

Philippians 3

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life focused on Christ in glory, counting all earthly gains as loss in pursuit of Him.

Scripture: Matthew 25:6, John 13:31-32, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 2:7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:3, Philippians 3:8, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 3:1-2, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "Christian Identity", "Focus on Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the practical characteristics of the Christian life as outlined in Philippians 3, focusing on lowliness and the energy that propels believers towards Christ in glory. He highlights that the Christian path is not about sin but about walking in the Spirit, with Christ's accomplished work and heavenly calling as the central focus. Darby explains that believers are called to be conformed to the image of Christ, and that the Cross signifies the end of reliance on human righteousness, establishing a new identity in Christ. He urges Christians to live with their affections set on heavenly things, recognizing their citizenship in heaven and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, he calls for a singular focus on Christ as the object of our lives, encouraging believers to count all things as loss for the sake of knowing Him.

Transcript

This epistle gives us two practical characteristics of Christian life in which we find the true practical power of the life - the principle on which it passes through the world according to the mind of God. The Epistle is not doctrinal but, in it, we get the Christian path - Christian experience in the power of the Spirit of God. There is not a word about sin in it from beginning to end: but it sets out the Christian path in a person walking in the power of the Spirit.

The first characteristic is lowliness as in Philippians 2: the second, the energy that leads a soul on, with Christ in glory as its object. This is the whole power. The basis of the whole thing is, that Christ is in the glory as man. It is a wondrous truth, that man - that is, the Lord Jesus Christ - is gone into heaven on the accomplishment of that work on the ground of which man could go in, hence as our Forerunner; and that the place that man has thus got in Christ is what the Holy Ghost always sets before our minds as our object.

All the great truths of God are found centred in the cross. Seeing a man in heaven sets man aside on the earth. We have got to pass through the world till Christ comes, and the question is how we walk down here

till then. Of some the Apostle tells us weeping. We are looking for Christ to change our vile bodies. Till then we are not in the full result. That is what is set before our minds; but Christ is presented as already set down at the right hand of God, the distinct testimony of our accomplished salvation, and the blessing into which it brings.

225 Our calling is heavenly. Nothing is more important than our distinct apprehension that our calling is to be with Christ and like Christ where He is now. There is a full definite revelation of it all now. It is not merely that we are cleared of sin, but that God has a purpose about us which forms the object of the running here. "For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." The Cross was the turning point between that which tested man's responsibility down here and God's purpose concerning us. Before the world was, God had this purpose about believers, to have us there like His Son (Prov. 8). God, according to this purpose, would have us in this glory with His Son - the personal dignity of the Lord being always kept safe. You never find the saints said to be brought into this glory, without the guarding of His perfect excellency. The heart delights in preserving it.

Let me refer to one or two instances. In Matthew 3 Christ took His part with the remnant - going with His people in their first right step. Never till then was the heaven opened. At this moment the heaven was opened unto Him, and the Spirit of God came down, and the voice of the Father declared, This Man is My beloved Son. Now heaven was just as much open to Stephen: but mark the difference. When the heaven is opened over Christ, does He look up and see an object that changes Him into the same image? Not at all; heaven looks down upon Him. But this is just what Stephen does. Thus His person is kept safe, while Stephen gets as like Christ as the creature can.

226 So on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elias appear in just the same glory as Christ; but the moment Peter would put them all together on the same level, they go away. He remains - the voice again declaring, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

But to return to these thoughts of God about us, in Matthew 3. Having put man into his proper place there is for the first time the revelation of the Trinity. There, where the fact of God's Son taking His place as Man sets man into his proper place before God, all three Persons are revealed in connection with it. The more we enter into the thoughts God had about us, the more we see what poor worms we are. How could we ever have thought of being brought into this same glory as the fruit of His redemption? It shows how it is all grace, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus."

He brings these things before our souls now that our affections may be formed by them in living association with Him where He is. We want to walk through this world with our affections flowing from our connection, as new men, with the second Man, that is Heir of all, in heaven. He connects us with the Man that is there - Christ in heaven - the only accepted Man according to the counsels of God - by the Holy Ghost. God did not begin with the Man of His counsels; He gave promise of it in Eden, and it becomes clearer and clearer afterwards. He began with the responsible Adam. All that probationary system is closed, in the setting aside of the old things altogether in the Cross. It closed the connection between God and the flesh, in spite of all that man - infidel and religious - can do to make something of it. That makes all the difference in our position. Now I have a fallen man - each of us adding our own sins to the heap - and a glorified Man. Am I walking on the principle of the fallen man, or the heavenly Man? I cannot do both. To walk as the heavenly Man is full blessed liberty of soul. The Cross made Christ say, "Now is the judgment

