

Reading on Ephesians 3

by John Nelson Darby

Paul's gospel is the sovereign grace that treats man as dead in sins and enemies of God, and brings us into the same glory which Christ has taken as Man.

Scripture: Romans 15:8, Ephesians 2:3, Ephesians 2:12

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Sovereign Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound connection between Paul's gospel and the doctrine of the Church, illustrating how both Jew and Gentile are united in Christ through sovereign grace. He explains that while the Jews had the promises, both groups were equally distant from God due to sin, and it is through Christ's death and resurrection that all can be reconciled. Darby highlights that Paul's ministry uniquely reveals the mystery of the Church, which was hidden until the coming of the Holy Spirit, and underscores the importance of understanding our identity in Christ as members of His body. He stresses that the gospel is not about human righteousness but about God's grace, which is available to all, regardless of their past. Ultimately, Darby calls for believers to recognize their new position in Christ and the implications of being part of the Church.

Transcript

It is striking how the gospel of Paul and the doctrine of the Church run into one another. They are distinguished somewhat more in Colossians, where Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the Church as well as of the gospel, i.e., he was a teacher of it, and not merely, as with many others, a teacher in it. Here, they both run together; so we read "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body," and the gospel Paul preached was to bring this about.

What makes this so immensely important is, that it involves sovereign grace. For, as regards his state, it did not matter much whether a man were Jew or Gentile; in reality, both Jew and Gentile were far off; but the Jew had promises which God, of course, could not fail to fulfil, and Christ was therefore "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers," and also, "that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy;" Rom. 15:8, 9. The Jews came thus under pure mercy because they had rejected Christ; still, God is faithful, and promises were there to be fulfilled.

We read, too, that "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed," Gal. 3:29. In Ephesians 2:3, all are viewed alike, while in verse 12 the contrast is fully expressed.

I do not overlook the difference between near and far off, for those near had the promises, and the root and fatness of the olive tree.

Ques. Can you give us an outline of Paul's gospel?

The great principle of it is the sovereign grace I have referred to; it treats man not only as dead in sins, as in Ephesians, but also it brings out that man, looked at as alive, is at hopeless enmity to God. Of course, morally speaking, he is dead, but looked at as active, there is in him positive enmity to goodness.

This was proved by the law, though not then brought out; for the law was presented to men to keep, but "the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." And this is not all, for before Paul began his ministry another element came out, viz., that in this world of sinners and lawbreakers God was in Christ, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Here, then, we have an additional thing altogether.

292 Sinners they were in full, and positive transgressors, too, but though God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, men would not have Him: "Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." There had been thus a full revelation of the Father in grace in the Son; "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did," etc., and they had hated Him.

After this came the apostles, and in Peter's ministry there was this additional element, viz., that Christ's intercession ("Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do") had spared the Jews. A certain respite was given them; but in stoning Stephen they sent, to use the Lord's figure, a message after the Lord to say that "we will not have this man to reign over us." Instead of repenting, they put Stephen to death and stopped the apostles' mouths; and here for the first time we find Saul, holding the clothes of those who were killing Stephen. The distinct expression of their enmity, as well as the whole energy of it, was brought out in the clearest way in Saul of Tarsus.

And while he is doing his best at this, and in the highest degree, he is stopped and made an apostle.

Sovereign grace comes in. This is why he calls himself the chief of sinners; not that he was at all immoral, but he was the highest expression of the enmity of man's heart against God.

Then God comes and says, 'As you have no righteousness of your own for me, I will give my righteousness to you.'

That which gives such peculiar character to Paul's gospel is that, being sovereign grace, it is good for Gentile as well as for Jew, no matter which; indeed, in one sense, the Jews were the worst, but still it is good for both. And further, Paul was converted by the glory; though he knew Christ had been humbled, he did not know Him in His humiliation. He knew the glory before he knew it was Jesus who was glorified.

The other apostles never saw Jesus behind the cloud; Paul only knew Him behind the cloud.

