

Letter: 52e 112 Brother, -, September 24th, 1846

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the importance of relying on the Holy Ghost and gathering in Christ's name amidst the challenges faced by the church.

Scripture: Ezra 3:3, Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42-47, Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:11-13, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Unity in the Spirit", "The State of the Church"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the importance of recognizing the current state of the church, which he describes as a general ruin of the dispensation. He expresses confidence in God's ability to maintain a remnant of believers united in love through the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on formal government structures. Darby believes that true ministry comes from the conscience in grace and that Christ's presence is assured where believers gather in His name. He warns against the dangers of seeking carnal unity through authority and encourages reliance on God's provision for the church's needs. Ultimately, he advocates for a humble approach to church life, trusting in God's faithfulness and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

p112 MY VERY DEAR BROTHER, - . . . I suspect many brethren have had expectations, which never led me out, and which perplexed their minds when they were not met in practice. I never felt my testimony, for example, to be to the ability of the Holy Ghost to rule a visible body. That I do not doubt, but I doubt its proper application now as a matter of testimony. It does not become us. My confidence is in the certainty of God's blessing and maintaining us, if we take the place we are really in. That place is one of the general ruin of the dispensation. Still, I believe God has provided for the maintenance of its general principle (save persecution); that is, the gathering of a remnant into the comfort of united love by the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, so that Christ could sing praises there. All the rest is a ministry to form, sustain, &c.

Amongst other things government may have its place; but it is well to remember that, in general, government regards evil, and therefore is outside the positive blessing, and has the lowest object in the church. Moreover, though there be a gift of government, in general, government is of a different order from gift. Gift serves, ministers; hardly government. They may be united as in apostolic energy; elders were rather the government, but they were not gifts. It is specially the order of the governmental part which I

believe has failed, and we are to get on without that, at least in a formal way. But I do not believe that God has therefore not provided for such a state of things.

I do believe brethren a good deal got practically out of their place, and the consciousness of it, and found their weakness; and the Lord is now teaching them. For my part, when I found all in ruin around me, my comfort was that, where two or three were gathered together in Christ's name, there He would be. It was not government or anything else I sought. Now I do believe that God is faithful, and able to maintain the blessing. I believe the great buildings and great bodies have been a mistake: indeed, I always did. Further, I believe now (though it were always true in practice) the needed dealing with evil must be by the conscience in grace. So St. Paul ever dealt, though he had the resource of a positive commission. And I believe that two or three together, or a larger number, with some having the gift of wisdom in grace, can, in finding the mind of the Lord, act in discipline; and this, with pastoral care, is the main spring of holding the saints together in Matthew 18. This agreeing together is referred to as the sign of the Spirit's power.

I do not doubt that some may be capable of informing the consciences of others. But the conscience of the body is that which is ever to be acted upon and set right. This is the character of all healthful action of this kind, though there may be a recourse in present apostolic power, which, where evil has entered, may be wanting; but it cannot annul "if two of you shall agree . . . it shall be done." So that I see not the smallest need of submission to popery (that is, carnal unity by authority in the flesh), nor of standing alone, because God has provided for a gathering of saints together, founded on grace, and held by the operation of the Spirit which no doubt may fail from want of grace, but in which every remaining gift has its scope; in which Christ's presence and the operation of the Spirit is manifested, but must be maintained on the ground of the condition the church really is in, or it would issue in a sect arranged by man, with a few new ideas. Where God is trusted in the place and for the place we are in, and we are content to find Him infallibly present with us, there I am sure He is sufficient and faithful to meet our wants. If there be one needed wiser than any of the gathered ones in a place, they will humbly feel their need; and God will send some one as needed, if He sees it the fit means.

There is no remedy for want of grace but the sovereign goodness that leads to confession. If we set up our altar, it will serve for walls. (Ezra 3:3.) The visibility God will take care of, as He always did; the faith of the body will be spoken of, and the unity in love manifest the power of the Holy Ghost in the body. I have no doubt of God's raising up for need, all that need requires in the place where He has set us in understanding. If we think to set up the church again, I would say, God forbid. I had rather be nearer the end to live and to die for it in service, where it is, as dear to God: that is my desire and life. . . .

Ever yours affectionately.

September 24th, 1846.

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