

# The Epistle to the Ephesians

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon on Ephesians explores the profound spiritual blessings and calling of believers in Christ, emphasizing our identity and inheritance as children of God.*

**Scripture:** John 3:16, Romans 8:17, Ephesians 1:3-5, Ephesians 1:9-10, Ephesians 1:17-18, Ephesians 2:6, Colossians 1:26-27, Hebrews 2:10

**Topics:** "Identity in Christ", "Spiritual Blessings"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the profound truths found in Ephesians, emphasizing God's blessings and purpose for believers through Christ. He highlights the transition from being mere servants to becoming children of God, sharing in Christ's inheritance and glory. Darby explains that our spiritual blessings are rooted in our identity in Christ, and he encourages believers to understand their position as new creations, united with Christ in heavenly places. He also stresses the importance of faith and the transformative power of God's grace in the life of a believer. Ultimately, Darby calls for a deeper comprehension of God's love and the believer's role in glorifying Him through the church.

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## Transcript

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Ephesians 1

Here we have the thought of God about us - all that there is of blessing in Him for us. Angels, principalities, and powers, will learn through us the manifold wisdom of God. Then He unfolds it all. First our calling, then God's purpose as to Christ - His place then our inheritance. The close of chapter 1 puts all these subjects together; all are founded on this title which God takes - the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is only after His resurrection that Christ calls His disciples His brethren.

Verse 3. You get here the double title. It is the secret of all God's thoughts, that His purpose is to put us into the same place as Christ. (1 Cor. 15:49.) We shall be as like the Second Adam as we have been like the first.

132 In Matthew 16:20, He forbids them to say He was the Christ. In Matthew 12 He is rejected; Matthew 18, He introduces the kingdom of heaven; Matthew 16, the church; Matthew 17, the kingdom of glory, but at the end He shews the disciples where He was leading them. He says to Peter, You and I are children,

we are therefore free - "for me and thee," think of the Lord of glory saying that! He puts Peter into this place with Himself. Then He shews His power over creation. He puts Peter in association with Himself just when He was shewing this divine power.

Ephesians 1:3 is altogether in contrast to the Jew. They will be blessed with temporal blessings under Christ, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He has blessed us; that is the first wonderful statement.

Christ's place comes second, not that it is second, but unless we were brought into the place, we could not understand His place.

Verse 4. We have to go through the world, all of us (speaking generally), but we belonged to heaven before the foundation of the world. "Holy," "love," that is God's nature; we are made partakers of it; that gives capacity for knowing Him. I know not anything of an angel, for I have not his nature; but I am capable of knowing and enjoying God, and that in His own presence.

133 Verse 4 is what Christ was here - holy, blameless, and always before God in love.

Verse 5. "Children" implies "Father," but it is still in Christ. It does not say in verse 4, according to the good pleasure of His will, for He could not have unholy creatures before Him; but here it is said, for though He might have only desired to have servants, He chooses to have "children." Verse 4. He might have said "accepted in Christ;" that would not do, it is "in the Beloved," accepted according to that.

Q. Is holy in Christ our state now, or our standing?

A. It is put here as it is in God's mind, not as it is found in the poor earthen vessel. The extent of God's grace almost alarms people. Do you believe that God loves you as He does Jesus? If I have glory, it is "the glory which thou gavest me."

Q. Do you think we get this without going through Romans and Colossians?

A. No; but it is of immense moment for us to understand that it is by "grace," and that according to what God is.

The conscience must be reached. God is light and love; and that manifests what we are - exposes us.

He reasons down from what God is - no one is ever free till he gets that side.

134 Israel, in Egypt, were sheltered from judgment; but it is a different thing at the Red Sea. There they are told to stand still, and see the salvation of God.

I am where God has put me, not where sin has put me.

In John 3 you get the two sides. Then my peace flows from what God is for me. If I go to God now, I go to the One who did not spare His own Son for me. I get all the love that was in His heart, this love reigning through righteousness.

The forgiveness is not according to the measure of my need (though it meets it, of course), but the manner of it is "according to the riches of His grace."

Verses 9 and 10. Then God says, Now that I have brought you into capacity to understand, I will make known to you my purpose about Christ.