of this world," but Christ then said, "Now is the prince of this world cast out." God did that work on the Cross; while men slew Him, it was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." It was the triumph of Divine love, that through Christ's work the counsels of God might be accomplished that put us into the same glory as Christ. The counsels were never brought out while that probationary system was going on, because the foundation for them was not laid. But the counsel "is now made manifest" (2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:3). Hence we read, in 1 Corinthians 2:7, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery . . . ordained before the world unto our glory," but it did not come out. Again "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." People stop there, saying it is so wonderful and blessed we cannot know it. It is just the opposite, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit . . . that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." Then we have three steps as to the revelation of these things. First revelation: second, the inspired communication of them: third the spiritual reception; and this founded on a perfectly complete work. A Man has entered into the glory as our Forerunner, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. There is a difference between having our debts paid, and having all this glory before us. We might have our debts cleared and be without a farthing, but God gives us besides an inheritance of glory.

228 In John 13 Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him, if God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself." He does not wait for the royal manifested glory. The Holy Ghost comes down and puts us into connection with Christ in the glory of God, and the things that are around Him. That is the Christian position.

What becomes then of man's righteousness, if you are made the righteousness of God in Christ? The Cross puts an end to it altogether. It was just the attempt to maintain the legal righteousness that led Paul once to persecute the saints, and afterwards became his whole toil and burthen to oppose. The continual effort is to build up the first man again - in bold infidelity - but even in the Christian too. Whatever there is of it is a hindrance to the enjoyment of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Cross has judged it all, broken down the whole thing, "He takes away the first that He may establish the second." We get it here, "We are the circumcision which . . . rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh."

What is confidence in the flesh? A very easy but a very foolish thing. It is the religion of the flesh. In verses 5 and 6 you get all that man was under the law. Who established it? God. Why then speak of it in this way? Because under that system they had crucified His Son. "If I had not come and spoken to them they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin . . . now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." The Jews had promises and Christ was the fulfiller of them: He had come and they would not have Him, and the Jews were shut up in unbelief that they might come in under pure mercy just as the Gentiles.

229 Religion of the flesh is still man's confidence, because we do not know that we have no power, and we try to make out righteousness for God, instead of seeing God has made it out for us in a new way in a Man in glory. The Cross was the end of the trial of religion with man, to see if there was any good in him. But people say, "Ought I not to walk in this way?" You ought to have done it, but you are guilty under that system.

Here we have the religiousness of the flesh (not sin) which he calls concision - a name of utter contempt. That was the grosser thing, that was first set aside. But now he comes to "all things" and counts them loss for Christ. "That which was gain to me," that was the secret of it. If he was learned, who had the credit of it? Righteous - to whose credit was this? Paul's; but he says, I will not have "me." There is a totally new

thing that God has set up - a Man in the glory of God as my righteousness, and the Spirit of God makes Him the object of my affections. "I am crucified with Christ . . . and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people." What my heart wants is to have the Christ that has done it, in glory. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." He says, "There is God's intention about me, now, in the settled certainty of that, I want Him in the glory as my object." Here he is speaking of what carries the heart on. The object of a man is what characterises him: if money, then he is covetous; if pleasure, then he is a man of pleasure; if power, then he is ambitious: he who follows after Christ is a Christian. Christ is the power and principle of his life here. Paul was walking down here but he had no other object in the world than to win Christ. Christ had laid hold of him to have him in the glory, and he wants to lay hold of that. What governs the Christian in his path is the Cross written on all down here, and Christ up there as the object.

230 "Not having mine own righteousness which is of the law." He does not say "Not having his sins," but his righteousness. Christ has obtained the glory. The law would have been his righteousness down here: but doing what I ought to do would never give a title to be in the same glory as the Son of God. Why should it? But he will not have his own righteousness, "but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (verse 10). It is not that we are to seek suffering, but the cross was before him and he says "I will only be more like Christ; I have a life in Christ that is beyond death." As he says in 2 Corinthians 5. "We are always confident, knowing, that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." His place is all a settled thing: if killed he will only be with Christ. But he has not got it: it is his object.

231 He sets aside all that man is. The flesh, take it in all its best shew and colours, is all legal righteousness - fleshly righteousness. All is set aside.

Another thing has come in - not making the first man righteous, but - substituting the second Man for him.

His first object was to get Christ Himself; afterwards his own part in the blessing. Christ takes up the active open enemy against God. Not content to stop at home, like the chief priests, Paul goes to strange cities persecuting the saints, and then God stops him in sovereign grace, with a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun. If it is a question of labouring for Christ, there will be different results; but if of glory, it is true of all saints as of Paul, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. If you believe in Him, He has obtained it for you.

Then he looks at that glory. If it costs him his life, that is what he wants - "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ." There is no uncertainty. Cost what it will going through this hostile world - if it cost him his life - he says, "Well, I will be more like Christ," and he will have the conformity of His sufferings.

