

The Character of the Ministry of the Gospel 2

Corinthians 4:5

by John Nelson Darby

The character of the ministry of the gospel is characterized by the possession of things for ourselves before we can minister to others, and is marked by the knowledge of the unveiled glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:5

Topics: "The Glory of God", "The Ministry of the Gospel"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that the character of the ministry of the gospel requires that one must first possess the truth of the gospel in their own heart before sharing it with others. He explains that the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, who has accomplished the work of salvation, allowing believers to see and reflect that glory. Darby contrasts the ministry of the New Testament with that of the Old Testament, highlighting the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. He encourages Christians to remain vigilant and prepared for Christ's return, emphasizing the importance of being filled with the knowledge of God's glory and living in a way that reflects that light. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize their identity in Christ and the hope of eternal glory that awaits them.

Transcript

(Words of Faith, Vol. 3, 1884, page 5.)

The character of the ministry of the gospel, is, that the things are possessed for ourselves, before they can be ministered to others. In the Old Testament it was not for themselves, but for us, "did they minister the things." (See 1 Peter 1:10-12.) We stand between the suffering and the glory, with the Holy Ghost, come down from heaven, shining in our hearts, to give out the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. "When it pleased God," says Paul, "who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles." (Gal. 1:15, 18.) Mark, Christ was revealed, not to, but in, Paul. It is the light of the gospel of the glory of God, called the gospel of the glory - Christ is speaking from heaven. We have got the last things, the last revelations, connected with the glory of God in the Man Christ Jesus, now in heaven. "Therefore, having this ministry, we faint not," etc. (2 Cor. 4:1-6.) He is speaking of the contrast with Moses, who put a veil over his face.

There is no glory to be compared with that in the face of Christ. Man could not look at it, if it came with a legal claim on the heart of man. You never get the light of the glory of God shining into the heart of man,

without the conscience being awakened, if under law. I cannot stand in the presence of God; it tells me what I ought to be, and if I am not that, I cannot look at the glory - He must hide Moses in the cleft. But when I see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, where do I see it? It is in heaven, in a Man, in the Man that hung on the cross for my sins. The meaning of the glory seen there, is, that sin, death, and Satan have all been put away together. He, being made sin, died, and went into the grave, was raised, and is gone into heaven, and the only part in it man had was sin, and hatred to Himself.

The glory of God is the witness that there is the complete cleansing away of all sin. That Person at God's right hand, who was made sin, went under death, went into the grave, and has passed it all, and is now in glory; and, in virtue of the work being accomplished, the testimony comes to me, the One who bore my sins is in glory, and all is done with. There we get the full testimony of the glory of Christ - the testimony of God's value of it. All this I get in the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. Having been brought by Him to believe in God, I see the glory of God - I can look, and delight in it. The testimony of my salvation is the glory, and seeing it with an open face, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

I say, Let me see that my Sin-bearer is in the glory of God, and I have the certainty that all sin has been put away, and then the Holy Ghost comes down, and, because I am thus cleansed, I am sealed by Him. A Christian stands, and looks at the accomplished sufferings; looks back at the accomplishment of the work that has put away sin; looks up, and sees the One who did it all in glory, and that is the way the glory attains its full effect in the heart. It is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It confounds one when first one sees it; but what am I waiting for, if He owns me as one with Himself? I am waiting for Him to come and take me there - to bring me into the thing He has made mine.

Power has come into this place of death; I do not want to die, but to be clothed upon - death swallowed up in life. I do not want to die, I want to be changed into the body of glory, without dying at all. It is a present living power. We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed; the power of death is broken. If I go up to the judgment-seat, in what state shall I go? The Lord will come, and take me there. Christ, having such delight in me, comes for me; changes me; and takes me there glorified, and I shall have to give an account of myself there, and a very great blessing it will be to have all brought out in the light - how Christ kept me when I fell; how He lifted me up. The fulness of redemption is manifested when we go up to the judgment-seat in glorified bodies. When He appears, we shall be like Him, and what can I fear in regard to judgment now? My Sin-bearer is at the right hand of God, having put away sin at His first coming, and He appears the second time, without sin, unto salvation, to take us to Himself, as made like Him.

