

The Accepted Man

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being like Christ, who is the accepted man, and the need for Christians to put on Christ and exhibit His character and motives.

Scripture: Luke 10:27, John 3:20-21, John 17:4, Acts 7:55-56, Romans 5:20, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, Galatians 3:10, Ephesians 2:2-3, Philippians 3:6, Hebrews 1:3

Topics: "Acceptance in Christ", "Transformation through the Spirit"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the distinction between the accepted man, Jesus Christ, and the natural man, who is blind to his own condition and lacks the moral motives of Christ. He explains that true acceptance before God is found only in Christ, who embodies the character that God delights in, contrasting this with the self-seeking nature of humanity. Darby urges believers to recognize their identity as 'epistles of Christ,' transformed by the Spirit, and to find liberty in their relationship with God rather than fear. He highlights the futility of trying to attain heaven through the law, which only reveals sin and condemnation, and points to Christ as the Mediator who provides true acceptance. Ultimately, he calls for Christians to reflect Christ's love and character in their lives, becoming living testimonies of His grace.

Transcript

THE ACCEPTED MAN

2 CORINTHIANS 3

There are two ways in which we may approach the judgment of man. We may judge of where man is (of the condition in which he is looked at by God) by taking the word of God and applying it to the condition of man in himself, to his state as an actual sinner. Thus, for instance, in Genesis 3, in the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden we see the character of evil against God Himself ; in Genesis 4, in Cain's sin, the character of evil against man's neighbour. Here then is direct opposition to the requirement of God in both its parts ; Luke 10 : 27. But there is another thing of which Scripture is full-the accepted man, the Lord Jesus. We get in Him a precious living divine picture of what that Man is whom God does accept of the Man after God's own heart.

If we find in Christ the accepted Man, whatever any other man's thoughts may be about himself, it is evident he is not this, because he is not like Christ (I speak not now as to divine power). In the glory Christ is the accepted and the acceptable Man before God. As the pattern for the saint He is the exhibitor, not of

divine power in grace toward man, but of manhood such as God can accept. Now no man can at any rate lay claim to being this. The unconverted man, though he cannot comprehend the Man after God's own heart, can plainly see he is not this. A blind man may not be able to tell what I mean when I speak to him about light and colour, because he has no perception of these things, he is blind ; but he knows that the things I am talking about he lacks the knowledge of. So, when Christ is spoken of, the natural man is in a state of forgetfulness, or rather of ignorance as to who and what Christ is (whether looked at in relation to God or to the sinner), and therefore as to the real dissimilarity between himself and Christ ; but he is perfectly aware that there are things which others know about Christ that he does not know. He may say he knows them, but he does not ; and moreover he must be conscious that he does not know that which he professes to know. The blind man may hear me speak, or be listening to sweet music, and in a certain sense lose nothing through his blindness (in the present enjoyment of what he hears he may forget his inability to see) ; but let him attempt to walk across the room towards me, and he will be reminded of it ; for, unless one lead him, he will run up against that which stands in his way. The blind man may get used to his blindness.

So with the sinner. When the natural man hears the word of God read, or when Christ is spoken of, he is blind, ignorant (as was said before) of who and what Christ is ; but he is ignorant of the depth of his ignorance ; his mind is so occupied with other things that he does not think about it, and he gets used to his ignorance. When the truth is put before him he cannot see it ; yet he must know that he knows nothing about it. If he looks into the Scriptures, he does not apprehend Him of whom they speak. He is entirely ignorant of the motives that actuated Christ in His path through this world ; yet, if his attention be at all called to what Christ was, he must have the consciousness that he is not like Him, that he is not and has not the thing spoken of.

If it be true that this is the acceptable Man, the Man in whom God delights-acceptable in His spirit, and ways, and character, it must be evident to the natural man that he cannot be. He may have many amiable qualities (in nature there is much that is engaging and beautiful : we see it even in the animals) but nothing that is acceptable to God. Morally we do not find one single motive that governed Christ governing man, as man; it is evident, therefore, that if Christ's were acceptable motives, his are not.

Now being accepted is a great thing. It is impossible to think of a day of blessing, or of a day of judgment, without immediately having thoughts arise in the soul as to how it will be with us, whether we shall stand accepted in that day, whether we shall escape that judgment.

