

The Standing and State of the Believer

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding eternal life, which is characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost and a new nature capable of enjoying God, given to us in Christ.

Scripture: John 5:24, John 10:10, John 14:16-17, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:9, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:30, 1 John 1:2-3, 1 John 5:12

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Indwelling of the Holy Spirit"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of understanding the standing and state of the believer in Christ, highlighting that eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are foundational to Christianity. He explains that mere forgiveness of sins is insufficient; believers must recognize their new nature in Christ and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Darby illustrates that through Christ's death and resurrection, believers are not only forgiven but also empowered to live a new life, free from condemnation and sin. He stresses that the Holy Spirit is essential for experiencing this new life and for maintaining a relationship with God. Ultimately, the believer's identity is rooted in their union with the risen Christ, who is the source of eternal life.

Transcript

The possession of eternal life in Christ Jesus risen and glorified, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, are blessings which characterize Christianity, and it is consequently of the utmost importance for the child of God to apprehend these truths. The two are intimately connected, as we shall see.

As to what we are by nature there is no room for doubt: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." Nor will improvement or reformation gain acceptance with God, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Even the knowledge of forgiveness of sins does not touch the root of the evil in us. Supposing the fruit of a tree is offensive, to strip off the fruit may remove the offence for the time being, but will not prevent a fresh crop appearing. Just so; many a soul truly trusting in the blood of Christ, but knowing only the forgiveness of sins, fails to enjoy settled peace. Fresh sins and daily failure trouble the soul, and there is a constant recurrence to the blood to get relief for the conscience. What, then, is needed, is not only forgiveness for our sins, but the judgment of our state, and a new nature given - a new life capable of enjoying God, and of bringing forth fruit pleasing to God. All this we have in Christ. He has not only borne "our sins in His own body on the tree," but God has condemned sin in Him on the cross (1 Peter 2:24; Rom. 8:3), so that faith can say, "I am crucified with Christ:" adding also, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

(Gal. 2:20.) This, and nothing less, is our place in virtue of the work of Christ. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have" - not merely forgiveness of sins, or even the new birth - but "eternal life."

What is it to have eternal life? It is to have Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life." "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." Observe, it is the gift of God, and it is "in His Son." It is not in our keeping, but is secured for us in Christ. (1 John 5:12.) So we read, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear." (Col. 3:4.) Faith believes the record of God, receives Christ, and passes from death unto life; as JESUS says, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation" [judgment, it should be], "but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24.) How simple! May it be yours, dear reader, if not sure of your portion in Christ, to receive what God gives in the simplicity of faith. He has given His word for the purpose of removing every difficulty. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." (1 John 5:13.)

It is important to observe, that eternal life is in a risen Christ. It could be said of Him in incarnation, "In Him was life;" but man could not be brought into association or union with Him except on the ground of redemption. As He walked here below He was ever the holy One - "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." How could any link be formed between Him as such and those who were "dead in trespasses and sins"? Obviously it could not be. There must be the entire setting aside in judgment of all that pertained to the first man ere there could be living association with "the second Man, the Lord from heaven." So Jesus says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John 12:24.) In marvellous grace He took our place, and died in our stead. But that is not all. He rose again, and we are brought into His place before God - that comes out in John 20. Immediately that He has risen from the dead He can say, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," thus placing them in the same position as Himself with reference to God. How sweet to hear Him thus, at the earliest possible moment, associating His loved ones with Himself! Can we doubt that He looked forward with joy to that moment? We hear Him saying, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" This was now over: the pressure of that hour was removed; sin was gone from before God; redemption was accomplished; and now the love of God could flow out with unhindered force. What is the result? In the first place peace - "Peace be unto you." Blessed result! And then "He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

This remarkable scene reminds us at once of the manner in which Adam received life. The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. We know how soon the life was forfeited, and how, as fallen, Adam became the head of a fallen race.

