

Our Portion in Christ Ephesians 1

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the profound implications of our relationship with God through Christ, emphasizing our identity as joint-heirs and the fullness of God's plans for reconciliation.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Divine Love"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound relationship believers have with God through Christ, highlighting that our identity as children of God is rooted in the work of Christ and the counsels of God. He explains that while human responsibility was addressed at the cross, God's intentions and plans for humanity were established before the foundation of the world. The sermon illustrates how believers are not only justified but also called to share in the glory of Christ, being conformed to His image and enjoying all spiritual blessings in Him. Darby encourages Christians to recognize their position in Christ and the love God has for them, which is akin to the love He has for His Son. Ultimately, he calls for a life that reflects this divine relationship, urging believers to live in accordance with their identity as children of God.

Transcript

There are two ways in which we may look at man in relation to God: first, in responsibility; second, in the counsels of God.

It is important to know the full value of the work of Christ, and our present relationship. All duties and right affections flow from relationships; the Christian lives in those new relationships into which God has brought him. We find in this chapter our relationship to the Father as children (the individual relationship has the first place in Ephesians); then comes in the unfolding of the unity of the body of Christ.

God put man originally in a certain relationship with Himself in innocence; that relationship - the claim of it - must subsist. You cannot destroy God's title by human sin, but on man's side the relationship is gone and broken. Wickedness on one side does not destroy rights or claim on the other.

As to the history of God's ways and dealings, man's responsibility has closed at the cross; it is not a time of probation now, though the individual is proved. In the same cross Christ perfectly glorified God Himself. We find the two things quite distinct: responsibility; and the intentions of God before any responsibility was in question. This epistle takes up the side of these counsels.

In Philippians we are looked at as running the race through the wilderness with our eye fixed on the glory. In Ephesians we are seen as brought completely to God and sent out into the world to shew God's character. In Romans we see the responsibility side simply, the sinfulness of man, what man is without law and under law, and the justification of a sinner. The counsels of God are only just touched on in the verse, "For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Man is proved to be a sinner; the blood of Christ is that which cleanses us. There we get responsibility, as also justification - not in Ephesians. God has no need to justify the new creation.

In 2 Timothy 1:9 we see that what was before the world began is now made manifest. We have the same thing in Titus 1. This thought of God is very distinct.

318 In Genesis we begin with the responsible man. All depended on man's responsibility; but nothing could be more complete than his fall. He distrusted God and believed Satan. Distrust of God is the essence of all sin. There is no way back to innocence. We may get divine righteousness, and may be made partakers of His holiness; but we shall never have innocence again. Christ was "the seed of the woman." All God's thoughts and counsels and plans were around the second Adam. Promises there were, and prophecies clearer and clearer; but what God was actually doing up to the cross was trying man on his responsibility.

Before the flood testimony was given; but there were no particular dealings of God. Then the world became so bad that God had to bring in the flood. When God begins again with Noah, he got drunk. The world subsequently went into idolatry.

Adam was the head of a fallen race, Abraham was the head and father of all that believe. When God had scattered the people of Babel, from among them He takes a people for Himself; then, having chosen Abraham, He gives him promises. The apostle in Galatians shews how the promises to Abraham could be neither disannulled nor added to. The law came in by the bye. To Abraham there was not a question of righteousness - no "if." The law was the perfect measure of what man ought to be. Before ever Moses came down from the mount the Israelites had made the golden calf. At last God says, "I have yet one Son," one thing more that I can do. The husbandmen cast Him out of the vineyard and slew Him.

Thus in the cross the history of responsibility (not individual responsibility) was closed. Sin had been fully brought out. Man was lawless; then, when the law came, there was the transgression of the law; and when the blessed Lord in wondrous love and grace came into the world and went about doing good, they could not stand God's presence. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Stephen gives us the summary - prophets slain, the Just One killed, the law broken, the Holy Ghost resisted. "We will not have this man to reign over us." Christ interceded for them on the cross, "They know not what they do," and the Holy Ghost in answer to this says by Peter, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it."