A third point is, that the Christians who were being persecuted, the Lord calls, "ME." In germ, therefore, we have here the church.

This gives a special character to Paul's ministry, and these things shew the elements of it. Of course, the subject of it was still Christ, and Christ's death. There could not be two gospels; but I am speaking of the special character of Paul's gospel. And notice, in this connection, that the Holy Ghost came down upon the twelve when they were already called. Paul's direct mission was, that he was sent forth by the Holy

Ghost, and he owned no connection with the twelve, no apostolic succession; his mission was "not of men, neither by man."

293 Ques. Will you explain a little more fully what Paul's gospel is?

It is the gospel of sovereign grace when men are dead and enemies; this is what he preaches, and it is to every creature under heaven, because it rises above all dispensations, and with which it has nothing to do. But with the twelve, the message was, "unto you [Jews] first," etc. True, the Jews would not have it, but it was so presented to them - the One whom you crucified, God has glorified.

Paul comes and says, all are enemies of God, whether Jew or Gentile, and in this state of enmity God has sent this testimony of Christ to all alike. It has nothing to do with promise. It is God's righteousness apart from law, being witnessed both by the law and by the prophets. All the apostles had testified that Christ was coming again, and this, of course, Paul fully recognises.

Ques. Is there any other gospel to be preached now?

Well, I may begin at the other end, and say, 'You have crucified Christ; not with your own hands, of course, but you have preferred vanity and the world, which comes to the same thing.' It may be quite right to take up that side of the question.

Ques. Do we find anything in the preaching of the twelve as to the unity of the body?

In addressing the Jews, the testimony of the twelve is, you have killed Jesus, and now that He is at the right hand of God, what are you going to do?

Ques. But was there any difference subsequent to Stephen, and prior to Paul?

Peter says, they that were not a people are now the people of God. Of course, as to the foundation, there could be no difference; but with Paul the form the gospel takes is that it treats man as totally reprobate. It comes from the glory, and it is this which gives it its character. Paul begins with Christ in the place where the whole work of redemption is finished: here are persons dead in sins, and here is glory for such. Glory revealing grace, that is his starting point.

294 Ques. Ought evangelists to begin with the glory?

Ah! I do not say that. In 2 Corinthians 5, "God was - not is - in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Paul says that, and we are ambassadors, as Christ had to die and go away. Paul goes more thoroughly and deeply into things. There was not merely a record of offences, but also positive enmity against God. And all were dead. Now there is revealed not only the righteousness of God by faith, but also the wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Here is God come out in His nature, and I say, that will not do for me, I cannot have that. It brings out in a distinct way the absolute contradiction of God's nature and man's nature, whether it be that of the Jew or the Gentile.

The utter contrast between what man is and what God is has been thus brought out, and then we find sovereign grace in God rising above all that man is. There was no good whatsoever in Saul when he was made an apostle; on the contrary, there was in him the worst possible disposition that could be found in this world. The strongest expression of enmity against God was found in him when God met him in pure grace. And then God says to him, 'Go, and tell people of it.' It was true also of Peter, as to his nature but

here in Paul we see how this is brought out.

Ques. But Paul had a good conscience?

Yes, indeed; but that, in other words, is only self-righteousness, for when I get into God's presence I have a bad conscience; a good conscience in such a case means a hard one. If a man is listening to his conscience, he does not see with his own conscience what he is. If he has done nothing to trouble his natural conscience, he goes on unconscious of what he is; but the mind of the flesh is enmity against God.

Ques. But did not Paul say, "I did it ignorantly"?

Yes; it was not done with deliberate will to be wrong.