A man of the world must own that he has nothing in common with Christ, except indeed that he is a man and Christ was a man : he eats, drinks, sleeps ; and Christ ate, drank, slept. But there is sin in every man, and Christ was " without sin " in the place of godliness, malice in the place of love. As regards the moral motives of the soul, he has not any of Christ's, and Christ had not one of his. The world would cease if its conduct were regulated by the motives which actuated Christ ; it could not go on an hour. There may be the outward imitation of that which was found in Christ ; but God is not mocked. But, it may be said, and many do say it, God does not expect us to be like Christ in everything. Now the fact is, God does expect us to be like Christ. It is impossible for God to accept one thing as that which is agreeable to Himself, and then accept or be satisfied with the directly opposite. if the man of the world is the very opposite of what Christ was, God cannot accept him. He cannot deny Himself.

We shall see how God does bring into the very same place as Christ those who are accepted in Him. You cannot have a third man. You must have either the place of the first man, rejected, turned out into the

world, in the place of ruin ; or that of the second Man, accepted, brought out of the world to God. There is no third man offering an indefinite acceptance in some unknown condition.

What then is the Christian ? We read here of two things as characterising him : he is an " epistle of Christ " ; he has " liberty." What is the " liberty " ? You will find this a characteristic of man, as man, that he has not liberty with God, and (though he has not liberty from Satan) he has liberty with Satan. He is afraid of God; but he is not afraid of Satan. He would not like to be with Satan in hell, it is true ; he is horrified at the thought of that ; but he is not horrified at walking with him every day. He is at liberty with Satan, walking at his ease with him in the earth; but of walking with God he has a perfect terror. Now do you, dear friends, find yourselves at liberty with God ? I know that in heaven by-and-by you would like to be with God ; but do you covet this nearness now ? That is the question. Do you feel at home with God ? would you like Him to take you just such as you are ? Taking you just such as you are, could you trust yourselves with God ? You hope, perhaps, that when the day of judgment comes, all will be well with you; you have no thought but that you will be able to stand in the judgment then. But if God were about to take you just such as you are at this moment is there not something you would be afraid of ? What is there so terrible in thinking about God, that you should be afraid of God, that you would not like to trust God with your present condition ? You are not afraid to trust Satan.

Satan is " the god " (2 Cor. 4 : 4) and the prince " (John 12 : 31 ; chap. 14 : 30) " of this world yet men are not afraid of making their way through a world where the Lord tells His disciples to have their loins girded about and their lamps burning, to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, to be armed at all points. Men are not afraid there. Is not this strange ? In Satan's world they are at ease, but with God they are not at ease. They go readily into places of temptation where Christ is sure not to be ; and in the place where Christ could honour God they are ill at ease. They go to seek their pleasures where Christ could not have found His ; and they are not afraid of Satan, though they know he is there. They are afraid where the light is : but they are not afraid of the darkness. Darkness is their element ; light their fear. Now that is a terrible thing! " God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Satan is the prince of " the rulers of the darkness of this world " (Eph. 6 : 12), " the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," etc. (Eph. 2 : 2, 3).

Man can compare himself with the reprobate sinner, and take credit in his own eyes for the difference between himself and the sinner, when God is not in the conscience; but he puts away the judgment of God concerning himself, he never compares himself with Christ, " neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd," John 3 : 20, 21. Now let us look at Christ, as to this judgment of man about himself. We find Christ scorning what man delights in, passing by those who could thus compare themselves amongst themselves, and becoming the friend of the profligate and the abandoned.

When He met with a publican, or a person of bad character, making no pretence to be anything but a sinner, He was at home with the sinner. Of such were His companions. He came in grace to sinners, as sinners. He saw into the heart, and therefore detected the hollowness of all man's pretended righteousness. He did not come from heaven to this earth to look for righteousness-that is the last thing He would have taken the journey for ; He came to seek sinners.

Again, you read a person's character in his letter. Now the Christian is Christ's letter to the world. In verse 3 the apostle speaks of him as " the epistle of Christ," written by the Spirit of the living God in the fleshy tables of the heart, and contrasts him with the law written on tables of stone. A Christian is therefore a person upon whose heart the Spirit of God has engraved Christ, just as truly as God wrote and engraved the law upon the tables of stone ; so that the world may read Christ in the man, as an Israelite might read

the law on the stones. Now how far can we according to this definition call ourselves Christians ? We come short, I doubt not, we have blotted the letter ; but I speak of the thing in principle.

Oh the folly of man! he has taken for granted from the Scriptures that there is a heaven, and then sets about getting to that heaven his own way. How does he know that there is a heaven at all to go to ? It is impossible that he should know it except upon the authority of God. I learn it from the Scriptures, he says : it is in the Scriptures, and therefore it must be true. Yes, doubtless it is in the Scriptures ; but having taken for granted just that, he does not go to God to know who are to be there, or how he is to get there.

