

Our Relationship to the Father and to the World John 17

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being brought into Christ's place with the Father and manifesting the Father's character in the world.

Scripture: John 17:1

Topics: "Relationship with God", "Christian Identity"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound relationship between believers and the Father as depicted in John 17, highlighting that Christians are called to reflect Christ's character in the world. He explains that believers are placed in a unique position as sons of God, tasked with glorifying Christ and manifesting the Father's nature through their lives. Darby outlines four distinct paths of Christian living, focusing on humility, service, and the importance of being set apart from the world. He stresses that true sanctification comes through the truth of God's word, which empowers believers to live as Christ did, embodying love and light in a world that often rejects them. Ultimately, Darby calls Christians to embrace their identity as children of God, living out their faith in a way that glorifies both the Father and the Son.

Transcript

I take this chapter as fully setting us - the twelve disciples, then those that believe on Him through their word - first, in our place of relationship to the Father; secondly, to the world; and both in a most distinctive way. We have something of the same character in the Ephesians; but there it is more God in relationship than the Father.

I find four different ways in which the practical path of a Christian is represented in Scripture. First, the object, a glorified Christ, in Phil. 3, giving energy and character to the Christian's race: "This one thing I do." Secondly, in Phil. 2, we get a fuller character, in a certain sense, to have the same mind which was in Christ Jesus. It is not that I am running after some thing; it is the proper character in everyone having a glorified Christ; not going up, but always going down, even to the cross. "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Thirdly, in Eph. 4, 5, a very different kind of thing, which, however, coalesces with this, where, being brought completely to God, and seated there with Christ, we are sent out to bear witness to the character of God, to give testimony to Him in this world. Fourthly, here in John 17 it is a little different. The point especially is, we are put into Christ's place with the

Father - put into the Son's place. My father may be a good man, a great man; it is more this, he is my father. I have a son's place, duties, etc. I have to imitate his goodness, and to learn his greatness.

The Son being glorified (He goes up to the Father), then His disciples left here, He was to be glorified in them. The Father had been perfectly glorified in Him on the earth; He went up into glory, He was to be glorified in them by their answering to what He is in glory, and they were to be carrying the Father's word as He carried it. It was holiness, because they belong not to this world at all: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Christ belonged to the Father, was entirely His; He came down and revealed the glory of the Father; came and brought this out before the world, and was in the bosom of the Father all the while (I mean as to His eternal Sonship, of course). He brings us into that place, the bosom of the Father, and then puts us in His own place down here to manifest Him. He is not only in the bosom of the Father as "the only begotten Son," but He is there as the glorified Man. In Phil. 2, in the Son's walk on earth, we get the spirit and mind and tone and temper of Christ, always coming down (in John He is always going up into the glory of God as Son). It is the beautiful and lovely character of the descending path of a Christian on earth, esteeming every one better than himself, he makes something of them and nothing of himself, seeks nothing for himself and considers everyone else. Christ Jesus "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant," that He might serve us and glorify God, when He could do it freely. That is what we are called to do, as set free and brought to God; we are called upon as having an immense place (the glory of Christ being ours) to go and serve God as He did. In the rest of Phil. 2 the expression of love is shown in the wonderful consideration and care for others - love opposed to selfishness, self entirely given up and all the spirit of it. One verse I refer to, to show what our walk ought to be, and how a Christian is really brought into Christ's place. (v. 15.) Blameless and harmless, sons of God without rebuke, holding forth the word of life - each member of that sentence, while it is exhortation to Christians, is exactly Christ. He was blameless and harmless; there is not a single element in a sentence of that exhortation which is not an expression of what Christ was down here: and "I am glorified in them."

The difference in John is, He is gone up into the glory as Son. (vv. 1, 2.) There are two parts, or grounds, in the way in which we are brought into this relationship with Christ. First, "The hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." There is the relationship, the moment the Son was glorified as such. Then, secondly, He adds, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." The glory is His, but He gets it because He has glorified God. The Son had been in the place of humiliation; and is now raised as man. "Glorify Thou me." There the glory, into which Christ enters, is founded on His work. In virtue of His having perfectly glorified the Father, the Son has to be glorified with the Father. He enters on that glory in virtue of having glorified the Father. The Son had glorified the Father on the earth, and the work having been finished which the Father gave Him to do, the Father glorifies the Son with Himself. He is Son in it. The place of Christians is to be sons. We get the glory in the place of sons, in result of the perfect work which has glorified God; not merely being made sons, but put into the same place.

