

Notes of a Reading on Colossians 1 (1879)

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the significance of Christ's titles, His rights to all things, and the believer's new position and responsibilities in Him.

Scripture: Psalm 8:4, Colossians 1:3, Hebrews 1:2

Topics: "Understanding Christ's Authority", "Walking Worthy of the Lord"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of understanding the titles of God and Christ, particularly 'Father' and 'Lord,' which reflect our relationship as children and servants. He explains that Christ, as the Creator and established Heir, will ultimately take possession of all things after redemption, binding Satan and removing evil. Darby highlights the importance of recognizing our current position as raised with Christ, yet still awaiting our full inheritance in glory. He encourages believers to walk worthy of the Lord, filled with the knowledge of His will, and to rely on His power for endurance and joy. The sermon concludes with a reminder of God's faithfulness in keeping us secure in our salvation.

Transcript

The word "Lord" is often used by people in a vague way; but here (v. 3) we find those names of God and of Christ which represent relations. If we say "Father," we speak as children; if we say "Lord," we speak as servants of the Lord Jesus. The title Lord applies to Christ as Man in the glory. "What is man?" (Ps. 8) Here we see Him as having entered into the divine glory, but not having taken His own throne as yet. (See Heb. 2:5) He is now gathering the co-heirs to take them up to Himself; and when they are gathered He will take His throne, and we shall reign with Him.

Three points are to be noticed as to the rights of Christ to take possession of all things. First, He has created all things; second, He is the Son - established Heir of all things, after Heb. 1; third, according to God's counsels; fourth, there is yet another point, He shall take possession of all things on the ground of redemption. Satan shall be bound, and evil put away; then the Lord shall take possession of all things, and reign.

We find, then, here, these three relations: God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important not to confound them, but to understand what the responsibilities are which flow from them.

We shall have all that Christ has. He will bring us into all that He Himself enjoys, only He has ever His own place, ever the pre-eminence in all things. Thus, on the holy mount, we see Moses and Elijah in the same

heavenly glory with Him; but then, when Moses and Elijah disappear, the Father's voice is heard - "This is my beloved Son." That is the place that is His.

Q. What does the earnest of the inheritance mean in the Epistle to the Ephesians?

A. It is not difficult to understand that, for in our everyday language we often speak of earnest-money (i.e., a part of the payment before the whole be paid). It is the Holy Ghost in us. That we already have; but we are not in possession of the inheritance. As to power, and our enjoyment of Christ by the Spirit, it is evident that when we shall be in the glory our state will be very different. Take, as an example, the case of condensed steam in an engine. All that immense power is spent in dragging thousands of pounds. It is slow and difficult work; but if the steam were free, what elasticity. It is so with us, as being the vessels of the Spirit. The greater part of its power is absorbed in dragging the weight of that which is earthly, but in heaven there will be nothing to drag.

Verse 3. There are, then, these two characters of Christ which are not to be confounded: first, as Man before God; second, as Son before the Father. In Hebrews 1 we find yet a third: He is Son of God born in this world. Compare Psalm 2: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

Verse 5. "On account of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens." Notice carefully that we are not looked at in Colossians as being seated in Christ in heaven. We have died, and have been raised up; but we are still in this world, and in it with the hope (of glory) laid up for us in the heavens. Compare this with the position of the Lord Jesus during the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. He was a Man that had died, and had been raised up, but who had not gone up on high. God grant that we may fully apprehend the force of this word "raised up." There is a great difference between quickened and raised. In John 5 the Son quickens the dead - He imparts life to dead souls. That is what follows when His Word is received. (John 5:24.) But how many quickened souls there are who do not understand aught of resurrection. When I speak of having died and being raised up the question is an entirely new position before God. Associated with Christ in His work, and united with Him by the Spirit, we pass into an entirely new state of things. Such is the Christian in the Epistle to the Colossians.

Q. Had the Old Testament saints life?

A. Of course they had; they were quickened, but they had not "died with Christ," nor had they been raised up with Him, which was impossible, because Christ had not yet died, nor was He risen. Then, again, He has brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings. This is the new thing.

Verse 8. Notice that this is the only instance where the Spirit is mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians.

Verses 9 and 10. Here we have a very important thing - the walk in this world of a dead and risen Christian, according to the spiritual understanding which belongs to him. "Filled with the full knowledge of His will." This supposes that the eye is single. Mark the expressions in these verses. What an intelligent walk - with the full knowledge (ἀπὸ τῆς πληροῦς γνώσεως τῆς θεοῦ) of His will. It is not a question here of merely being a good neighbour, a good father, or of being diligent in one's duties, etc. (any respectable Jew would do quite as much), but of walking worthily of the Lord unto all well pleasing.

Thus we find (Phil. 1:10) things that are excellent, and the point is to be able to distinguish them. There are things which are good, and things which are excellent; the latter still more pleasing to the Lord. There are three expressions in connection with the Christian walk:

Walking worthy of:-

God (1 Thess. 2:12), who calls us to His own kingdom and glory.

Christ (here in Col. 1:10) unto all well-pleasing.

the Spirit worthy of the calling. (Eph. 4:1)

Verse 11. Here is another point: "Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy." We see here the character of the epistle - the full knowledge of a glorious Christ, and thus are we strengthened with all power. To what purpose? For some heroic deed? No; but that we may endure. It is unto all endurance and longsuffering. This is true power. When speaking of proofs of power, Paul always puts endurance and longsuffering in the foreground. It is no such easy matter to endure everything with joy; for this we need the might of His glory.

Verse 12. Here we see the present position of New Testament saints: "Fit to share the portion of the saints in light." That is our present position. Not only are we saved, but we are already made fit to share the portion of the saints. Compare with the golden altar in the holy place of the tabernacle. The brazen altar prefigures rather the forgiveness of sins and the sinner's reception; the golden altar was within - in the sanctuary.

Verse 13. Mark two points here. There are two characters of God revealed in His Word - God is light, and God is love - and both are spoken of here. He has delivered us from the power of darkness (into light), and He has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (love).

Q. What is here the meaning of "the kingdom of the Son," etc.?

A. It is where Christ has His true sway - the real thing, true believers; a kingdom, because His authority there is fully owned.

Verse 14. Here redemption is mentioned last of all these things.

Verses 15, 17, and 18. There are two headships of Christ here:

1st (v. 15). He is image of the invisible God, He who has created all things. It is a question of the rights and glories of His person. He has not taken His rights yet, as laid down in this verse. All things have been created by Him and for Him.

2nd. This is the second headship (v. 18). He is the Head of the body, the Firstborn from among the dead. He is about to take possession of all things on the ground of redemption. As risen Man, He will take all that He has created as God; and the assembly, the body, shall then be the fulness of His glory. The two reconciliations (vv 20, 21), and the two lines of Paul's ministry (vv. 23-25, etc.), flow from these two headships of Christ. (1) All things shall be reconciled; (2) you hath He reconciled. Again, (1) Proclaimed in the whole creation; (2) the dispensation of God towards the body of Christ, which is the assembly.

Mark now the word "if" (v. 23). Why should the apostle speak of being kept if there were no danger? The "ifs" apply to the wilderness. We are saved and reconciled, but not yet in glory, and we need to be kept guarded. We should not shun these expressions; for we have need of dependence all along the road, else we shall be negligent. God is faithful to keep us, but it is necessary that we should be kept. Thus, in John 10, the Lord says, "No one shall pluck them out of my hand." But it is evident that the enemy will

endeavour to do that. See further 1 Cor. 1:8, 9: "Who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom" - we have God's fidelity to keep us. May we avail ourselves of it.

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