The very idea, fabulous as it is, he possesses of heaven, renders the assumption of his being there less pardonable than would have been his utter ignorance about it. A man would be less wrong, supposing he did not know anything about a regal palace (a savage, fit only for the woods), than a person who knew what the palace was, and had some idea of the requirements of the place, and yet thought to go and live there. The unconverted man acts and thinks more apart from God in thinking he ought to go to heaven, than if he thought there was no such place at all ; he in a state of sin is expecting to get into the presence of a holy God!

One thing impressed my own mind most peculiarly when the Lord was first opening my eyes-I never found Christ doing a single thing for Himself. Here is an immense principle. There was not one act in all Christ's life done to serve or to please Himself. An unbroken stream of blessed, perfect, unfailing love flowed from Him, no matter what the contradiction of sinners-one amazing and unwavering testimony of love and sympathy and help; but it was ever others, and not Himself, that were comforted, and nothing could weary it, nothing turn it aside. Now the world's whole principle is self, doing well for itself; Psa. 49 : 18. Men know that it is upon the energy of selfishness they have to depend. Every one that knows anything at all of the world knows this. Without it the world could not go on. What is the world's honour ? Self. What its wealth ? Self. What is advancement in the world ? Self. They are but so many forms of the same thing; the principle that animates the individual man in each is the spirit of self-seeking. The business of the world is the seeking of self, and the pleasures of the world are selfish pleasures. They are troublesome pleasures too ; for we cannot escape from a world where God has said, " In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground," etc. Toil for self is irksome ; but suppose a man finds out at length that the busy seeking of self is trouble and weariness, and having procured the means of living without it, gives it up, what then? He just adopts another form of the same spirit of self, and turns to selfish case.

I am not now speaking of vice and gross sin (of course every one will allow that to be opposite to the spirit of Christ) ; but of the whole course of the world. Take the world's decent moral man, and is he an " epistle of Christ " ? Is there in him a single motive like Christ's ? He may do the same things; he may be a carpenter as Christ was (Mark 6 : 3) ; but he has not one thought in common with Christ. As to the outside, the world goes on with its religion and its philanthropy ; it does good, builds its hospitals, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and the like ; but its inward springs of action are not Christ's. Every motive that governed Christ all the way along is not that which governs men; and the motives which keep the world going are not those which were found in Christ at all.

The infidel owns Christ's moral beauty, and selfishness can take pleasure in unselfishness ; but the Christian is to " put on Christ." He went about doing good all the day long; there was not a moment but He was ready as the servant in grace of the need of others. And do not let us suppose that this cost Him nothing. He had not where to lay His head; He hungered and was wearied; and when He sat down, where was it ? Under the scorching sun, at the well's mouth, whilst His disciples went into the city to buy bread.

And what then ? He was as ready for the poor vile sinner who came to Him, as if He had not hungered, neither was faint and weary; John 4. He was never at ease. He was in all the trials and troubles that man is in as the consequences of sin, and see how He walked! He made bread for others ; but He would not touch a stone to turn it into bread for Himself. As to the moral motives of the soul, the man of the world has no one principle in common with Christ. If then the world is to read in a Christian the character of Christ, it is evident the world cannot read it in him ; he is not a Christian ; he is not in the road to heaven at all, and every step he takes only conducts him farther and farther from the object in view. When a man is in a wrong road, the farther he goes in it the more he is astray.

There is another terrible thing: we find men agreeing to take the commandments of God as their rule and guide, as Christ took them. We take His directions, they say, all that God says about what we ought to be, and what we ought to do; we are not going our own way. Well, granted ; but you must take the law, such as it is, and with its consequences. If man says, I accept the law to be judged by, I take this as my guide, he makes himself the responsible party, that is, he has to answer for himself. And mark how God began with the law. What does the law say about him ? It says he is " cursed " already. This law that he is taking to get to heaven by is the very thing that pronounces judgment against him . " Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal 3 : 10. Suppose I bring a right and true measure to a man who is in the habit of using a wrong measure, what do I do it for ? Not to make him honest, but to prove his dishonesty. It is in vain for him to say, I will change my character ; the thing is already done. The question is, has he a character ? and he is proved to be a dishonest man. Now the law was given " that the offence might abound," Rom. 5 20. The right, perfect, holy law of God was given as a rule but if that rule be given to a sinner who cannot keep it, and if it be applied with all the searching power of the holiness of God, he is a judged person, and brought in under its curse. He hopes perhaps to be better ; he has some vague thoughts about the mercy of God; but it is no use to talk about what he will be: judgment is already pronounced against him.

