

The Presence of Christ and Spiritual Intelligence

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having Christ as everything to the heart in order to gain spiritual intelligence and live a life of practical sanctification.

Scripture: Acts 7:51

Topics: "The Presence of Christ", "Spiritual Intelligence"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of Christ's presence in guiding our paths and shaping our testimonies, while also highlighting that true spiritual intelligence stems from a personal attachment to Jesus. He illustrates the failures of humanity throughout the Old Testament, culminating in the rejection of Christ, and stresses that understanding our lost state is crucial for recognizing God's grace. Darby uses examples from Scripture, such as Moses and Mary Magdalene, to show that closeness to Christ leads to deeper knowledge and communion with God. He concludes by urging believers to make Christ central in their lives to experience His love and wisdom fully.

Transcript

There are two points which are on my mind to say a word about. First, the way in which the Lord's own presence orders the path and gives character to testimony. Secondly, the way in which personal attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ gives intelligence in everything. The way to get spiritual intelligence as to all the things of God, is to have Christ as everything to the heart.

I turn to the Old Testament with regard to the first point, for there you get a striking history of the total failure of man. Stephen alludes to it in Acts 7, proving that man, dealt with by the law as responsible, was an entire failure, and at the cross man was fully rejected. Man is lost, but the process he goes through is to find out. To get a clear apprehension of divine things, we must see that we are lost, and if that is the case, we are not in a state of probation. We may get the knowledge of sin by the law, but the thing a man must be brought to the knowledge of is, that he is lost! "If one died for all, than were all dead." This is a very solemn position to recognise ourselves in, but it is not the first thing we learn; we learn first what we have done. If you ask persons if they are sinners, they say, We are all sinners; but if you say, Have you sinned enough to be lost? they say, Oh dear no, I hope not. In the death of Christ, man rejected the grace that had come in to him, and the One who had all the promises. The Gentiles were lawless, and the Jews

broke the law; but when Christ came, there was a despising of mercy.

The condition of man from Adam, was that of sinners outside the garden. When God had given the law, it was broken - and when there was "none righteous, no not one," God comes in to the world in love, and man turns Him out (though, of course, He fulfilled His own purposes at the same time). That was more than sinning against Him, it was positive hatred. First you get lawlessness, lust, and self-will - then law-breaking - and then the positive rejection of God come in grace. The history of man is thus closed, and God begins on His own footing. It is not now what you have done, but as was said to Israel, "What hath God wrought?" The only possible relationship with God, depends now on what God has wrought.

First, the people make a golden calf - giving up God: that is always the first thing man does. When God sets up something good, man spoils it. Take Adam in the garden of Eden - take Noah; no sooner out of the ark, than he gets drunk - then the law, it is scarcely given before it is broken. Aaron too, he never puts on the garments of glory and beauty after the day of consecration. So with Solomon, no sooner established in the kingdom, than he brings in idolatry - the same with Nebuchadnezzar, the first great Gentile power. But it is a distinct thing when God comes in grace, for they despise it altogether. Government began on the part of God with Noah (Gen. 9:5, 6), and went on till His Son came - they rejected Him, and then all was over. There was a little supplement in the beginning of Acts; but when Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, testifies to a glorified Christ, they reject a glorified Christ, as they had rejected Christ in incarnation.

But you get everything in which man failed set up again in Christ - failure in the first man, and God glorified in the second, where He had been dishonoured in the first.

At the golden calf, the trial of man was really over, "Yea, he took up the tabernacle of Moloch," Stephen quotes from Amos. That was the root that produced such terrible fruit afterwards. One finds in Moses what grace did. The Lord says to Moses, "Thou hast found grace in my sight, I know thee by name." And Moses says, "Consider that this nation is thy people," he pleads for them. There you get the fruits of grace, in contrast with the effects of sin. Moses is a beautiful picture of grace, but not as Christ was. God says to Moses that He will destroy the people in a moment, and they were to put off their ornaments, that He might know what to do. But Moses says, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people." That is just what we have to do. Why must I insist on having God with me? Because, unless I have Him with me in His grace, I shall never get through the wilderness, with this terrible flesh about me. I give as a reason, Because I am so bad; and through grace He can have me with Him, in spite of all my infirmities. I say, In my flesh dwells no good thing; if you do not go with me, I shall never get through the wilderness.

It is in separation that God deals in grace with Moses, in connection with his going outside the camp - the camp was deserted, but God was outside. The tabernacle had not really be set up then; so now, the building of God is not finished. There was nothing established on earth when He said, "I will build my church;" but He did establish a church on earth, responsible in its place, which has failed altogether - that is why we speak of ruin. The Lord says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" they never will against what He builds. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul puts the church under the responsibilities of builders; but man fails in that, as he does in everything. Paul says to the elders of Ephesus, "After my departing, even of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things." He says, As soon as I am gone you will see how it will all be; and we have seen. Not a stone that Christ builds but will be safe in glory. The history of the so-called church is a history of iniquity - if you read the history of the heathen, you will not find such a history as that of the church.

The thing that Moses does, is to take the tabernacle and put it outside the camp. What was the effect of this? The Lord was in it; He came down to the door and talked to Moses, as a man speaketh unto his friend. He comes down in the cloud; we have something better, for we go into the cloud. God refers to this speaking face-to-face as a special favour shewn to Moses. When there had been this separation, Moses got such communion as he never had in the camp. When he was up in the mountain, and God tells him that Israel has made a golden calf, and says, I will consume them, but will make of thee a great nation; Moses says, No, Thy glory is concerned in that. Why? Because he identified God's people with God's glory; and when he comes down from the mount, he identifies God's glory with God's people, and says "Slay every man his brother" - you get the very same principle in both cases. If I see God's people in evil, I say, You must be dealt with by the rod. Moses sets up the tabernacle outside the camp, and God owns it. There was no holy of holies then - it was a meeting place with the Lord. "And it came to pass that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle." They sought the Lord, that is what governed the whole. The golden calf was in the camp; the Lord was in the tabernacle, which was not then set up in its completeness.