319 The history of Adam, the moral history, is closed; that is, what we are. In all this we have God's history of man's responsibility. I find in the cross that I am in a condition which God must reject. Christ has come to be made sin, and a work has been done according to God's holy and righteous nature. If I look up to God now, I find no sin in His presence; I go there by the work of Christ, and God cannot see the sins. Not only has Christ died for my sins, but I have died with Him, I have done with the nature. First, I find the putting away of sins, and along with that I have died with Christ. Christ did much more than this at the cross. Sin was in the world, evil was rampant, Satan reigning, God's glory in the dust, the earth full of violence (whatever the signs of wisdom). It was not merely a question of my sins; but God was

compromised in a sense. Christ then was Jehovah's lot.

Suppose God had cut off Adam and Eve, there would have been righteousness, but no love. Suppose He had spared every one, there would have been no righteousness. If I look at the cross, there is righteousness against sin - never such displayed before. And there I learn the perfect love of God. At the cross I see God perfectly glorified in a Man, His own blessed Son, but still a Man. There is a man in the glory of God. Not only is there one man out of paradise, but another Man is in paradise. The work, by virtue of which He is sitting there, can never lose its value. Now the counsels of God can be brought out. If sin is cleared away, why should I be in the same glory as the Son of God? We do not get the one without the other; but nothing can be the result of that work on the cross less than the glory. There are two things: not merely are my sins cleared away, but I stand in the light as God is in the light, as He is. This we are in Christ; and we are to be "conformed to the image of his Son." Now we are brought as Christ and like Christ. He is the "firstborn among many brethren." "Tell my brethren that I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." This is our present place. "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." But, says the Lord, you need not wait till then: "to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

O how the things of this world are dimmed by this that we are loved as Christ is loved! What a blessed place this is! Christ has taken all on Him as man, that we may be for ever with Him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [a remarkable expression, in the best place, in contrast to Judaism] in Christ Jesus." There is not one possible blessing into which Christ has entered as man that we are not brought into. Christ never gives away; He brings us into enjoyment with Himself: "not as the world giveth, give I unto you." This is perfect love.

320 Have you ever thought of God's thought about you, that you are "to be conformed to the image of his Son?" "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." This cannot fail. The Lord presses on our hearts that He brings us into association with Himself. "Then are the children free." He "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." God gives us His own nature, "holy and blameless before him in love." He puts us in this place answering perfectly to His nature, and with a nature to enjoy it. We are in Christ: this is God's thought. I get the place of a son with the Father. Servants would not do for Him; He takes us as sons. We are "accepted in the beloved": "in Christ" would not do here. "I was daily his delight." In this One, who was always God's eternal delight, we are accepted.

Have you the thought of God's heart about your blessing? Is the thought you have that you are loved as Christ is loved? Are you able to see God's heart as He has revealed it? Where shall I get what is in God's heart? Is it in my heart? If the angels want to know what love is, it is in us they see it. Is this the way you think of God? We soon find out what poor creatures we are. Quite true; but can you say, There is where God has set me? This is the very thing that makes us see our own utter nothingness. The reasonings of the Holy Ghost are always downward from God to us; the reasonings of conscience are always upward from us to God. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son: much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." The Holy Ghost reasons downward: is this the way we reason? If you are naughty, do you feel you are a naughty child? You cannot be a naughty child, sad as this may be, unless you are a child. If I am a child of God, I am bound to live like one. He expects children's affections, children's duties. Have you given up the first Adam entirely, and found your place in the second Adam, "accepted in the beloved"?

I may remark that it is our positive place before God that lets us into the counsels of God. There is no real knowledge of these counsels except as we stand in our place before God. Knowledge that puffs up is always defective and sterile; it is a statue, not life. There is nothing really connected with it in the mind, when it puffs up. There is a certain place for the believer before God; into this the heart has to get. We are made partakers of the divine nature. Then all these thoughts and counsels of God come to be precious, not as knowledge, but as belonging to the glory of Christ. "I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness." Where our own souls are before God, according to God, of course there is fellowship and communion with God. Activity of course, even right activity, tends to bring self in. Take Paul: there was danger of his being puffed up; and the Lord sent a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. When he came down from the third heaven into the ordinary activities of life, there was danger. The thorn was a hindrance to him in his ministry, that the power of Christ might be made manifest in him. The moment he finds what it was, he says, "I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Christ chooses things that are weak that no flesh may glory in His presence.