But more than this, as a matter of fact the law tells man not so much what he is to do, as what he is not to do. If we look at the ten commandments we shall find that they do not tell him to do anything, except to honour his father and his mother. That is the only positive precept. All the rest are, " Thou shalt not " do this, and thou shalt not do that. How comes it then that such a form is employed ? This of itself is a sufficient proof of evil tendencies in those addressed. Men care not to make laws for a country to prohibit that which nobody thinks of doing ; and so God's law forbids people to do certain things because they have a tendency to do those very things ; it touches the motives and dispositions of men's hearts as they are known by God.

The law is given most surely as a rule ; but it is given to a sinner who already needs amendment. The first thing it does therefore is to prove sin, condemning the inward disposition as well as the outward evil. Paul's experience of it (Rom. 7) is proof enough of this. He could say he was pure so far as concerned outward compliance with its requirements, " touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," Phil. 3 : 6. " Alive without the law once when the commandment came, sin revived," and he died. " I had not known sin," he says, " but by the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet ; but sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence; for without the law sin was dead." " When the commandment came," he found he was a condemned sinner. The law, being the righteous demand of God from man, and applying itself to those who are already sinners, must necessarily work condemnation and death. It is " the ministration of death " (v7), and of " condemnation " (v. 9).

But, again, there are not only wrong motives in man, but a very strong independent will. Man likes to have his own way. Now what is the effect of putting anything in the way of a person who wants to go his own road ? That he will push it out of the way if he can. Thus the will of man, if the man be resting on the law as such, and yet liking to have his own way in a single thing, proves him to be a breaker of all the commandments. The will of the man, being contrary to God, if opposed, would push aside the whole law. This is what is meant by " whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," etc. (James 2: 10, 11.) The authority of God is attached to His law; and therefore, if, when the authority of God meets the lusts of man, he is guilty of the breach of that law in one thing, he has overthrown the claim of the authority of God, and thus broken the whole law. If he commit riot adultery, yet if he kill, he sets aside the authority of Him who made the law that says, " Thou shalt not commit adultery"; for He that said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, " Do not kW." Suppose you had forbidden your child to do three things, and he was not disposed to do two of the three, or lacked the opportunity, would his not having done two of these three things make you hold him guiltless ? No ; you would say that he was not disposed to do them, or he would have done them had he found the occasion. Having set aside your authority in the one instance, your authority was not his restraint.

How hard it is, you may be ready to say, that man when a sinner should have a law given him to keep, which he cannot keep, and which therefore, after all, instead of helping him, only works death and condemnation. These are man's thoughts and not God's. God never intended to save man by the law: that was not His purpose in giving it. He never meant to save any other way than by Christ. Bounds were set about the mount (Ex. 19 : 12, 13)-it is a barrier from God; and Moses required to have a veil put on his face when he spoke to the people; Ex. 34 : 33-35.

People have taken the idea of heaven from the Scriptures, and then they have taken their own way to it. But they are trying to go to heaven by the very thing God has given as the ministration of death and condemnation ; and they expect to get there by the very thing God says pronounces them " cursed."

The first principle of Christianity, whilst recognising in the most solemn manner man's responsibility to answer for himself, puts the Christian on other and entirely different ground. This is the first principle and basis of all Christian truth, that there is a Mediator-a third person, between man and God. Another has implicated Himself, and, because man could not come to God, has taken up the cause of man, and worked out an acceptance for him.

Two things (already noticed) are brought out here, as the result of this. " Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," the liberty of grace. And we become the " epistles of Christ " (blotted ones, no doubt, in ourselves, but we are not epistles of ourselves), transcripts of Christ " written with the Spirit of the living God." This we " are," not merely we ought to be. Though in ourselves most imperfect and failing, the definition given by the Spirit of God of a Christian is that he is a transcript of Christ.

Now the natural thought of many a soul is this, Well, if that be true, I do not know what to think of myself I do not see this transcript in myself! ' No, and you ought not to see it. Moses did not see his own face shine. Moses saw God's face shine, and others saw Moses' face shine. The glory of the Lord, as seen in Moses' face, alarmed the people. They could not bear that glory. But we see it now with " open," unveiled " face " in Christ (v. 18), and yet are not in the least afraid ; we find liberty, comfort, and joy in looking at it; we gaze on it, and, instead of fearing, rejoice. How comes this immense difference ? It is the ministration of the Spirit," (v. 8), and of righteousness (v. 9).