There are two things, the being brought to God as sons - brought with Christ and like Christ - and there is the effect of His having perfectly glorified God as the Father, that the Father puts man into the glory of God. Christ is forerunner. This has nothing to do with responsibility, it had to do with the purpose of God. As Son the work of Christ was done, which gave the title of bringing many sons into glory. It is the mystery now made manifest. Forgiven, they are accepted; but why should they be in the same glory as the Son of

God? The place that we have is thus brought to the FATHER, and brought to the Father, remember, through the rejection of Christ from the world. He, speaking of the children, says "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." Then as regards the world He says, "Righteous Father." It is connection with the Father in contrast with the world's rejection. Now He was going up there as Son, and the Father had, so to speak, to decide between the world and Him; Christ or the world must be disowned. The moment of decision came - Christ must be refused by the Father, or the Father must refuse the world. A moral question is at issue. Christ had been faithful to the Father all through His life, especially on the cross, and the time had come when God must chose practically between the Christ who had glorified Him, and the world who had rejected Him.

That is done in a more dispensational way, and brought out doctrinally with Paul. The Lord appears to him on the road to Damascus - "Delivering thee from the people (Jews), and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Paul was not a man that belonged to anyone in this world at all. He was sent forth - where from? From Christ in glory, not as belonging to this world. The great truth that I refer to is, that he was taken out from the Jews - out from the Gentiles. Who is he? A Christian connected with Christ in glory, and sent out from Him; that is why he says, "Henceforth know I no man after the flesh," not even Christ come among the Jews as being after promise. He sees Christ in glory, and knows that only, and goes out of the world to Him. It is just the same principle with us. We have not only been separated from the world; the message the disciples bring is to put us into the place where Christ is with the Father: the thing that puts us into this glory and blessing is in thorough contrast with all that is in the world. The Father is put in contrast with the world always. "All that is in the world . . . is not of the Father;" He could not say is not of God, because it was created by Him, but "is not of the Father," it does not belong to the new order of things that is brought in by the Son being rejected here.

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name." It is always the Father in John 17; and that is the very thing in the sermon on the mount, and in the Lord's prayer, as they are called, though they did not understand it. He is declaring the Father's name, it was the Father's kingdom they were to pray for. Of course it is more fully now that we have the spirit of adoption. All in the chapter here especially associated the disciples with Christ's place as gone to the Father, as sons.

"I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world." "Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee." Not things God had given Him; what the Father had given Him were of the Father. It was not Jehovah setting up something on earth, but as Father He gives to His Son the things which belonged to Him in that place specifically. Now He is unfolding this. Mark in verse 8 how far He goes with us. "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest me." That is, He had so put them into the place and relationship He was in as a man upon earth with the Father, that whatsoever the Father had communicated to Him in that relationship He passes on to them; He brings them into all the blessing - into all the brightness of the hope - brings us now into all the consciousness of the relationship.

The way in which Christ took that relationship has been greatly on my mind, as illustrated in the gospel of Matthew. It is the very way you get the juice out of the gospels, if you see Christ as the perfect expression of the model of what God had made man on earth. Take the end of chapter 3, and see how wonderfully He takes that place. John says, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Of course He need not; John was His creature, but He comes and takes His place with His poor people - "For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Thus it becometh us! Wondrous lowliness! "You have your part, and I have mine - to fulfil all righteousness - not on my part repentance, that I have not needed." The

moment He had taken this place with the poor remnant, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him - just what has been done to us since the rending of the veil. He was anointed with the Holy Ghost and sealed; so are we. He was the Beloved Son; we are sons, and know it. Of course, He had it in His own blessed Person, and we are brought in by redemption. He enters into every position in which He puts us through redemption.

Another thing struck me. In this wondrous sovereign grace, for the first time the whole Trinity is revealed. When the Son is there revealed as a man, the Holy Ghost cannot stop away, neither the Father. The Holy Ghost descending owns Him, and the Father owns Him from the heavens. We get the whole fulness of the Godhead identified with Christ taking this lowly place as man, and that is our place with the Father. But we have another place; that is, conflict with the power of Satan. He took our place there too in Matt. 4 when "He was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The Lord took this place in this wondrous, blessed way. He binds the strong man. All that the Father communicates to Him in that place as man, He gives us. It is the "word" He gives them, and He looks consequently for them to be kept in His own name from all that is inconsistent with the relationship and place of which He was the pattern Himself in this world.