Taking the general principle, if I enter into the knowledge of divine things, it must be along with God. Love is never puffed up; love likes to serve. I am thus blameless that I may have communion. We cannot have practically a more important truth than that all real divine knowledge is found by being in the presence of God; and whenever we are in the presence of God, there must be lowliness of heart and mind and spirit. God's presence is always a holy thing. There is no true knowledge, and no true communion unless the soul is in that state before Him. There is no more dangerous thing than a certain apprehension of divine things without the soul learning them with God, as we see in Balaam and in Hebrews 6, where you get all the wondrous things of Christianity poured on the mind and natural heart. This is dangerous even if there is life, and fatal if there is not. The revelation of the counsels of God is founded on knowledge of our place with God. The eye cannot bear light from God except so far as we are right with God. Having brought us into the blessed consciousness of this place, where we are at home with God, now He can unfold His counsels, as to Christ Himself. Having brought us there in grace, He can trust our hearts with all His plans. There is no real divine knowledge of the counsels of God except so far as we are personally with Him. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" He reveals to Abraham what He is going to do, not with Abraham, but with Lot.

322 All flows from the soul being consciously in the place where it is set, in Christ. He can then trust us with the knowledge of His will; He can trust the sons of the family with the family affairs.

Christ was a true real man in this world: was He occupied with the interests of His family, or the interests of man? He was subject to His parents. There was in Him perfect obedience, perfect confidence, and - what is so hard for us - perfect waiting. He gave Himself for our sins; He says, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." This is not merely an outward thing. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Christ was a dying sacrifice. The Christian is to be a living sacrifice: this is to be the whole life of the Christian. We are set at liberty by the power of the life of Christ, and the Holy Ghost is in us, and then we yield ourselves to God. We cannot yield ourselves of ourselves; but the moment we are risen with Christ from the dead, we have the power of the Holy Ghost. Suppose a child is exceedingly anxious to go and see something, if his father desires him to go, there is an instance of perfect liberty and obedience also at the same time. It is a "law of liberty" to us; the new man having the mind of God, its delight is to do the will of God. We do not belong to anything in this world, but only to God. I have no duty that does not

belong to a man who has died and is alive again. Blessed path of liberty it is, but a path of liberty to one who has no object but Christ! This is the Christian's place, entirely separated to God. If I am my own, I am a poor lost sinner (Christ never called Himself His own); we are bought with a price, and we belong to God. When in that case, He can open out to us all His wisdom and prudence; "we have the mind of Christ."

323 Thus I first get Christ's own place; and this is exceedingly blessed, because it puts us into our place. Our calling is what we are towards God. Remember you do not get dispensed glory, until as a first thing you get to God. Christ offers Himself up to God; you have a life to God down here, and then a death to God, before you have the glory. Our relationship to God Himself comes before any acquaintance with the dispensed counsels of God. Responsibility and the counsels of God are distinct. I was a poor sinner: but I find, through the work of Christ, that all that was against me is gone. God's counsels and plans have nothing to do with man's responsibility. When man had come to the point of positive hatred against God in killing Christ, then the counsels of God were brought out, the mystery hidden in God. All this plan and counsel of God were before ever the world was. Christ in His rejection does the work which is the foundation of everlasting righteousness.

Everything that concerned the Person of Christ was revealed before in the Old Testament, but not these counsels of God. You may find the ascension, resurrection, gifts - all that concerns the Person of Christ - but nothing of union with Him, of being members of His body, joint-heirs with Him: all these counsels were hidden. I was a poor sinner, I must have my responsibility met; but this does not say that I should be in the same glory as the Son of God. Not merely has He cleansed our sins, but He has glorified God. Man goes into the glory of God because Man (He was more than man, of course) has perfectly glorified God. We are loved as Christ is loved: the world will know it when He appears. Ah! if we only saw where the Christian is placed! It is a terrible thing to see all this rest on the surface. Are you conscious that the Father loves you as He loves Jesus?