It is a great point to get distinctly hold of this, that God is not looking for good in man. Paul brings this out. So when the Lord said, "A sower went forth to sow," He brought the seed with Him. He knew morally that the Jews were rejecting Him, and so He says, 'I am come to bring the blessing.' But until He was actually rejected, Christ could speak of coming to look for fruit in His vineyard, though He found only wild grapes. When a person is converted, and sees he ought to do differently, even if he does not see more than this, the tendency of his heart will be to try and get this kind of righteousness, if he has it not, rather than to believe in righteousness from God. When therefore the young man came to Christ and asked, "What good thing shall I do," etc., the Lord says, 'You are all wrong, "there is none good but . . . God."' He puts then the commandments to him, because the young man had asked, not how he should be saved, but how could he obtain eternal life. So at once Jesus meets him with this: "There is none good but one, that is, God."

295 Another immense truth now comes out, viz., that God is no longer dealing with the question of our responsibility. If I were to keep the law like an angel, it would never give me title to the glory of the Son of God. This is a matter of God's counsel. The question of our responsibility has been met by Christ for us perfectly on the cross, but there was beside this the laying of the ground for the accomplishment of God's counsels, and for the putting us into the glory with the Son of God. So that it is now a righteous thing for us to be in glory. That is the reason we find in Paul's writings the truth of the Church, and of the rapture, and all these things.

On the cross, Christ went down to the lowest place, and there He ended everything for God. And there man was proved to be ruined and lost. Suppose someone had spent all his money and had no property, I could not talk to him as to how he is to meet his responsibilities. He could not do anything. It must therefore become a matter for me to see how I can do something for him and set him up again. Now God had this counsel, that He would put us in the same place with His Son. And thus is revealed in Paul's ministry the glory of the counsels of God.

All this has nothing to do with responsibility. There was, of course, the question of our responsibility. But Christ has cleared this all away for us; and so in the Epistle to the Ephesians we have the side of the counsels of God in Christ, "in whom we have redemption through his blood"; and therefore the character here taken by the apostle is, that "unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." This does not refer to a promised Messiah yet to come, but that to Paul it had been given "to make all men see what is the fellowship [dispensation] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," etc. "Fellowship" is a wrong word in this verse, fellowship is our part in it; the administration of the mystery was

Paul's.

296 It was the mind of God to give us this place in Christ before ever the world existed; the responsible Adam came in afterwards.

Counsels do not raise the question of righteousness, although when these come to be accomplished, they must be so compatibly with righteousness.

The question of righteousness (first raised in Paradise) was brought to an issue by the law requiring this from man, and then by goodness when Christ came into the world. It was raised on the question of man's responsibility under the law - "this do, and thou shalt live" - and yet again, when Christ came into the world to see if man could be restored by goodness. But man killed Christ, and then it was all over with man. And herein is seen God's wonderful wisdom, because that which has brought out the evil of the thing in its height, has also brought out God's righteousness.

Now, if we submit to His righteousness, all is clear for us; we are made fit not merely for life and happiness, but also for glory, for Christ is there.

I agree with those who say there is a negative work (a common word, if not quite the best), a righteousness in putting away sin, and a positive work, as a distinct thing.

Supposing I owe money, or I have debts, and they are paid, well, all that is cleared away. Romans 3 goes so far; for there, righteousness goes no farther than forgiveness. Negative it is, in one sense, for it imputes nothing, Christ having borne all. But then there is another thing; what is our place in the work of Christ? That is where the difference comes in.

Persons go back to the law; why, what is that but setting me up again as alive in the flesh? That was the case once, but I am no longer a child of Adam. I have died to that in Christ. Well then, what place have I now? I have passed the Rubicon of death, and I have entered with Christ into the heavens, and I have now a righteousness according to God, founded not on the responsibility of man, but upon the work accomplished by Christ.

On the ground of responsibility I was dead and lost; but now, before God, I have nothing of that character at all. Christ has borne all for me; He has made atonement for my sins, and has died to sin, and so I am out of my old place. But that which has brought me out of it now associates me with Christ in glory, no longer with Adam under law. I have passed through death and resurrection with Him, and I have now His place.

297 Ques. Does justification include both?

Yes; it is the whole thing. I am associated with Christ after death, that is to say, I cannot have a place with Christ before I have died; otherwise it would be to associate the Holy Son of God with sinful man. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."

