

Sovereign Grace in Christ Ephesians 1

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding our relationship with God through sovereign grace and the process of communion with God, which involves perfect peace as regards the conscience and the Spirit's role in giving us power to enjoy God.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3

Topics: "Communion with God", "Sovereign Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the dual aspects of our relationship with God: our approach to Him through our needs and the sovereign grace He extends towards us. He illustrates that we can only draw near to God through Christ, recognizing our dependence on His sacrifice. Darby explains that true communion with God requires a purged conscience and highlights the joy of being in fellowship with Him, which is rooted in grace. He encourages believers to understand their identity in Christ, being accepted and loved by God, and to focus on their relationship with the Father rather than merely on the inheritance. Ultimately, he calls for a heart that delights in God's affections and grace, leading to a life of joy and communion with Him.

Transcript

There are two ways in which we may look at our relationship to God, and rightly: firstly, our coming to Him; and secondly, sovereign grace in the dealings of God towards us.

Of Abel, it is said, by the Holy Spirit, God had respect unto his gifts; he came with his needed offering. We are looked at in the Epistle to the Hebrews as drawing near to God. Who could draw near unless he could bring Christ as an offering? We must have that sacrifice in order to bring us near; consequently in that case our relationship to God is measured by our need. We come near because we find we cannot do without it, and we accept that offering as needful to accomplish it.

In another way we never know the measure of God's blessing until we look on our relationship as measured by God's thoughts of us - by all that which He loves to display when He satisfies His own heart of grace with His ways of shewing it out. We never enjoy our true blessing unless we see how He thus feels and acts. My mind must rise above what I am to what God is; then it is that one is formed by the revelation of what God is. To this we are called.

We must come in by our need, as the prodigal did. Man cannot by searching find out God. There cannot be any knowledge of God in grace by man's competency to know Him. There would be no need of grace if he could know God without it. If I can claim this grace, I do not need grace at all. The way a sinner must come in must be by his need. Thus must one begin to learn grace and love. But when I have got to God, it is another thing. Then He would form our minds and hearts by what He is Himself. I come as a sinner, because I need it - just as a hungry man needs food; but when brought I have fellowship with the God who has brought me to Himself. The measure is given in this epistle - "growing up into Christ, in all things." It is a wonderful thing that God has called us into fellowship with Himself - to have the same thoughts, the same feelings as God, and to have them together! All flows down from Him, and we are brought into it by grace, and we enjoy it just so far as we are emptied of self.

312 First, He makes us partakers of the divine nature - the same nature as Himself. This gives the capacity - I do not say power. The new nature is capacity; the Holy Ghost is power. The new nature is entirely dependent and obedient. The Holy Ghost being there gives me power. In the First Epistle of John this capacity is brought out in a remarkable manner; chap. 4. Every one that loves is born of God - has this nature; and he that loves is born of God and knows God. Then being partakers of His nature, we, by virtue of the blood being sprinkled on us, have received the Holy Ghost which gives power.

In order to communion, it is plain that there must be perfect peace as regards the conscience. There is no communion in conscience. I am alone as to my conscience, and so are you. In order to communion, I must have nothing to settle with conscience: a perfectly purged conscience is the basis of communion. We must know that God has settled the whole question of sin. The moment a child of God fails, communion ceases. The Spirit then becomes a reprover to bring him back; but there is no communion. Communion is the full enjoyment of God and of divine things, when there is nothing to think of as regards oneself. God can now let flow into his heart who has a conscience purged, all that He delights in. He loves to communicate what He Himself has joy in. All that Christ is, is for us to enjoy. You are called into this place of Christ Himself - of the Head of the body; and that the delight God has in Christ should flow down into your heart. How rich then the saint must be! But he is entirely dependent on the Spirit of God for power. There is no power to enjoy anything without Him. There must be an emptying from self to enjoy what He gives. The Spirit of God has no place to act where self and imagination are in exercise. It is not the glory at the end that is so much the object of the believer's thoughts, as the source of it - God Himself. There is more happiness in the fact of being in communion with Him than in the things He communicates: and I say again, because of its importance, a soul cannot have the enjoyment of the things of God without having peace, which is connected with the conscience.

The beginning of this chapter shews how we are presented to God. It is a test, whether the judgment-seat brings any terror to your minds. Does it give you any uneasiness? How does the saint get there? Christ comes to fetch him. He said, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." Do you ever think of your coming before the judgment-seat being the effect of His having come to fetch you? Not sending for you, but coming Himself for you, because of His desire to have you with Him where He is, to be fashioned into the same image. You are to bear the image of the heavenly, as you have borne the image of the earthy. When you are there before the judgment-seat, you will be with Him, and like Him: every trace of God's unwearied hand, all His patience, here brought out. We shall be like the One who is the Judge. You will never (of course I speak to saints now) be before the judgment-seat of Christ without His coming to fetch you into the same glory in which you are to be. It is the knowledge of grace, of redemption, that leaves me at perfect liberty; and all my life should be a witness to the enjoyment of this blessedness into which we

are being brought. The whole of this is through looking at Christ. He is the Firstborn among many brethren in the Father's house. We shall be with Christ and like Christ before God the Father. There will be the blessedness of being with Christ in the presence of the Father, loved as He is loved. This is what we have in this chapter - set in Christ and in the presence of God.

