

Letter: 50e 103 W Kelly, -, 1846

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon discusses the essence of true grace, the authority of the Holy Spirit in the church, and the critical relationship between the church and the truth of God's word.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:12, Ephesians 4:11

Topics: "Authority in the Church", "Grace vs. False Pretension"

Description

John Nelson Darby addresses the importance of true grace versus false pretensions in the church, warning against the dangers of self-confidence masked as humility. He emphasizes that authority in the church comes solely from the Holy Spirit and not from human traditions or arrangements, urging believers to rely on God's truth rather than man-made doctrines. Darby encourages his brother to stand firm in faith and to engage in spiritual battles, asserting that the church must remain subject to the truth of God's Word. He highlights the necessity of maintaining a direct relationship with God, free from interposed authority that could lead to sin. Ultimately, he reassures that God will preserve the essential truths of the faith among His elect until the end.

Transcript

p103 [W Kelly] [To the same.] MY DEAR BROTHER, - There is a fund of grace in dear -, but he has been in a bad school. Really - 's humility (though he be a devoted man of God) consists in counting that they have infinitely more grace than any one else, and shew it in condescension. I know nowhere such amazing confidence in self.

. . . This is associated with a kind of latitudinarianism which substituting grace in manner for fidelity, makes the supposed possession of superior grace a reason for swamping every principle of God. There is a tremendous deal of putting on of cant (forgive me the word, for I own the love under it at -) in it, but being flattery and looking like grace it wins people. It must be met kindly but decidedly, for it is insinuating and mischievous, and I think poisons the springs of christian simplicity and plainness. I should always meet assumption, whether in the form of superior grace or otherwise, as being entirely the contrary to grace. And I should be plain in principle, though not in the way of controversy; for the enemy is seeking to swamp it under this pseudo-charity in many a way. At any rate, dear brother, the exercise will do you good. You have had none to deal with at all Å"quis armis, and your own grace and full trusting in the Lord will be tried. Lean on Him, and fight the good fight of faith. Never allow your own importance thus to come into question, while firm as a rock in disallowing all this false pretension. It is all pseudo-grace, though there be

real grace in those who have it: much better to get at this and speak plain English than speak about grace and flatter.

And now, while urging you to count on the Lord and fight the battle, His battle, yourself - this is really called for: it is time we should rouse ourselves and buckle on our armour, if we have what is worth contending for, and not look merely to others to help, while I am sure I will render all the help I can; but it is a time of putting faith to the test, and they that quit themselves like men will not lose their reward. But I will now turn to your perhaps more important questions.

Authority in the church is neither more nor less than the power of the Holy Ghost. There may be added at the beginning the apostles as constituted companions of Jesus, and having directions from Him. But now this is simply the working of the Holy Ghost in the church. This may be in an individual, according to the measure of power given to him, or it may be in the body; but it will always recognise the Holy Ghost in the body and in all the members. This is most marked in the epistles. They speak as to wise men who have an unction from the Holy One. This is the whole matter: this once departed from, some mere arrangement takes its place, and the Holy host is in principle - namely, in faith - set aside, and weakness is soon apparent. The kingdom of God is in power; but that power is known only to faith.

As to traditions, no one who has read the Greek Testament can a moment doubt that the word is, in the New Testament, a doctrine delivered, not handed down; though this might sometimes be the character of what was delivered. *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* of Romans 6:17 makes this plain. So tradition in the popular sense is in contrast with scripture. But in the passage you refer to [2 Thess. 2:15], it is either the direct word of prophecy in the church there or the apostle's epistle: nothing handed down in the church is secured by subsequent authority. The saints were to keep the doctrine they had been taught - the body of saints. Suppose I were to write to the body of saints in - to hold fast what they had been taught, whether *vivā voce*, or what I had written to them by letter, what would that have to say to the authority of the church or tradition of a subsequent era? Yet this is exactly the case, save that that teaching was divine and inspired, and therefore the exhortation had its peculiar place and weight: *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* clearly shews *ἡ ἀληθεὶς ἐπιστολή* just to be a doctrine delivered.