The wise virgins were asleep, as well as the foolish. What changed it? The midnight cry waked them - the testimony of the Lord's coming; they had oil (grace), and awakening at the cry, they were ready, and went in. When asleep they had given up expecting the Bridegroom, and when the cry came, they woke up. At first they went out full of the thought of His coming, and then got into ease and comfort, and went to sleep, more or less, in the world.

If the Lord Jesus came to-night, would you all be found, with bright lamps, ready for Him? It is the state of your souls. We are to expect, in the last days, perilous times, but great blessings, in the midst of it all, in the path of faith. We find the form of Christianity, but denying the power. In Timothy it is the scriptures I am directed to, because, if I say, "The church teaches this, or that," the question is, What is the church? But if I say, "The scripture says it," I know where I have learnt it - "From a child thou hast known the scriptures," &c.

The word of God is "sharper than any two-edged sword," etc.; it deals with the conscience, not with the intellect. If I touch it, it deals with my conscience; it comes in with invisible power, and, like the woman of Samaria, I can say, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did." Faith's root is in the conscience. People talk of apostolic succession; there is no succession in God's word. Just before Laodicea is spued out of Christ's mouth, the word to Philadelphia is, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, which no man can shut." Not a great deal to say about Philadelphia, but it is characterised by what God delights in - the word of Christ has authority on their hearts and consciences, they hold to His name, and are looking for the promise, "Behold, I come quickly." He is waiting, sitting at the right hand of God, till His enemies become His footstool. His friends are perfected for ever, and He is coming to receive them. He does not take a bit of the inheritance till He has gathered up the fellow-heirs; then all things in heaven and earth are to be gathered together in one, and all to be under Christ.

Our place is a peculiar one, like Eve's. She was not lord of the earth, she was, in all the creation of which man was lord, his helpmeet. The being associated with the Lord Jesus Christ is the one thing marking our peculiar place. He is given to be Head over all to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all, and we, the joint-heirs of Christ, we wait for Him - the Eternal lover of our souls!

The thing that characterises Christianity, is, the knowledge of the unveiled glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and "if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." A veil may be on man's heart, but the fact of man being in the glory of God remains equally true, and when the veil is taken away, there is nothing to come but Christ coming in judgment to the world. Then the trials and afflictions of the present time are all connected with the earthen vessel - its weakness. If an apostle, you can only be kept, day by day, by the power of God.

The vessel is one thing, the treasure is another. The vessel must be nothing, if the treasure there is to shine out. The old man is judged, and crucified with Christ; I have to look at myself as a dead man. I may light up a lantern, but if the glass be not kept perfectly clean, the light will not shine out. I have a glorified Christ in my soul, and if my flesh rules me, that is not the treasure shining out; I must ever reckon myself dead before God.

A Christian stands a new man in God's sight. To reckon myself dead is a privilege for myself, and a necessity for my testimony, to put it simply. Suppose a mother heard her son was half-killed, would she stop on her way to him to look at the shops? So, if a Christian is full of Christ, he will not be distracted by anything of the world. Where the earthen vessel is right, the light will shine out. There must be no rest for the flesh; nothing but sorrows and trials - always "delivered unto death," and "bearing about in the body the dying," &c. The Lord put the apostle through all sorts of circumstances. If anything of the flesh sprang up, the red-hot iron must be put to it, to destroy the sprouts; death wrought in him, that nothing but the life of Christ might appear.

There is such a thing as a man being superior to all the circumstances he may be passed through; Paul gets the sentence of death welling through everything, yet "bold to preach," &c. We find the most complete superiority to circumstances in Stephen. Whilst the stones are flying about, he kneels down, and prays for his murderers; he is a copy of Christ, of life in the midst of death. - J. N. D.

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