313 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are blessed with Christ, and God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "my God and your God," Christ said. There is no measure of any relationship out of Christ - nothing but condemnation out of Christ. If I have known what it is to be condemned, if I have known what sin is, and how God hates sin I know there can be no hope for me out of Christ. But God has put away sin. God does not look at my sin, but on Christ. Just as I know my condition in Adam as ruined and condemned, so I know my place in Christ as accepted. How it throws us out of self-importance, self-dependence, self-glorying! We enter into the presence of God in Him who has perfectly glorified God. He is the God as well as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is that wrought in Christ which was hidden from ages and from generations, and He has gone back in virtue of what He has done to vindicate the character of God. We enter into the blessing in Him who has done all. We shall know God in virtue of what the Father bestows upon us. The Father brings many sons unto glory, and brings them back perfect through the work of Christ - "Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ": none can be forgotten; not an affection of God's delight is wanting. He brings us into His presence without one reserve of the affection that Christ has. We are brought back to Christ. Therefore all that Christ has we have.

314 How he goes on to unfold it! "That we should be holy and without blame before him in love." He is not content with a mere general account, but brings it out in detail that we may know it. Suppose I saw a person with an excellent character, and I felt I could never be like that person, I should not be happy. The fact of the excellency of the person, without the possibility of being like him, would make me miserable; and to have him always before me would be all the worse. But in heaven I shall be with Christ, and see Him, without the possibility of being unlike Him. What divine inventiveness of love to make us happy, infinitely happy! What God does, and is, is infinite; and it is so much the better that He will be always above us.

We shall have perfect freedom of intercourse with Him. Moses and Elias were speaking with Him of His death: by-and-by it may not be so much of His death; but there will be communion with Him in all that He has.

"Without blame." He would release me from all that would hinder my loving Him: therefore I am made; "holy and without blame." There is the proper joy of the heart - "Before him in love," but no thought of equality; "wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." Then there is another fact - "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world." Thus we have His heart set upon us in eternity. The soul knows there is a personal love from God towards himself, and the heart delights in that. So with Christ. In Revelation 2 there is the white stone He will give - proof of personal delight. There is the individual rejoicing in the love of Christ.

How the Spirit seeks to draw out our affections by all this! He tells it all, and would have us know and enjoy it. He would have us know that we are going to heaven, and why. He would form our hearts by what He is doing, while bringing us in, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children" - still in Christ and with Christ - "by Jesus Christ unto himself." It is through Him, and in Him, and with Him I find it. It is having my heart fixed on God and the Father, that my affections may be drawn out to Him, and all is because

"accepted in the beloved." God has not blessed angels like this. We are not servants only (we should be servants, to be sure), but we are brought into the confidence of children. Ought not a child to have confidence? We have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry "Abba Father." Our heart should answer to God's outgoings of heart in grace, and reflect this grace, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." He has done it all.

315 Remark here, that there is not a word as yet about the inheritance. I dwell on that, as shewing how the affections of the saints are formed. If I speak of the inheritance, it is something below me. All prophecy concerns the inheritance. But I am looking at what is above me, and my own blessedness is in what is above me. Subjects connected with the church, blessed as they are, as prophecy, etc., are below. He will exercise us about these things, but let me first get my relationship with my Father known. Do not talk of me, of what I have, but of what Christ is, and what He has. My soul must enjoy the love that has given it all. The love that has saved is more than the things given. It is of importance to the saints to feel this in the presence of God. It is not mental power, but the heart right - a single eye - that is the great thing. Unless a soul gets its intelligence and direction from God, it never understands the ways and affections of God. His own affections must be known and valued. If I have not known my place in the affections of my Father, I am not in a position to have the communion of His thoughts and purposes. When we were dead in sins, His heart was exercised for us. The sinner is here looked at as dead, not "living" in sin (as in Colossians) and chastening, etc., for that, but in Ephesians "dead," not a movement of life, when God comes and creates the blessing according to His own will. When our souls have known the value of Christ's sacrifice bringing us to God, we are seen not in ourselves at all but only in Christ. Then there is perfect rest.

Afterwards He can tell us about the inheritance; and then the prayer is that we may know the hope of His calling (His calling is not the inheritance). He has called us to be "before him in love" (v. 26); then verse 11 begins about the inheritance. Now I will shew you what Christ's inheritance is, and you are to have it too. I must know I am a child and have the thoughts and affections of the child before I can have to do with the inheritance. The end of the matter is that we are brought in to share the inheritance.

316 How far are your hearts confiding in God's love only for your wants, etc.? but how far is your confidence and delight in Him for Himself? The heart of the child will delight in the affections of the father. Do your thoughts about God flow from what He has revealed to you of Himself? or are you reasoning about God - will He, or will He not, do it? When it is a settled thing with me that I am a sinner, what have I to reason about? We want to be brought to this simple conviction: I am a sinner; and if I am a sinner, what am I to do? Can I look for anything from God on the ground of righteousness? No. When brought to God, I am brought to grace. What He is is the spring and source of the whole matter. We are in Christ. It could not be otherwise. We stand there now, by virtue of the atonement, in that position which makes the sin the very necessity for God to bless. Christ died for my sins, and God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

God is going to take us to heaven, to be happy with Christ there: but He makes us happy out of heaven too. It is a difficult thing, but He does; and He would have the saints living up there where God is, and where we are going, and free from this present evil world.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net