

Notes of a Lecture on Colossians 2:1-10

by John Nelson Darby

We are complete in Christ and should live our lives with the consciousness of being risen with Him.

Scripture: Colossians 2:1

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Spiritual Completeness"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes in his lecture on Colossians 2:1-10 that believers are spiritually dead to the world and alive in Christ, urging the church to recognize their identity in Him. He highlights the apostle Paul's deep concern for the saints, illustrating the power of prayer and the necessity of being rooted in love to comprehend God's mysteries. Darby warns against the dangers of ritualism and rationalism, asserting that true understanding comes from a relationship with Christ, who embodies the fullness of God. He encourages believers to live with the consciousness of being risen with Christ, setting their affections on heavenly things, and recognizing their completeness in Him. Ultimately, he calls for a heart that is fully engaged with God and His purposes, reflecting on the transformative power of Christ's love and grace.

Transcript

The leading truth of this chapter is, that we are not alive in this world. "If ye be dead with Christ . . . why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" The Lord having died, death is written on everything, because we have died with Him, and take our whole place with Christ risen from the dead.

When we come to the details, it is touching to see the interest the apostle has in all the saints, and in those he has never seen. They are on Christ's heart, and as far as we have His heart they are on ours. We are poor, feeble things at it; but the Spirit of Christ in the believer is now concerned with the love of Christ, above all, to those who are His own, though we may not have seen their face in the flesh.

"What great conflict I have for you." There we see what prayer can be (the same word as that used for the Lord agonizing in Gethsemane). It is not merely going to God with confidence as to our Father with our needs, though we cannot get on if we do not; but this is overcoming Satan. Where we have to move the power of Satan (which we have to do in all service), the word of God is the weapon; but the first thing is for the heart to be with God about it. Paul had never seen these saints, but he got exercised with the Lord about them, and the Lord was as much in one place as another. He was with them, though Paul was not. It is positive conflict here for the blessing of others. We find a lack of that now. There is not that kind of interest with God, and connecting His people with Himself so as to set the heart in this conflict and

exercise.

Verse 2. "Knit together in love." The presence of God, who is love, always gives that as the primary character -- "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend," etc. I cannot understand and apprehend God's mind unless I am with Him; and if I am really with Him I am with love. I cannot be with Him without having the spirit of love, for He is love. "To the full assurance of understanding;" that is, Christ must be the centre of all glory, and have everything united under Him; it cannot be otherwise. It is part of God's counsels. Taught of God, the soul enters into all this, and sees there is no possibility of its being other. The moment our relationship with God is settled, He tells us things that do not simply concern ourselves. "All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." That principle is brought out fully in Eph. 1. In the first seven verses you get the condition of the believer in these counsels. Then, when He has put us there, He "abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will . . . to gather together in one all things in Christ." It concerns us, for we are joint-heirs; but God says "You are completely at home with Me as a child, and now I am going to tell you all My plans about glorifying Christ." There the heart gets its delight. You must first have salvation; but is that all you are going to think of -- yourself? You must begin there; but supposing God has brought us to this place, and deigns to call us friends? A friend is one to whom I go and tell what is in my heart -- things that do not concern him at all. That is what God does to us; and do not tell me it is a matter of indifference to you. No matter to be treated by God as His friend? If by Christ my heart is in that place, it won't be so; as I walk in love and near to God, He unfolds to me what concerns the glory of Christ, and thus the Christian's heart gets an occupation that makes him grow. Every one must think of something, some more and some less; but God introduces me into a new world, and my heart gets opened and enlarged to all the thoughts of God.

Verse 10. We are "complete in Him." Christ being the Head, the Body completes it. As God, the Divine Being, He fills all in all; but as the exalted Man, we are members of His Body, and He is the Head -- we the completeness of Him, "Christ in us, the hope of glory," makes us realize it all. That is the mystery of God -- Jews and Gentiles brought together. "Mystery" does not mean something mysterious, but something into which we are only initiated by revelation. It means what we do understand; but should not if it were not revealed. The Christian is initiated. It was hidden, but now is made known, and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are there. The sphere into which the believer is brought is God's world. This is the fallen world of the first Adam; that is God's world, a new creation altogether. My body is of the old creation, but my soul and spirit, my life as a Christian, of the new. The new is faith; we are living outwardly in the old, with a nature that belongs to the new, and then comes exercise that we should not live according to the old but the new. "Ye are dead . . . Set your affection on things above."