You will see what the communications were with Moses at this time. (Ex. 33:13.) "Show me now thy way, that I may know thee." There you get knowledge. Then "That I may find grace in thy sight" - not that he had not found grace, but he wanted to know it every moment. "Consider that this nation is thy people." He never forgets God's people, though God would not call them His people. God's presence is the next thing. Moses must know God's way and have His presence. (Ver. 16.) They had sought the Lord when the tabernacle was set up outside the camp, but Moses now wants His manifest presence. Here I find that God's presence was the centre that governed the whole, that stamped the character of the whole thing, and if you have not that, you have nothing. It was when the sin was manifested in the camp, that Moses insists on the Lord's presence. It was God's way and God's presence that were to separate them from all the people on the earth. Moses gets bolder in faith, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." But he could not see His glory, there was no atonement then - the cloud was not His glory. We have here two principles - one, the total failure of what God had set up, then we get the Lord's presence and the Lord's rest.

Two characters are brought out here, Moses and Joshua. Joshua did not leave the tabernacle, that is where the difference is between them. Joshua is the figure of Christ spiritually at the head of His People. We must be as near the Lord as Moses was, and the effect of nearness to Christ is love to all the people of God, even if they go wrong; but, at the same time, if I am near Christ I cannot go with any who are going wrong. It is only so far as we know how to separate from the vile, that the Lord says we shall be as His mouth, but we must be close to Christ to be enabled to do it according to His mind. I am speaking now of broad principles.

The first point I desired to shew you was, how the Lord's presence governed everything; now I will shew you some instances of personal attachment to Christ being the origin of intelligence. I was greatly struck with Mary Magdelene's history in John 20. The disciples go to their own homes, but there was no home for Mary without her Lord, and she stands there weeping. Though she turns and sees Jesus, at first she thinks He is the gardener. Her attachment to Him leaves her all alone with Him; it will lead to communion with others, but there must be the soul alone with the Lord. The other women came early in the morning, but she came while it was yet dark. The disciples had gone home, but that would not do for Mary; she had not got Christ, and her heart could get nothing, if it did not get Him, and she is the first to whom He reveals Himself, and makes her the messenger of intelligence, for the disciples as yet knew not the scriptures. To her He says "Touch me not." He did not mind other women touching Him, but He says to her, That is not

for you yet, "But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God." This is the first time He calls them brethren. Mary got the truth from Himself; He tells it to the disciples, but it is by Mary He tells it. There I get the secret of divine knowledge, and so you will always find it. She was wrong in one sense, in seeking the living among the dead, but there was this thorough attachment to Christ, and the consequence is that she gets the first revelation of Christ. She was the vessel of knowledge because she was attached to Christ.

Take the woman who was a sinner, in Luke 7, there was thorough attachment to Christ, and what was the consequence of this poor wretched creature's love? There was light, the knowledge of complete salvation, whilst the self righteous Simon, delighting in his own heart, was in perfect darkness - does not think God's Son even a prophet! But the woman loved much, and the Lord turns to her and says, "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." One sees forgiveness, salvation, and peace, connected with that poor creature's attachment to Christ. Her heart had been won to confidence, and she gets salvation revealed.

Take another instance. There was Martha and there was Mary. Martha was much cumbered about much serving, but Mary was sitting at the Lord's feet, hearing His word: just what He wanted. And what is the consequence of this learning? That she knew His mind. When Lazarus is dead, Martha goes out in the haste of her temper to meet the Lord, but soon returns to call Mary, saying, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Martha had the consciousness that she was not equal to this intercourse with Christ, so she goes and calls her sister. With Martha, there was no entering into the mind of Christ, but when He sees Mary weeping, He is moved deeply and groans in spirit. So when He comes to Bethany, it was this same Mary who poured the ointment on His head - her heart did it. The disciples think it a mistake, but He says, "Let her alone" - she knows all about it. It was not that she could have told prophetically what was the meaning of it, but her heart had got the instinct; she anointed Him for His burying.

Now look at the disciples in John 13. Peter could not ask Christ the question about His betrayal. Why? Because he was not on His breast. John did not place himself on Christ's bosom to get knowledge, but in being there he got it. As the apostle Paul expresses it, "We have the mind of Christ." John was in the place where he could get Christ's ear - Know Christ's secrets. But now all God's wisdom and power are in Christ, and to have the understanding of them, we must have Christ; it is when to our hearts He is practically all, that we get into His secrets. Then you are in the right place, and the right thing is done as He would have it done. I shall never get "Shew me now thy way," unless I have Christ - unless he is everything to me. Whether the habits we indulge in, or the things in which we are walking, are grieving to Christ, or whether they are like Christ, we have to look to; because when we come to the end, there will be no life but what we have lived for Christ. The life that we live, answers to the Christ that we find when it is over. We would not like to be found not doing our duty, but faith makes present those unseen things, so that we live upon them, and we live Christ and can say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

The Lord give us to find Him everything, beloved friends; He is far more full of love to us than we are to Him. May He lead our hearts closer to Himself, that we may get the secrets of His grace and wisdom, and then go forth in the Spirit to live a life of practical sanctification to Christ, without losing the judgement of self!

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