He was a man of one thought, one object, one purpose - "This one thing I do." All gain to him is loss, "I have suffered the loss of all things," but "I do count them but dung." Not "I did count," but "I do count." It had not lost its present power. Do we count everything but loss for Christ? In Matthew 25 there is time left between the cry "Behold the Bridegroom" and the coming, to test the heart to see if Christ is everything. If we look around how often people talk of losing first love. It is that Christ has lost His first power over the heart. The world comes in in such a subtle way - and the things of it - and deadens the heart. The

consequence is we begin at last to judge after the atmosphere we are living in. When Christ fills the heart the temptations are not there. It is the power of this new Object.

232 I turn now to what is connected with that, what Paul calls the perfect Christian. The thing set out before us is to be like Christ in glory. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, according to the eternal counsels of God. We are not that yet. "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure." That supposes that the heart has understood this - not merely that my sins are put away, forgiven, but my place in Christ. Romans 5 and 8 give the contrast; "if any man be in Christ" is the new place I have got into. Not my sins blotted out - that is the first thing - but, "he is a new creation," belonging to this new world. This is what the Apostle earnestly insists on. I am not a debtor to the flesh - there speaking of its sinfulness. The point of that is "crucified with Christ," not Christ crucified for my sins merely, but I am a dead man. He takes this truth of our being crucified to put our hearts, and consequently our lives, where we are not in body yet - in complete association with the Man that is in heaven. The old man has been condemned. If I know my place then I put off the old man and put on the new. Where do I get the measure of it? "Which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Besides sins put away the cross of Christ has separated us from our existence in the flesh, sin, the world, and law; and risen with Christ, I have my place in life, and heart, and spirit, along with Christ, who has redeemed me to Himself in glory. "Our conversation is in heaven."

233 I add another thing; the same Spirit that dwells in Christ, dwells in us. People talk of being united by faith, Scripture never does. We get the Spirit and then we know that we are in Him and He in us. The soul gets hold of this by grace, and my part, my portion, and my place is with the Son of God, the second Man and not the first. The Cross closed the whole system of righteousness by law. I died and now belong, as having Christ as my life, to the place where He is; and the Spirit is given that I may know it. "Our conversation is in heaven." What am I waiting for? For Christ to come and put me there, every day seeking to be more like Him here.

You find a Christian first converted knows his sins forgiven. But if you want to be a Christian as God contemplates it, you are in the world but not of it as He is not, you are in Christ. That is the reason why God puts us constantly through trials and difficulties, that God may make all this real to our souls. "Always bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our body."

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: . . . who mind earthly things." The Cross has put entire contempt upon them. If I look for the glory of God, where do I find divine dealing with sin, infinite divine love? In the Cross. That is what has put an end on God's part to everything connected with man - pretension to righteousness, recoverableness, everything, save the body left to be the vessel of the manifestation of the life of Christ.

"Our citizenship is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." We are left here like the man with the legion of devils, sent to his friends that they might know what great things the Lord had done for him. We look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, to do the one thing that remains to be done, to change our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto His glorious body. Then all will be complete. He will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied then.

234 Christ has come and given Himself for us that He might purify us to Himself. The Cross was the test of infinite love. And what we have to look for is that love of Christ to come and take us to Himself. If a

Christian understands that he is done with the old man, he has to learn to grow up to the stature of Christ. There is no other full growth of the Christian but that. As to mind and faith he gets into the full grown state. The thing is to be attained in glory, we cannot say we have attained, but can we say "This one thing I do." If a man has only seen forgiveness yesterday he has got to walk according to the same rule. To be forgiven and know it, is blessed of course; but can you say you are doing one thing?

People talk a deal about perfection, but they have lost the sense that perfection is to be as Christ in glory.

Can you say that your citizenship is in heaven, your righteousness in Christ, the associations of your heart with Christ, everything there? Infidelity is stalking abroad, ritualism is in high places. Can you say I have no confidence in the flesh? Divine righteousness is in heaven, but the Cross has written death upon all below upon earth, and all association with it. We find our imperfection every day, but is the ruling object of our souls Christ? Are you looking for Christ? You cannot say when He will come. It is carefully not revealed, to keep you watching. But whenever the Lord speaks of it, He never puts it beyond the life of the people that were then living. He never presents another thing to their thoughts. In the parable of the virgins, those that awoke at the midnight cry were the same that fell asleep while He tarried. He wakes them up and then He comes, but stays sufficient time to test hearts as to how far He is everything. If He were to come to-night, would your hearts be saying, Oh that is what I am looking for? Do you love His appearing? Would it be the joy of your heart to say, "Oh there He is, and I am to spend eternity in the glory with Him"? You cannot expect joy unless you are looking for the Lord to come. The Cross put an end to all fleshly religion, and earthly things, and Christ becomes the bright blessed Object: while the love of Christ lays hold of, sustains, and comforts the heart, and gives us the consciousness that nothing can separate us from it.

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