Mark the practical effect as regards the world in John 17:14. "I have given them Thy word;" that is, word, not words: what should He give them but the word, the Father's testimony as to the world - that is, their place as regards the world. "Christ died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." God's grace to the world has nothing to do with the Father; that is, the God whom we know in verse 3. It is the Father now, with the Son by His side, whom the world had rejected; that is why I am sent into it, as the Lord Jesus Christ was sent. "To us there is but one God, the Father." The place God has taken with us is that of the Father who has had a Son rejected on earth. The world has rejected Him, and to Him He says, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." There is the Son with the Father who is in the perpetual consciousness that He has the rejected Son beside Him. That is the condition He sees Him in, and us in relationship, to Him, and He must look as far from that world as possible - there is goodness of course, caring for poor sinners.

"I am glorified in them." He does not say the Father is glorified in them, but it is Christ, whose character we bear, is to be glorified in us. We have got the Father's word, and the Son's place on earth. This is the very way He calls His disciples His friends - "All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you;" He has brought them into the intimacy of all those things which He received from the Father as a man, and puts them into His place as sons by redemption: He gives them thus the Father's testimony to carry back into the world - the place in which they are set. Christ was the perfect expression of what the Father is, and of course the person that is faithful is the perfect expression of the One of whom he testifies.

The beginning of all evil was the devil destroying Eve's confidence in God: she must bring in her own will. In Christ we see that instead of God keeping back the tree, lest they should be like God in the knowledge of good and evil, He gives His Son that we may be like Him in glory. What was Christ's life here upon earth? The expression of holy, divine goodness in the midst of evil; and so must you be the expression of God's nature and character in the world. Christ was not of the world, but of heaven as to His character; and so "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Christ was in the world - laboured for Joseph and His mother, till the time came for Him to be called out to minister. He was walking this world absolutely apart from all the evil in it; He was good and doing good. Then He looks up and says, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." It was the Father's truth they were to be set apart by; there is no real truth whatever without it. Now it was said by Christ, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

In our walk they ought to see every thing that was in Christ.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth." The world has not truth at all. If I were to say "God is good," the world would only misconceive it; when the world says "God is good," they mean that they hope He will care as little about sin as they do themselves! The disciples came directly from Christ, bearing His character before the world. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." It is not only that everyone that comes from Christ has a testimony for Christ in the world, but they have His character. We are sanctified by the truth from all evil in the world. "For their sakes I sanctify myself." Christ has set Himself apart as this model man in heaven, the spring and source of all blessing to us here - that our affections being identified with Him, our eyes resting on Him there, He might be the truth in us: but you must keep your eye on Him there. My heart gets identified with the things that He delights in. The time is coming when it will be manifested that we have this place, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them . . . that the world may believe . . . may know," etc. Then even the world will see that you are loved as Christ is loved.

Then there is the place of testimony. We stand in the world that Christ may be glorified in us; that is His object in leaving us here. I have referred to other of those characteristics. If we turn to Eph. 4, 5 again it gives us the Christian character founded on the blessed truth of the place into which we are brought. There are two great subjective principles in us which are foundations of this walk. First, it is not merely that we are quickened, it is not all that the Christian has a new life, but we must be quickened together with Christ. Besides that, Christ having gone down into our place of sin and misery, gone down there and had nothing, He did not go in and glorify God in that special place without results. God's Son as risen becomes our life, we have done with the old thing, the life that is gone. I am "quickened together with Him," and I have left myself, "my old man," in the grave where Christ was. We have to learn that we have died with Christ, that is the meaning for example of the Jordan. The Red Sea is Christ alone, dying and risen, that is what saves us. But in Jordan it is my share in it with Him; it is not only that I have to see it in the Red Sea, but specifically in the Jordan. We walk through death into Canaan, the heavenly places. We have "put off the old man with his deeds." Here I get God as the measure of right and wrong, God is the measure I am to take. We have "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth." God is now the measure of my conduct.

Secondly, there is another element of Christian walk here. "Your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost." Thus we get, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God;" that is, I now get the new thing, God Himself dwelling in me, and I am sent out to walk as Christ walked. It is not here carrying the Father's word as a testimony, but go and act like God. The apostle goes on to say, "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children." My path now is to walk as one who imitates God, because I am His child.