Then the apostle takes up the two things of the present day: ritualism and rationalism (philosophy). A man may be very clever, but he can only spin his imaginings out of his own mind; he cannot bring out more than he has in him; he may catch flies, and does. Man in the flesh cannot get beyond man's mind, and that knows nothing about God. His conscience does, and wherever God works, it is with the conscience. If I could measure God by my thoughts I should be equal to Him, and He would not be God at all. In philosophy, if you leave God out, it is false; and if you bring Him in, it is religion and not philosophy. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" The moment I have to do with God, if He is God and I am man, my conscience must have to do with Him. In Christ I get the full and blessed revelation of all my heart can live in and by; all the affections of the heart are drawn out. If a man has a strong imagination, he goes to the poetry of ritualism; if he has a hard head, he goes to the reasonings of rationalism -- all that is not after

Christ.

I get a world of folly and wickedness, or philosophy; but (v. 9) I find the fulness of the Godhead bodily in the midst of it all -- God in the midst of this world of sin. The living revelation of God Himself as a Man, one of ourselves, though perfectly sinless. "All the fulness of the Godhead bodily." What immense blessedness! He who is to be the centre of this new creation -- where do I find Him? In all the glory up there? I find Him a carpenter's Son -- if you take His appearance -- and laid in a manger. He could not take the glory of the world, which was the vanity of man's heart; but He came in divine grace and love, that man, in his sins, wretchedness, folly, and pride, might have God close to him, and see One who was above all the folly, and showed out the nature of God. All His life was the unceasing expression of God, who is love, in all the sorrows of man. What do philosophers say when they look at the world with its misery, hatred, and corruption? They say misery is necessary to form man's character. I would rather see a criminal in his wretchedness, than a philosopher saying that misery is necessary. Sin has brought it in, and after the sin God has come into the midst of it all. If I say, "I am too vile for Him to be with me," that is truth in the inward parts. He has come as light, and brought the conscience to its bearings.

When do I find a man that told me all that ever I did? When the perfect love of God has brought it to me. Perfect in love and holiness, He was carrying love through the world that there might not be an aching heart that did not know it is in God. He was "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." To one awakened to see what the world is, it is rest to see Him who is perfect grace in it. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." When I have the living God present in this world of sin, I have the key to what God is, and how the evil came in; that man departed from Him. Now instead of theorizing on what the world is, I confess what I am.

"And ye are complete in Him." He was complete before man in his sins, and those who believe are complete before God in Him. This "completeness" was manifested to man, and now what is man (who believes)? "Complete in Him." There was the completeness of God before man in sins, and now the completeness of man before God in holiness. All the fulness of everything God could delight in is in Him, and I am in Him.

The moment Christ has come in to be my life, I say I am dead. What He has done is mine, because He is become my life, and therefore I do not own the old man; it is not I; I do not own it as myself. It is in me to hinder me if it can; but I have done with it. Christ is my life. "Putting off the body of the flesh," etc. (v. 11.) In Ephesians Paul takes up the counsels of God, and does not see Christ till He is dead; and he sees us dead in our sins before God. As to God, totally dead; alive as to sin. Christ comes down into death, puts away the sin as He comes down, and then Christ and we are quickened together. In Romans we are seen living in sin; not in respect to God, dead in sin. But man is guilty, for he is living in sin without God; and there you find he has to die, or the old tree will bring forth the old fruit. In Ephesians he is dead.

In this chapter (Col. 2) you get both. As dead, and as living. Both are true; living to sin, and dead to God. (vv. 12, 13.) "Buried with Him in baptism," verse 12, is Romans. And "you, being dead in your sins . . . hath He quickened together with Him," verse 13, is Ephesians. You must go to death, you must get the tree cut down; and then he shows it has been cut down in Christ's death. Looked at as dead, I want to be made alive. In Romans you do not get the Christian risen, in Colossians you do; but not sitting in heavenly places, as in Ephesians. Here he is in spirit and heart risen with Christ, and he is, to set his affection on things above, and the apostle speaks of the hope laid up for us in heaven. In Ephesians he is sitting there by faith. In Colossians he is risen as to the spirit of his mind; he has died and is risen, and has to look up. I

do not get the Holy Ghost here. In Ephesians it is full union -- Christ and we one in heavenly places. In Romans it is merely individual, and the Spirit seals. In Colossians you get divine life; for the man is risen. Thus for our instruction we get different aspects in the different epistles. Justification is in Romans, not in Ephesians; for there it is a new creation, and that God cannot justify. Here the soul is going through the world with the consciousness of being risen. Are you passing through the world with the consciousness of being risen? It is a question of realizing it first as a truth, and then getting our affections in it, as the effect of the blessed truth that "the fulness of the Godhead bodily," in Christ as a Man, has been down here, and we are in Him before God. He is the Head of all principality and power. Man (Christ as Man) has been exalted to this place, to be set over all the works of His hands. He is the one God delights in, and we are complete in Him. We live in the world as those risen with Him while here, and our affections up there. How far are your hearts living in the objects Christ has brought you to? Christ brings us to another world. Adam and sin brought us to this. Are our hearts living in that? After such a thing as Christ Himself visiting us, and dying for us, how far is He all to us? J. N. D. (1871.)

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