The "fulness of times" is spoken of here, not eternity; in eternity we find God all in all. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." This is the thought and purpose of God that everything He has created He will bring under Christ's moral power as Man. He created all things, we read in Colossians. He is going to reconcile the state of things: but we are reconciled. The place of the Christian is - absolutely reconciled to God in a world that is not reconciled at all. Everything in heaven and earth will be reconciled. If you want to go as Christians through the world, you must go as absolutely reconciled to God among things not reconciled. You have nothing to do with "things under the earth" here: in Philippians they bow at the name of Jesus. The scene He created He will perfectly restore. His first title is Creator; His second is Son - He is the heir of all things.

324 Actual creation is always referred to the Son and Spirit - God, of course. Man is to be set over it all, set at the head of everything in the fulness of times. As we get into Christ's place in our calling, we get into Christ's place in our inheritance. Whatever He created as God, He inherits as man.

"By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"; the work is complete and finished for His friends, and He is waiting till His enemies be made His footstool. When that comes, He leaves the Father's throne and takes His own. He who created all things is Son and heir of all things, and He inherits them as man. We are joint-heirs with Him. In the thoughts of God, His Son having become a man, we have become completely associated with Christ. He went alone through the earth; but, the moment redemption was completed, He says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." How thorough is this

association! Christ became a man, and in perfect love He brings us to everything He has as man. If He takes everything in heaven and earth, we are joint-heirs with Him (as Eve was with Adam), members of His body. When Mary Magdalene comes to the grave, He says, "Tell my brethren that I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

God's heart is set upon me. It is the fixedness of heart on an object, but besides that I have the confidence that He never takes His eye off me. We get divine love in the nature of God, and, besides that, love set on an object. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." My inheritance is in Christ, because God has associated me with the Lord Jesus. See the way the apostle dwells on and repeats this word "in"!

If I have the love of Christ in my heart, can I look on a world that is under Satan's power, and not be a man of sorrows? We have joy through Christ, if you take that side. If a holy being is in a world of sin, he must suffer; if a loving person is in a world of misery, he must suffer.

325 It is not that the glory is the highest thing, for it concerns self. At the transfiguration Moses and Elijah were in the same glory as Christ; but more than that, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Jehovah was in the cloud; and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son." When they went into the cloud, the disciples were frightened. The cloud, so to speak, answered to the Father's house.

This chapter invariably refers to God, His calling, and His inheritance.

"That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ" - hoped before He appears. The world will get a portion under Him, but we a portion with Him. While we must be born of God, there is in the proper sense of the word no glad tidings in telling a man that he must be born again. The thing revealed in the gospel is, that the grace of God which brings salvation has appeared; there is remission of sins and full salvation. Have you never been in God's presence? Were you fit to be there? The veil is rent: we are just as much in God's presence as if already in heaven; we shall see it more clearly then. I have everlasting life, I have divine righteousness, because I am in Christ. I am brought into God's presence, and I am not there without being fit through the work on the cross. We have not got anything of the inheritance as yet, but we are sealed with the Holy Ghost. The blood of Christ having cleansed me from all sin, the Holy Ghost can take His place because I am clean. "Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?" What if the apostle were to write this to you? Being born again, I have life; when sealed, I have God dwelling in me. The Holy Ghost can take His place as a witness that in God's sight I am as white as snow. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." Oh! beloved, what a place the Christian is in! If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God is dwelling in you. How are you treating the divine guest? "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed."

It is not merely quickening, which was from the beginning: but when there is life, the Holy Ghost becomes the seal. I do not want an earnest of God's love. He loved me so perfectly that He gave His Son for me. His is a love proved in the death of Christ, and known in present consciousness. The Holy Ghost is the earnest of the inheritance. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Do not you be looking into your heart to find if He is there. Imagine a child inquiring if he is a child! Look if you are walking up to that. "We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Do you believe in the truth that "Jesus is the Son of God"? "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." But "they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again."

326 The apostle's prayer here is to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," that the saint might know what He has wrought, and would do for them.

Do you believe that Christ has put you in the same place with God as He is in Himself? We are in Him, we shall be with Him, and like Him, and He gives us the knowledge of it now.

Have your hearts gone back, when accepted, to look at this model? Have your hearts burned within you as you have seen Him, and talked with Him, and have you said "His path is mine?" Has it possessed your souls? This is a matter of daily diligence and conflict. The time will soon come when we shall say, of all that has not been Christ in our lives and ways, "That was all lost."

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