Evangelical doctrine stops very often at the negative side, or else it connects me with Christ keeping the law during life, and that is to make me alive again in Adam. This teaching arises from not judging what sin is, and doubtless many dear saints, often from simple ignorance, do not really know what sin is. And thus one find them in a state corresponding to that of which Romans 7 speaks.

It is, no doubt, the state of one converted, but who cannot get peace; and indeed such an one never ought to get peace while remaining there. But what is so beautiful in God's way with us, is, that the very principle and measure of holiness come in directly I learn I am dead. I have left the whole ground of law and nature, and I am dead to sin.

Ques. How can you live on, if you are dead?

It is quite true that we have still sin working in us as an enemy, but we are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." This is really the truth as regards our new state. And the moment the believer sees Christ in glory, he sees the whole result attained. And in Christ in glory I learn what this righteousness entitles me to. Christ could turn to His Father, and in all righteousness, say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." So that now He sits there as the testimony to the effect produced, i.e., to where this righteousness brings man; all this is for us, and thus "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Ques. How does the Church shew the manifold wisdom of God?

God's wisdom had been shewn in this creation when, as they looked on at it, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." God shews also His wisdom in His ways of providence, and again, in His government of His earthly people; but now we find a totally new thing in the wisdom of God, namely, that there are those united to His Son in glory; the whole question of sin has been so entirely settled, that God can now bring us into the very same glory which Christ has taken as Man. This is something totally new. Suppose I had gone and talked to a Jew about his Messiah having members of His body, he would have looked at me and wondered what I meant. There are plenty of truths in the Old Testament about Him, but nothing at all as to other people being members of His body, and yet that is what is brought out here in Ephesians.

298 In Psalm 8, there is still more. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" etc. This Son of man is to have everything in heaven and earth brought under His rule. The very One who created everything is the One who is to have everything put under Him.

As soon as Christ died and morally closed the old creation, He became in glory the Head of the new creation; only He is now waiting until He has gathered His joint-heirs.

God began with the first Adam, and when that was finished with, then He brought in Christ.

In a certain sense, the whole creation was subordinate to the counsels of God as regards the church.

All things were created by Christ, and for Christ, and therefore the moment He takes His place as a Man, He must have the first place, as the beginning of the creation of God, the Firstborn of all creation; the reason of this being, that He created them all, and therefore, if He takes a place among them, He must be the First.

It is this that Paul is used to bring out, the rest is in Peter's teaching. Stephen summed everything up when he said to the Jews, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and the murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." They had broken the law, killed the prophets, killed the Just One (Christ), and resisted the Holy Ghost. All was over.

Then, in his looking up to heaven, we see the turning point of the whole thing. At the killing of Stephen, Saul was at the height of his enmity; but grace comes in and takes up this man at the very moment of the highest expression of his enmity against Christ. This enmity was true of all, from Abel downwards, but Saul was the first person in whom it came out in that absolute way.

299 And then comes the turning point! "Why persecutest thou me?" Angels can see a unity which it is very hard to see with man's eyes, but we believe in it. It is true to angels: "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." That is one part of the truth, that the church is that by which angels see this manifold wisdom of God. The angels are the highest beings in the old creation, but we are identified with Christ in the new creation.

God shewed His sustaining power in the old creation, but a new thing comes out here as to which angels have nothing to say, and that is, the work of redemption and the association of those who had been sinners with God's own Son.

Ques. To what does Paul refer when he says, "As I wrote afore"?

I suppose it is to the early part of the epistle. It is quite possible Paul may have written fifty letters, but this is the one that God intended for us. So in 2 Corinthians, he refers to the first epistle. There may have been very much else written, not inspired of God for all ages.

