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

That is it. "Ye are . . . the epistle of Christ"; mind, He does not say, we ought to be this, but that ye are it. We cannot honestly say that we are the epistle of Christ, if we are going crooked and astray, but that is what we ought to be practically. And note, that it is "unto all pleasing," so that there never should be a thing in us that is not pleasing to Christ. God has put us by grace into this place, and now let us walk accordingly. If I have a child who does things which are dishonourable, this is, of course, thrown back upon the father, and the father will feel it. "Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." This is blessed! And it is all in connection with God. We know God. Let us bring Him, then, into connection with everything. "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power." There, we get our strength.

230 "His glorious power" is the measure of this might. But do we really believe these things? Do we believe it to be truth that concerns us?

Take now verse 9, of which I have said nothing; "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." How often we say some of these words, and yet, what have we been seeking in the wilderness? Is it not just our own comfort? No wonder, then, that we do not know what God's will is. Where is there a right path in this world apart from His will?

I do not know of one; and I am bold to say there cannot be one. Suppose a child who has left his father's house; well, he never can be right until he has got back. He may not be a thief; he may be in South America, where he may have a very good character; but he ought to have a very bad conscience, and never can he have a right one, until he goes back to his father.

In the world as such, there is no path for us, but the moment we have Christ, then there is a path; it is to go and walk after Him.

We may be but poor followers of Him, still, He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them." If only our hearts are in the way, following Christ, we shall be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual understanding.

And mark the wisdom of the Lord in this. Suppose I got a director who directs me aright; it is no credit to me at all. There is no wisdom or spiritual understanding in us, but God has taken care to provide for us in His own way. But, says someone, I do not see the Lord's mind clearly. Well, then, I ask, "Is your whole body not full of light? Then it is clear that your eye is not single." Whenever I find that I do not see clearly what to do, there is something that prevents my eye from being single.

231 Yet the thing the apostle looked for is, that we might be filled with the knowledge of His will. This has nothing to do with "meetness," but it has a great deal to do with the state of our souls. Well, there is wisdom and there is strength for us.

And further. Are we now to seek for brilliant effects and manifestations of power?

Indeed we are not, but we are to be strengthened unto "all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

What a come-down that is for us! It is no easy thing to be patient. Never for one minute to have our own will! Is that dreadful? But ought we not to be doing God's will? Did Christ ever do His own will? He came to do His Father's will, and He never thought of doing anything else. And why do we ever think of doing anything else? Because we like our own wills best! We have poor foolish hearts, where we find constantly our will is at work. If I send out my child with a message, and he wants to get a run too, why that is a law of liberty to him. But do we see that sort of thing in Christ? Was it not unspeakable patience? Paul says, "the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience"; and within, there was joyfulness. Mark that! We see this in Christ. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we, too, must learn that this world is not a place of rest, but one of trial. Paul asks, "who is afflicted, and I am not?" Suffering, truly, has many forms and sources. But remember that our Lord says, "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

What is the effect upon us of all the siftings and the sufferings? Do they make our hearts say, why, we are going to see Christ as He is? How this brightens our hope, and we call thus glory in tribulation, "knowing

that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." We are going to be with Christ, and to see Christ, and so I can endure all things for the elects' sake, that they may be saved.

And what is so dear to us is, not the putting on of outward joy whilst there is a canker at the root; in all that we are passing. through, there are sorrows, no doubt; but down at the bottom of our hearts there is joyfulness, and at the end of Christ Himself. We have Him now as the spring of joy in our hearts; and we shall have Him when we are in His presence for evermore.

232 There is still one thing to which I would refer, and this brings us back to the point where we are found in fact with God: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

It is a total taking of us out of the place in which we were. This involves not merely that we are born again, or the communication of life, or the precious blood of Christ that cleanseth us from all sin (which is the foundation of everything for us all), but that we have a new nature and we are born of God. There is more here than the blood which has put away our sins; He "hath delivered" us.