There is nothing absolutely certain but faith. I may believe there is such a town as Edinburgh, but it is possible that an earthquake may have destroyed it. Nothing but faith can be absolutely certain.

In Hebrews we read, the "full assurance" of faith. Three "full assurances" are spoken of - in Colossians it is of "understanding," in Hebrews of "hope" and of "faith."

135 "Prudence" is an unhappy word; here it is God's mind, His thoughts, not prudence in practice. You get the word in Proverbs. He unfolds to me His thoughts and plans about Christ; He is going to head up all things under Christ as man, and we get three reasons for this. In Colossians it is as Creator; in Hebrews Christ is the Heir as Son; and thirdly, having been rejected as Christ, He comes out as Son of man, Head over all things. Hebrews 2: "He left nothing that is not put under him." He is seated at the right hand of God, but He is waiting till the time appointed to take His power and reign over all.

He has this Headship as Creator, as Son of God, and as Son of man; personal, relative, and positional Head over all; but Head to the church, which is His body. A head would be incomplete without a body.

But there redemption comes in: as a Redeemer He fills it all, not merely as God.

We have seen the plan of God as regards Christ; then I get the inheritance. The first part of the chapter is our calling, afterwards we get the inheritance.

Verses 12 and 13. Those who trusted in Christ before He appears, get to be with Him - same place as the church.

We are sons by faith, not merely born; quickening and believing go together. We get the Spirit, the earnest of the inheritance, until Christ comes in His glory.

136 Q. Does "after that ye believed" suppose an interval?

A. No; it should be "having believed." It is not that there is an interval, but you must get the things in their order; God could not seal an unbeliever.

There is nothing in heaven that does not belong to me now.

Moses and Elias talked with Christ, that was the kingdom; then came the cloud, that was the Father's house, the Father's voice heard speaking from it, and they entered in; that was a new thing, the disciples were afraid.

Q. Does "the inheritance" include everything, heavenly and earthly?

A. The inheritance takes in all created things, you must not confound it with our calling.

Ephesians 1:17, and 3. We find the distinction between God and Father in these two prayers. Here He is looked at as Head over all things. Three things the apostle prays for - that they might know "the hope" of the calling and the "riches" of the inheritance; but then he prays that they might know the "power" that raised Christ from the dead. The calling is the first part; then that they are sons, they get the inheritance because they are sons. Then he goes on to pray that their "eyes may be opened."

137 Three callings - in Thessalonians it is "walk worthy of God, who has called you into his kingdom and glory;" in Colossians, "walk worthy of the Lord;" here it is simply God's calling.

To Israel, God says: "The land is mine." He inherited the land, in, and through Israel; here it is His inheritance in the saints.

"That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

We are called to enjoy what is above us, and to inherit what is below us. The crowned elders were happier when they were on their faces than crowned on their thrones, more blessed to adore Him than to be in honour one's self.

They [the translators] were afraid to say "thrones," so they say "seats." Far above all.

Q. What is the eternal inheritance in Hebrews?

A. Oh! it is all eternal there. You look at the inheritance in two ways. Peter looks up, and that's eternal. Here it is - (end of the sentence lost, A. B. T.)

In Ephesians it is union, in Hebrews priesthood.

Q. Is not the "inheritance" there spoken of in connection with the new covenant, which is millennial?

138 A. No; all is eternal there, in contrast to Judaism. He looks at the heavenly calling, a positive thing, in contrast to the old [covenant]. God's side of the new has been accomplished, but it must be made good with the Jew.

While God makes the principle of the two covenants different, the blood of the new is shed; but He had other purposes - the church - and the new covenant is suspended till that be accomplished. We are sanctified unto the obedience of Christ.

What delivers us from law, was not that it had lost its force, but we have died in Christ, and you cannot apply the law to a dead man, you cannot charge a dead man with having lust in his heart.

In Romans 8, I find that what the law could not do God did - condemned sin in the flesh. It is not that He let it pass, but has done with it in the cross; it is not here that Christ died for my sins (that's true), but I died with Him.

Romans 5:12 is the commencement of the new subject - what I am, not what I have done. I have died by faith, of course. Then there is the new life in Christ, which delights itself in God's will.

It is dead to sin in Romans, to the world in Colossians. You get not a word of all that in Ephesians, but that which takes me out of my own standing, and places me before God - Christ my righteousness - Christ my life.