In verse 5, Paul refers to the mystery which never had been made known, and could not be known, until after the coming of the Holy Ghost. The prophets there spoken of are exclusively the prophets of the New Testament. There may, of course, have been a prophet who was not an apostle. Luke and Mark were not apostles. It is a question whether the James who wrote the epistle was, or was not, an apostle. Paul does not recognise the twelve as being apostles at all until after the day of Pentecost. He knows no one as alive in the flesh, not even Christ after the flesh. In chapter 4, he speaks of Christ having ascended, and then says, "He gave some, apostles"; Paul does not own them as such before, though, of course, they were living then.

It is an immensely important truth that man as born of Adam is gone, morally gone, looked at as before God. It is a thing I have to learn. I was responsible to try and do right; I get into Romans 7 and I hope God will help me; but I find I do wrong still. God allows this in order to bring us to the discovery which Israel had to make at the Red Sea, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." But we are wonderfully slow to learn! If I look at anything in myself, how can I talk of that being with Christ in glory? But I have in process to learn to distinguish between things.

300 When I look at the church in this epistle, I look at it as united to Christ in heaven.

Ques. What is the difference between this and the heavenly city in Revelation 21 - both are viewed as buildings?

The heavenly city in the Revelation is a figure. It is John's teaching there, not Paul's. We do not find the Father in the Revelation. The heavenly city is a seat of government, a metropolis, as it is called. The titles found in the Revelation are Old Testament titles of God. The heavenly city is the saints brought into final glory, i.e., into ultimate result.

In the Old Testament and right up to the death of Christ, we have the responsibility of man, and God's direct government among the Jews, which we have not yet touched upon, and a great deal else besides;

but the moment Christ was rejected, that put an end to everything. The throne of God on earth had been removed at the time of the captivity to Babylon; there was no longer any Shechinah, or Urim and Thummim, or glory. God then gave government to Nebuchadnezzar. A remnant from the two tribes was still preserved, because another thing had yet to come out.

Both the Jewish nation and the house of David had been set aside; and then Christ comes, and He is totally rejected.

Direct government on the earth has thus entirely ceased, and the church has been brought in as the scene of sovereign grace given absolutely to sinners, and bestowing on man the place that God has been pleased to give him. This is a heavenly place, and one that has nothing at all to do with the government of the earth. One knows the muddle people have got into as to this, but the truth abides. But in the Revelation we get back to earthly government. In the historical part of the book we have the last half-week of Daniel. Messiah has been cut off, and there remains a half-week that is not fulfilled at all, and then the government of the heavenly saints comes in. The seventy weeks were cut short by the cutting off of the Messiah. But if the Jews had not cut off their Messiah, they would not come in in pure mercy, as we see in Romans 11.

The church exists now as a totally distinct thing until government shall return to the earth. Then the church will reappear in the Revelation as the seat of government, because we are associated with Christ, and only in that aspect are we called the Bride, the Lamb's wife.

301 All that is written in the Revelation as to church ground proper, is found in three verses at the beginning and in three verses at the end of the book, i.e., before the prophecy, and after it is finished.

The church is the expression of the sovereign grace of God. Without the ministry of Paul, we should never have understood from whence the heavenly city of the Revelation comes. The only word would be the word of Christ, "Upon this rock I will build my church," and that is what we find here in Ephesians, when Paul says, "Whereof I was made a minister." The other apostles were not employed to teach the truth of the Church. When ministering at Jerusalem, they witnessed that the Christ, who ought to have governed here, had been transplanted to heaven, and of course the church was also transplanted there in Him.

Peter teaches that "God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ"; i.e., this crucified Man has been transported up there by God. The One they had rejected, God had accepted, and Peter was set to teach this. Then Paul appears on the scene.