Thus not only are we cleansed, but, where that is true of us, we have been delivered from the whole standing and condition in which we were, and we have been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. This is the only place where it is called the kingdom of His Son, and it is to contrast it with the power of Satan. This is of great importance for the liberty and joy of our souls. We were once slaves of Satan, in Egypt, and now we have been taken right out of it. So, in Romans 7, it is asked, not, who shall cleanse me, but, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And now it is not merely that the blood is there, and that the judge cannot touch us, but it is an entire deliverance

No doubt the full effect of the blood is to take us out of the place we were in, and to set us in another. The One who has shed His blood, has there wrought that which effects another thing, viz., the complete deliverance from the power of darkness, and the translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

There is another element in this, which helps us to understand what I have been saying as to trial, and as to the complete joyfulness which we have in Christ at the same time. The apostle proceeds to show that Christ, having created everything, is to have everything. All things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. The One who is divine is the One who upholds everything.

Then, again, "He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." Death is below, down below the lowest creation, and Christ went down below it all. The One who has died has gone down to where the creature had got by sin, and His doing so was altogether in grace. He tasted death as none other ever did. The more He knew what holiness was, the more He knew what it was to be made sin. The more He knew what love was, the more He knew what it was to bear wrath.

233 And now He has been raised up from the dead, and is the Head of the body, the First-begotten from the dead. And He brings us into the closest association with Himself. He went down into death for us, and He takes us up to where He now is. God raises us up in Him and with Him. And so, too, all the fulness is dwelling now in Him; chap. 2:9.

What do we then find? Once, we were alienated, enemies in mind by wicked works; yet now hath He reconciled us; and we, i.e., the saints of God, are now the body of Christ. All things are going to be reconciled in earth and in heaven; but we are already reconciled, in the midst of an unreconciled creation. God does not leave us as part of this unreconciled creation; it groans, truly, and we groan, too, but we are reconciled to God. So now we see why there is the patience and longsuffering, and the joyfulness, too. Very unsuited these two things may seem in themselves, though the place we are in is very suited to glorify God. Reconciled is a strong, full word; it means that everything is brought into God's presence as God would have it. And we are reconciled.

I add one more word: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard."

Here we have just what we always do find in Scripture; when the saints are looked at as in Christ, all is a settled thing for them; but when, as here in Colossians, the saints are looked at as passing through this world, we find the "ifs" and the exhortations (and God forbid that we should weaken one word of Scripture) addressed uniformly to them, saying: "Well now, you must get to heaven," and, "you have to judge things," and the like. But if we are looked at in heaven, we are "complete in him." Nor is there any question about His faithfulness in helping us through the journey.

Knowing we are in Christ, our souls can cry, "Abba, Father," for we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

And whilst passing through the wilderness, what do we learn? "If the manna fails us a day," we ask, "what are we to feed upon?" or "how are we to get clothes?" God took care of the very nap of their coats, and the manna never did fail. God must sift and exercise us, and pull us to pieces here, but we have the promise, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." What is the good of telling us that, if there is no danger of our being plucked out? We learn therefore the patient faithfulness of God in every place.

234 I would not weaken these words one bit. Why, Christ ever lives to make intercession for us! We are getting grace from Him every moment; but this is not a question of our being made meet at all. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"; when we fail, the foundation is not touched, but we need to be restored, so that we are kept, where we ought to be, in dependence upon God. We want to be settled as to our place in Christ, so that our hearts may be happy and joyful; and we want to be dependent, too; and as we go through the wilderness, we learn that if He were to leave us one single minute - but He will not do that - we have no resources of our own at all.

Well, these things are put together for us in this epistle. The saints are reconciled to God, but they are still journeying down here, with the hope of the glory before them, knowing that they are made meet for it; and now they have to walk worthy of the Lord, and to trust the blessed, gracious, faithfulness of him who "shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Look at how two things are put together: "to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight," and, "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." In the Corinthians, where they were going on badly, Paul writes, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

But as to our acceptance, we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and we are found giving thanks to the Father.

The Lord give us to walk worthy of the Lord who has shewn to us such blessed grace!

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