Nor do I see what the communication of what he had learned to faithful men [2 Tim. 2:2], so as to form teachers, has to do with tradition. Nobody, unless they deny ministry, could gainsay this, and so far as a man could be trusted as receiving it from St. Paul, it would of course have weight; but that is just the question. It was not authority, but a means of communicating truth; the confounding these two things is the generally unperceived sophism of Milner's End of Controversy. A rule of faith, he says, or means of communicating Christ's religion. It must be plain, etc.; but these things are not the same. A mother does it to her babe, but she is not a rule of faith, perhaps does it perfectly rightly, but that alters nothing. Now here the apostle is directing the means of communicating truth to others, of course as surely as he can, but not setting up either authority or a rule of faith. When I had a dozen young men reading with me at Lausanne, I was doing this according to my ability. Was I dreaming of setting up authority or a rule of faith in them? Clearly not. The written word is clearly such the moment we own it inspired.

The real question is, Is it addressed to all saints as possessing the Spirit so as to use it? They are the church. Ministry may be a means of communicating, and a very precious one, as Ephesians 4; but they are never a rule nor an authority. A rule must be an existing quantum of doctrine, but this no men are. That as an authority must be infallible, which none is but God. Infallible is not perfectly right. I may say what is

absolutely right, but I am not infallible. Whenever the apostles spoke by inspiration, they uttered in revelation what was absolutely right from God, but this did not make them infallible. God is, because in His nature He never can say anything but what is right. When God spoke by them, as every true Christian believes He did, they were absolutely right: but God remained the alone infallible, who never could of Himself say anything wrong. This was not communicated to an apostle, since if he did not speak by inspiration, he was as another man - more experience perhaps, but a man. Inspiration comes from the infallible One, but does not render the inspired one infallible, but only perfectly right and divine in what he utters as inspired.

Further, I believe God will secure by His power that the truth shall not be lost in the church to the end. It may be only in an upright godly few, as when almost all the professing church and Pope Liberius among them turned Arian. But this does not make the church infallible; but it does prove that God will keep His elect in vital essential truth to the end. But being kept is not authority. I am persuaded I shall be kept in the truth for the end - sure of it through grace; but this is not making me an infallible authority; it is just the opposite; I am subject to the truth. So the church, the elect saints, are subject to the truth always. They may have accompanying obscurities on many points, but they will never deny saving truth to the church. Many foolish things may be brought in and added, but it will not deny saving truth.

This the Council of Trent, and hence the Catholic body (I do not say every individual) have pretty much done. Hence the difference of the Establishment. The prayer-book has added a mass of destructive, false, and superstitious errors, but the articles in general, though obscurely, do not deny but proclaim saving truth. Hence the Galatians Paul was afraid of; they were on the point of denying really the saving truths, though recovered. The Colossians were introducing superstitions which led to this, but they were not met exactly in the same way, as they were not denying justification by faith for example, as the Galatians were well-nigh doing. But this is saving subjection to the truth, not authority; and this is the real point of difference.

They say, with a law we must have an interpreting judge. God says, with My word I must have saving faith mixed - the heart must bow to it itself; another cannot do this. No one denies that one can help another according to the measure of the Spirit - that is, help spiritually the soul in reception; but this is not authority; it is ministry. The truth received has God's authority, and by the truth we are subject to Him. The word of God can have no authority to apply it, nor power either, but God Himself. Its whole object is to bring the soul and conscience into direct and immediate relationship with Himself. Interposed authority as to conscience sets aside God. There cannot be a judge with God's word, because Christ is. (There may be discipline, and, in this sense, judgment in which the whole body acts, but this is another question) but the whole point is the authority of God's word itself on the conscience; and mark, because God has said it, discerning it such, we set to our seal that God is true - not that the church is. The church it is that believes it, and thereby it is the church. So "ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." The church does not judge about the word of God. The word of God judges it, first as sinner then as saint. Whoever gets above this gets into sin - is not a doer of the law, but a judge.

I do not enter here on the external part of the question, that the tradition, nor even the authority is not to be found, though de facto many things are surely believed. It is clear that the local priest is not, though he may be a means of communicating. It is quite clear that the ponderous tomes of councils are not a more clear, or accessible, or intelligible rule of faith than the living word. But the truth is they are not agreed when it resides in a Pope or Council; and this is serious. It will be said certainly in both. But the Council of

Constance deposed, and that of Basle set itself above the Pope and ended without him. Also there were two, and neither owned by the former. And yet more. The Church of Rome cannot pronounce with unanimity which are the general councils. There are (I trust my memory) nineteen, but they dispute as to the enumeration of them. What a difference from the pure word of God!

Yours affectionately.

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