We never find the word 'church,' in the way of truth, except in Paul's writings - the mere local thing we may. But if men are to learn the truth, I do not need to talk to them of government in the millennium; I must seek to get at man as one who has to say to God Himself for himself. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven"; that is not governing man on the earth. As to the revelation and teaching of this, God is revealed, for there is no longer any vail; and you are unveiled too; you are nothing but sin, and you are in God's sight as lost, and wrath is revealed! What are you going to do? Do! You have done too much! And God puts that all away in the death of His Son. Another thing to notice is, that the church had no existence until after the cross. No hint of it is to be found in the Old Testament; it was hidden in God. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was kept up until it was broken down by Christ's death. The Jewish saints of old were bound to keep it up, so the Jew could not eat with the Gentile. They were quite right at that time to maintain such a thing, until the church had been set up upon earth. Then again, you do not see that any individual member of the church was in heaven before this. But the church was formed on earth by the

Holy Ghost sent down.

302 Ques. Some have thought that saints who died before Pentecost are brought into the church in heaven?

Well, God's word does not say so, and I believe God's word, not man's. Why, it would be affirming that our best blessings are given after death, and that a change in our position takes place after death!

No, if one looks at the church with Scripture, one must own that it began at Pentecost.

It has been, I know, the fashion to put all saints together in the church; this is because the true idea of the church has been lost, and only the question of salvation thought of, but salvation is not all the truth.

The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, and the church is now God's object; this proves that the church must be taken away before God can again own an earthly people, for in the church there is neither Jew nor Gentile. The "new man" is clearly that which has been made consequent upon the cross of Christ, and so also Christ said, "I will build."

If men take up with the totally unscriptural idea of a special church privilege bestowed on saints after they are dead, the effect of this is to lower the church to the level of Judaism.

It is through the Spirit that the church is the habitation of God, but then the Holy Ghost did not come until the day of Pentecost. Quite true, of course, that long before this, the Spirit wrought (and so did God also), but He had not yet come. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." His presence formed the disciples into unity.

Such suppositions are not found in the Word of God, it is just man "intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."

Ques. What is meant by the things which are in heaven being gathered together in Christ, in Ephesians 1?

This is future. It refers to the full accomplishment of the intentions of God. All things are to be put under Christ as man, both which are in the heavens and which are on earth. If one makes any difference at all, then, in a certain sense, the church is the only thing not included in that unity. Like Eve to Adam, she was not the lord, nor was she what he was lord of. After the fall, and as the effect of the fall, she was put under him: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Her position was that of helpmeet - his like. Christ is already crowned with glory and honour, having been made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; but all things have not been put under His feet, for He is not yet sitting upon His own throne. Actually, He is on His Father's throne, on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

303 But to put saints in heaven into the church, without any revelation of it made to them whilst upon earth, is to raise another serious difficulty, namely, that the faith of the saints now has nothing to do with their blessings hereafter. It is quite clear that, previous to Pentecost, the church had not been made known to the saints of old, so that whilst upon the earth, their faith could have had no kind of connection with the blessing they would have in heaven (if such a supposition were correct), for God had hid in Himself the mystery of the church, and consequently they were in total darkness as to it.

Ques. With what, then, was their faith connected?

They were looking for Christ, and for the promises of God.

All else is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures, except the truths of the church and of the present priesthood of Christ. They speak of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and of the promise of the Spirit to individuals, and also of the Melchisedec priesthood, but not of the church, nor of Christ's priesthood in heaven. Psalm 110 is Christ's priesthood on earth. But now He has gone through the heavens into the holiest; Melchisedec has nothing to do with going into the holiest.

"The Most High" is the millennial name of God, and this name He has with Melchisedec (Gen. 14). And in Psalm 110, we read that "the LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion," that is when Christ takes His Melchisedec character; and then, in verse 5 it says, "Adonai" (not Jehovah) "at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath." Christ's priesthood is after the order of Melchisedec, and He is a priest who lives for ever; but now He has gone into the holiest, just as of old Aaron went in.

The "as," in verse 5 (Eph. 3), is not a comparison, but a fact, for this mystery, up till then, had been hidden in God.

It is the same in Colossians, "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations," etc., and so again at the close of Romans, "kept secret since the world began."