So in another place, not only forgive, but "love your enemies," as He did. Did He not love you when you were enemies? Yes. Then go and act like Him. Here it is, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Christ is the measure of it; you give yourself entirely up to serve other people; Christ did. If you want to learn what the character of God in a man is, go and look at Christ's life down here.

He gave Himself up entirely, and to God; that is love. Well, you go and do the same. You are to be like God in love, and now in chap. 5 you are "light in the Lord." Another characteristic of God is light, God Himself is the pattern of what we ought to be in the world as love and light. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Mark, it is "thou that sleepest," not dead, for

Christians cannot be dead, but you cannot get any activity or intelligence from a sleeping man, any more than in a dead one.

A sleeping man is no better than a sleeping dog; if you want to put him in a man's place, you must wake him up. Christ is the measure of your walk, and the light to lighten you in the path; wonderful measure! God has so brought us to Himself in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that He brings us out to walk through the world as the expression of what Christ is. The path of the Christian is altogether above law. The law said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Christ says, "Do not let there be one bit of self in you."

There was none in Christ. The world would be a paradise if men loved each other as they do themselves. I must get a love that is sufficiently above the evil to walk in it, to love people even if they do not love me; that is what the Lord Jesus did. I must have the character of love that can show what God is, when all the people around me are quite the opposite. I may have Christian friends; but His was holy, divine goodness in the midst of a world that was all the opposite. As Christ was the expression of perfect goodness here, so can we be imitators of Him; there is the path, "Imitators of God as dear children."

It is wonderfully blessed that He brings us into a path where we are to empty ourselves and live Christ. In Hebrews Christ is before me; in Philippians, I get Christ come down, walking in this world, not setting Himself up. It is wonderfully blessed to be so brought into the place of children of God, that we are called to imitate Him; to go out from Him in the sense that we have Christ's place; to walk through this world as the expression of Him. In John, Christ gives me the Father's word, the word of Him who has received His Son on high, because the world rejected Him.

Then the character of what man sitting in heavenly places is comes out in this world - an imitator of God, in Ephesians. If you have this place with Him, go and show what He is to the world. The flesh resists, and there is conflict; but you see it does not follow in the least that you are to act on the flesh. There may be something in which we have not detected flesh; but where we have, we are never called upon to act in it, but the contrary. There is no such thing as mending the flesh one atom. In innocence it broke down; without law it is grossly and horribly ignorant; under law rebellious, not subject, neither could be. Bring in grace, and it spits in the face of the One who brings it in; put the Holy Ghost in a man, and the flesh lusts against the Spirit; put a man in the third heavens, and when he comes down the flesh will be puffed up about it - the flesh is the same all the way down. If I have a thorough rogue in my house that I cannot trust, and I keep him locked up in the cupboard, all well. Why should I let him loose at all? I may be foolish enough to let the flesh out, but I never need. We never can excuse ourselves. If we are foolish enough to leave an open door, Satan will come in. There may be a moment when I am not able to overcome the flesh, when it cannot be checked. Why so? I have been neglecting prayer, or reading the word of God, or have been careless in some way, and then when the enemy comes, there is no power to meet him, and we are overcome, and that is as good as allowing that Christ may be overcome. If I am walking carelessly I shall reap the consequences. Here is the difference, and it is a very real one. Suppose I am not walking in the Spirit, so that my conscience is not good, when I get into the presence of God, and have to think of myself, I am ashamed. I am not thinking of Him, and am forced to think about myself in the way of self-judgment. The effect of the light is to show me myself, make me think of what I am, and wake up my conscience (and it is well He does make me think about myself in self-judgment). But if I am walking without the least thing on my conscience, I do not think of myself, but am free to be occupied with Christ. It is not that the flesh is any better at any time. I am practically purged, have a good conscience, and when I come into God's presence I can let my heart out; and this is great blessedness - it is communion. That is where the real difference lies between a man who is walking in the power of the word of God and in

constant dependence, and one who is not. Paul is not afraid of the day of judgment: "Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men." He brings in the power of divine judgment as a present thing: "We are manifest to God." It is having the sense of divine judgment on everything that I am doing, and everything is detected.

We are called to walk in the light, as He is in the light, without doing anything inconsistent with it; not grieving the Spirit, who consequently takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us - that is communion. We never can excuse ourselves if the flesh thinks a moment amiss. It is not that at any given moment I have power to resist the flesh; if it acts, I have no excuse, for had I been walking with God I should have had power to resist it. J. N. Darby.

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