It is Christ alive in the glory that I see ; not Christ down here (sweet as that was), but Christ at the right hand of God. Yet though that glory is in the heavens, I can stedfastly behold it. All that glory (and He is in the midst of the glory and majesty of the throne of God itself) does not affright me, because this wonderful truth comes in, ban glory of God is in the face of a man who has put away my sins, and who is there in proof of it; Heb. 1 : 3. I should have been afraid to hear His voice, and have said with the children of Israel (Ex. 20 : 19), " Let not God speak with us or, like Adam with a guilty conscience, have sought to hide myself away; Gen. 3 : 8. But I do not say so now; no, let me hear His voice. I cannot see the glory of Christ now without knowing that I am saved. How comes He there ? He is a man who has been down here mixing with publicans and sinners, the friend of such, choosing such as His companions. He is a man who has borne the wrath of God on account of sin ; He is a man who has borne my sins in His own body on the tree (I speak the language of faith) ; He is there, as having been down here amidst the circumstances, and under the imputation of sin ; and yet it is in His face I see the glory of God. I see Him there consequent upon the putting away of my sin, because He has accomplished my redemption. I could not see Christ in the glory if there was one spot or stain of sin not put away. The more I see of the glory, the more I see the perfectness of the work that Christ has wrought, and of the righteousness wherein I am accepted. Every ray of that glory is seen in the face of One who has confessed my sins as His own, and died for them on the cross ; of One who has glorified God in the earth, and finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. The glory that I see is the glory of redemption. Having glorified God about the sin-" I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do "-God has glorified Him with Himself there ; John 17.

When I see Him in that glory, instead of seeing my sins, I see that they are gone. I have seen my sins laid on the Mediator. I have seen my sins confessed on the head of the scapegoat, and they have been borne away; Lev. 16. So much has God been glorified about my sins (that is, in respect of what Christ has done on account of my sins), that this is the title of Christ to be there, at the right hand of God. I am not afraid to look at Christ there. Where are my sins now ? where are they to be found in heaven or on earth ? I see Christ in the glory. Once they were found upon the head of that blessed One ; but they are gone, never more to be found. Were it a dead Christ, so to speak, that I saw, I might fear that my sins would be found again; but with Christ alive in the glory the search is in vain. He who bore them all has been received up to the throne of God, and no sin can be there.

As a practical consequence of this I am changed into His likeness-" We all, with open face beholding, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is the Holy Ghost taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them to the soul, that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ. I delight in Christ, I feast upon Christ, I love Christ. It is the very model and forming of my soul according to Christ, by the Holy Ghost-this His revelation of Christ. I not only get to love the glory, it is Christ Himself that I love ; Christ, that I admire; Christ, that I care for; Christ, whose flesh I eat, and whose blood I drink-what wonder if I am like Christ ? The Christian thus becomes the epistle of Christ; he speaks for Christ, owns Christ, acts for Christ. He does not want to be rich, he has riches in Christ-unsearchable riches. He does not want the pleasures of the world, he has pleasures at God's right hand for evermore.

Does the heart still say, Oh, but I do not, and cannot see this transcript in myself ? No, but you see Christ ; and is not that better ? It is not my looking at myself, but it is my looking at Christ, that is God's appointed means for my growing in the likeness of Christ. If I would copy the work of some great artist, is it by fixing my eyes on the imitation, and being taken up with regrets about my failing attempt, that I shall be likely to

succeed ? No, but by looking at my model, by fixing my eyes there, tracing the various points and getting into the spirit of the thing. Mark the comfort of this! The Holy Ghost having revealed to my soul Christ in the glory as the assurance of my acceptance, I can look without fear, and therefore stedfastly, full at that glory, and rejoice at the measure of its brightness. Stephen (Acts 7), full of the Holy Ghost, could look up stedfastly into heaven (doubtless in his case it was with more than ordinary power), and see the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and His face shone as the face of an angel. And look at his death. just like his Master, he prays for his very murderers. Stephen died saying, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge " ; Christ had died saying, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In him there was the expression of Christ's love for his enemies. By the Holy Ghost he was changed, and that in a very blessed way too, into the same image.

The soul at perfect liberty with God looks peacefully and happily at the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ ; and because it sees that glory and knows its expression, it walks before God in holy confidence. Instead of being happy and at liberty with Satan in Satan's world, the Christian dreads Satan because he knows himself. At ease in the presence of God, he there drinks into the spirit of that which befits the presence of God, and becomes the " epistle of Christ " to the world, shewing out to all that he has been there.

Well, what a difference! May we more and more make our boast in Him, in whose face all this glory is displayed-the Lamb, who has died for us, and cleansed away our sins by His own most precious blood.

The Lord give us hearts freed by Himself, whilst still in the midst of this poor world that is walking in a vain show.

J. N. Darby

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