139 In Colossians you get, "risen:" that question is not looked at in Ephesians, there it is dead in sins; I am dead in them - I am dead to God; God takes me up in Christ, and puts me in the same place. It is new creation here.

Death is spoken of in three aspects. In Colossians, "Ye are dead;" Romans, "Reckon yourselves dead;" 2 Corinthians 4, "Always bearing about in the body," &c., that is, carrying it out practically. I am at liberty, because I reckon myself dead, and so I can carry it out practically.

In Ephesians, "I am dead and quickened" together with Christ; and that is new creation; that power which came in and took Christ from that state of death and puts Him at God's right hand, takes us, and puts us in Him. The result, all things under His feet, and He Head over all things to His body. He fills everything between hades and the throne of God - fills the whole thing for faith. You cannot put my spirit in a place where Christ has not been. Ephesians 2:2 is the Gentiles (ver. 3 the Jew), Satan's power over the world. By nature the Jew was very far off, but not by position; by position he was near to God, the elder son.

God does not give two epistles for the same purpose. In Colossians we do not get the Holy Ghost, but we do in Ephesians, therefore there is the strongest possible contrast. "Together with Christ" is a great deal more than new life. I am taken out of the condition I was in, and put in Him, there where He is. I have divine life, but there is more here, my standing is in Christ.

140 The position is totally changed, it alters the whole character of the Christian, if they get hold of it. It is new creation, not merely that I get a new life, but I have got a totally new position. We have not to grow to become meet, not to grow up, etc. The growing is all right, but He has "made us" meet.

That is the ground of it; we are not in the standing of the old man before God at all. It is a wonderful thing to apply to oneself, that God is going to shew forth in me the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness.

Q. "It makes us so small."

A. It makes us nothing, that is the comfort. "By grace are ye saved" - a fact, not a principle. God's salvation is, that I am going to be in the same glory as Christ.

Q. Does "that not of yourselves" apply to the whole thing?

A. No; I believe it applies to the faith - faith is just simply the word of God applied to man's soul by the Spirit of God. When the conscience is awakened, it puts God in His place, and man in his.

141 If I know all that is in your mind, I am your equal, as to your mind.

The Pharisee and the poor woman (Luke vii.) is an instance. Who was the child of wisdom? She was kissing His feet, and honouring God - that was God's wisdom.

I believe there is instinctively in man a conscience that he has to do with a power above him. A thing that reasoning proves is never a fact, but only a consequence.

"Unto good works, foreordained;" the works as much foreordained as I am.

In Ephesians 1 we have the universal thought of Christ, Head over all to His body. Here (end of Eph. 2) we get a new thing, not a body, as in chapter 1, but a habitation of God.

Apostles and prophets are those of the New Testament.

In the first place, Christ builds. (Matt. 16) In Peter we have, "built up as living stones" - that is another aspect. What God has already done is, to set up man in responsibility, the first thing man does, is, to fail. Then Christ comes, and makes all good in the second Adam that failed in the first. In 1 Corinthians 3 "a wise master-builder"; that is man's building. But when Christ builds, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

142 In Ephesians 2:21 we get, first, it "groweth;" then (ver. 22), what God has set up, "ye are builded together" - it is not union here.

Q. When would you say the house will be set up in perfection?

A. In the heavenly Jerusalem. On the one hand the house, His dwelling-place; on the other, His body. It is union with Christ the Head, where it is His body, or, the bride.

Q. The body is not for the earth only?

A. Oh, not at all, it is for ever. There is no union till Christ is glorified in heaven.

The Vine and the branches is not the church at all. I get the house on earth; it will be the temple for ever. Consequent on the Holy Ghost coming down, the members of the body are united to Christ - entirely heavenly.

The church was never revealed in the Old Testament; not only did it not exist, but it could not be revealed till after the cross. You get the same thing in Colossians. You must have Christ glorified first, or you would have a body without a head; the church has its connection with Christ, the children with the Father. The Holy Ghost coming down from the Father puts us in the place of sons, and unites us with the Head: all that is heavenly. God has come out, and man gone in; the veil has been rent.

143 Colossians 1:26. You cannot have the revelation of the church, and the Jews, at the same time, for they set aside each other.