304 Ques. Abraham looked for a city?

Quite so, and it was a heavenly city that he looked for; in the land of Canaan he had not even as much upon which to set the soles of his feet.

Most people have no idea of the church; with them, there is nothing beyond salvation. The true Christian condition is, that "by one offering he [Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." We have to do with God, without any vail upon us, and for that we must be as white as snow.

Assurance of salvation is a question of Christ's work. I have no thought that, in myself, I am anything else but a sinner. But I sin, if I doubt that He has made a perfect atonement. I affirm distinctly that there is no such thing recognised in the New Testament as that a Christian should doubt his salvation. The idea of an unsaved Christian is something unknown to the New Testament.

There is plenty of priesthood for infirmities, weakness, and so on; but God has taken me up, and dealt with me, as at the Red Sea of old, and put all, all, away. We "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." I was myself in such a condition for some six or seven years after I was converted, but that has only served to convince me that this is not a Christian place at all. And the reason of my assurance is, that while Christ is within, the Holy Ghost has come down. His coming proves that Christ's work is accepted. It is no good anyone telling me that I cannot know; indeed, it is a mischievous work, for it makes people easy, when awakened; because if an awakened soul were to feel he ought to know, such an one would not rest until he did know.

Ques. What is the meaning of, "that they may lay hold on eternal life," 1 Tim. 6:19?

When God has saved us, He will keep us, but we have to go through the wilderness, where we have a great deal to learn, with the question of services also, and of rewards even, and of much more besides; people mix up all these things with the question of acceptance. But as to the crown before me, that is not a question of my being saved, but of my encouragement. And therefore I need all these exhortations and guides along the road.

305 It may happen to me, like Peter, that I have need of a fall, in order to learn what I am (a very sad thing, if I do), but that does not touch the question of eternal life.

My child has life as distinct when he is a day old as when he is twenty years of age. But when I speak about righteousness, then Christ is my righteousness, and it would be blasphemy to think of anything imperfect about that. As in Christ, I am Christ's own perfectness before God, and if so, then Christ is in me.

From this flows the responsibility of the Christian. Has there been seen in me to-day anything of Christ? Christ is in the presence of God for me, and I am in the world for Christ, and I am to take good care that it is not something else that I exhibit. "Keep yourselves in the love of God," this is what I have to do. "Work out your own salvation," this is the very thing I have to do. There is also my responsibility to walk in the Spirit. As a matter of fact, I am sitting in Christ (but not yet with Him) in the heavenly places; and yet I am running onwards to reach there. "Much more in my absence," is, that now you have lost Paul, work it all out for yourselves.

There are in Scripture two simple positions for a Christian; the one is, my acceptance in Christ. In myself, I am a lost sinner, and a man that is lost is not on probation; I have given myself up as on that ground, and the only part I have in what saves me, is my sins, and the enmity that killed Christ.

So that puts "I" out, as to acceptance.

Christ has done it all, and thus I am accepted in the Beloved, while as yet I have not an atom of the glory to which I am entitled. And now I must run for the prize. "Well, then," says the devil, 'I will be at you.' And it becomes then a question, not of righteousness, but as to whether I shall get through to the goal.

Anxiety as to this is met by constant dependence, and by constant confidence. By dependence, for I can do nothing without Christ. If in any measure I have lost sight of Christ, it is all wrong; on the other hand, I have this certainty: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." I am kept by the power of God through faith, but then this shows that I need to be kept, and it proves the danger, too.

Not that the issue is in doubt, because God is in it, but I am kept in constant dependence, that is just the very thing in which Adam failed.

306 When sanctified, I am sanctified "unto obedience."

Strange it is, that because I am told to hold fast my confidence, some should tell me that I ought not to have any to hold!

Ques. What about, "Lest . . . I myself should be a cast away"?

I have been looking at this word recently. It is *adokimos*, and is used, not for those who do not strive lawfully, but for those who have not qualified themselves to enter the race, and whose names are not on the list. And Paul says he keeps under his body, lest he should be *adokimos*.

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