In the Song of Solomon it is quite a different principle. There it is a question of going after Him, and finding Him, and losing Him (what the church never does). You have neither the place of sons, nor union with the Head.

Q. What is the difference between "children" and "sons"?

A. Well, "children" puts them in the place of relationship, but "sons" are considered as of full age. John speaks of "children," Paul, of "sons." You get "sons" in John, when it ought to be "children;" and "children," in Galatians 3, when it ought to be "sons." In 1 John 2:1, 12, 28 it is all Christians; in verses 13 and 18 it is young Christians.

Here we get a Man in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God. Consequent on that, the Holy Ghost came down (the Holy Ghost came down ten days after Christ ascended); then you get the consciousness of being sons.

You get all about Christ in the Old Testament, but no idea of union could be there.

Q. Will the temple be set up in the millennium?

144 A. I believe it will; the temple is never given as a figure of heavenly things, but always the tabernacle; "the faces of the cherubim turned inwards, and their wings stretched forth on high covering the mercy-seat." It was the secret counsels of God. In the temple they turned outward, and their wings stretched to the wall of the house. It was the administrative government of God.

The difference of the prayer in Ephesians 3 comes out in verse 15, where you get the expression, "Every family," in connection with that of "Father of the Lord Jesus." Before Abraham there was no family of faith; Abraham the root of all the promises.

God had His throne between the cherubim but no more from the Babylonish captivity. Then Christ came as a King, and they would not have Him; this sets the whole thing aside. The principle of Judaism was to keep up the partition, of Christianity to break it down.

The Syrophenician woman got through all dispensations to the heart of God; and all God's heart was at her disposal.

It is not now mercy and promises, but grace. "Unto me is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" - the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.

145 The heavenly beings did not know it, for it was hid in God. Then the "manifold wisdom;" a new thing came out. Our conversation is in heaven, our hearts ought to be there; all our living associations.

If I speak of "sons," it is not union - we are justified; you are a son and I am a son, but it is individual - we are two; but when it is said "one Spirit," it is union.

This prayer is very instructive. There was not one place where it was not the Jews who raised persecution against Paul, so he says to the Gentiles, "My persecution is your glory."

Now, I get "the Father" (ver. 14) of the Lord Jesus Christ - a deeper thing than "the God of the Lord Jesus." (Eph. 1:17.) "Every family in heaven and earth;" this expression is taken from Amos 3:2 - angels, principalities, the church, &c.

He revealed Himself as Almighty God to the patriarchs; as Jehovah to the Jews; it will be as Most High in the millennium. We come in as heirs with Christ, and He is our Father; we belong to no dispensation.

He does not say here, as in the prayer of chapter 1, "That ye may know;" here it is internal - we have it. He is in us as life, but here is another thing, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."

See John 4 what a difference that makes; it spiritualises the whole life. It is wonderful how far he goes here. In Romans 5 "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," - purely God's love. I get it in all its absolute purity, in the heart of God Himself. I had no part in what saved me, except my sins.

146 Christ is the centre of all God's purposes in glory - I have Him in my heart. Thus having Christ in me, I am at the centre. "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."

What is that? Of God's glory. He brings me back to that centre, and I am at the very centre of the glory in heaven. It is beautiful that He puts me into the centre of all the glory; he goes on, "And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge"; impossible to go beyond that! You may not be able to take it all in, but it

has taken me all in.

I cannot realise the thought of infinite space, consequently I can never get out of it, I am lost in it: still, I know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. We are creatures though a new creation; and shall be even in glory. "We know it" and "it passeth knowledge" go together.

Nothing of God that is revealable that is not revealed. We may think of one part at one time, and another at another time, but here we have it all revealed - "filled to all the fulness of God," "according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the church," etc. He is to be glorified in the church; He is looking for a power in us, and Christ being glorified in the church by that. People generally separate the last verses, but they go together; it is according to the power that worketh in us, that there will be glory to Him in the church by Christ Jesus.

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Many have not the courage to go on in God's warfare, because they hold on to something which is inconsistent with the light they have received. Perhaps, alas they lose the light which they have not acted up to, and Satan is able to bring their mind under the darkness of his good reasons for staying where they are without conquering more territory from him.

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The armour should be put on before the battle, not just at the battle.

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