Jesus, then, as the risen One, Head of the new creation, communicates resurrection-life to His disciples - a life, too, that was to be in the power of the Holy Ghost. This is more than being merely quickened or born again. The new birth was always essential before a soul could have any knowledge of God. The disciples were already quickened souls, yet Jesus says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10.) The life more abundantly is now being realized - but it is in resurrection. It was something quite new in character and quality. It would not now be divine life struggling with difficulties, producing desires after God, and groaning with the pressure of evil surroundings, but life in the power of resurrection, where nothing can enter to disturb the peace or destroy the relationship which He who is the life has brought the objects of His love into. Yet, in the present day, is there not many a soul

truly quickened that does not know the peace which John 20 unfolds? Although born of God, it sees no further than the cross as meeting its guilt, and consequently is troubled with all sorts of difficulties and fears. This surely is not the Christian state; for life in resurrection, consequent upon the complete judgment of the old man, is unknown. Such a soul has really never entered upon Christian ground. It is a stranger alike to the privileges and the experiences of that state.

But while the scene of John 20 resembles in some respects that of Genesis 2, it is also its contrast. Adam's life was held under conditions, and rightly so. This life is one that has already been fully tested; and not only so, but is made good for the believer on the other side of death and judgment - therefore, beyond the reach of either. This is what we get in Romans 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Why? Because judgment has already been executed on the cross. Sin has been condemned in the flesh, and the One who bore its judgment is alive again. The believer, therefore, who is "in Christ" is "not in the flesh" (Rom. 8:9); that is, is not in the condition or state to which sin and judgment attached. He has died with Christ, and with Him is out of it. He is now under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has made him free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:2.) Practically, he must learn to "walk in newness of life," reckoning himself to be dead unto sin. (Rom. 6:11.) The flesh is in the believer, and will be so long as he is here; but faith is never occupied with it, save as judging it, but always with Christ. This gives power for walk, and in so far as the flesh is practically kept in the place of death, the lovely fruits of the new life will appear. But as to the standing, faith gives to me to see what I am in a risen Christ, and judges self, or the old I, according to the measure of its utter condemnation in the cross. Christ on the cross is the answer to my old state, and Christ in the presence of God is the expression of my present standing and condition. (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6.)

Let us look now at the connection between such a condition and the presence or indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

In John 14:16, 17, Jesus, speaking of going away, declares that the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, would come to them to abide with them and to be in them. Thus, not only must resurrection be accomplished as a matter of fact, but He must go away ere the Comforter could come. (John 7:38, 39.) So really were the two things connected, that in John 16 He adds - "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." What would be the result? "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." (John 14:20.) "We know" is what the Holy Ghost enables us to say; "and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us." (1 John 3:24.) Founded on death and resurrection, the believer is in Christ, and Christ is in the believer, and the Holy Ghost is sent down to make us know it; hence, "at that day ye shall know."

Turning, now, to the Epistle to the Romans, where the whole question of our condition is taken up in detail, we find that the Spirit is not once mentioned until the fifth chapter, fifth verse, when peace being known, consequent upon death and resurrection, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us;" and not again until the eighth chapter, which opens with the believer "in Christ." Then, however, the complete standing of the believer in Christ having been established, the Spirit of God is introduced again and again, and shewn to be the energizing power of this new order of things. It was not always so; but the scripture does not recognize anything short of this now; for we read, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:9); and it is added, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" that is, he is not stamped with that which distinguishes a Christian. If "in Christ," then the Spirit of God dwells in you; and if not, you have still to learn practically this distinctive characteristic of Christianity.

Into the various aspects of the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the individual believer, and in believers as the body of Christ, we do not now enter. Suffice it to say, that the whole energies and desires of the new life are carried out in the power of the Holy Ghost. He is the living power of the new state into which the believer is introduced, and in which the flesh has no place. As the believer cannot lose eternal life, because his life is hid with Christ in God, so the Spirit does not cease to dwell in the believer as the seal, until the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30.) Hence the exhortation, ever applicable, not to grieve the Spirit, by the allowance of that which is dishonouring to Christ. Further, the Spirit always exalts Christ, and delights to engage our hearts with a risen and glorified Christ, whereby we become transformed into His image - "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.)

Finally, the Lord Jesus was "that Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." (1 John 1:2, 3.) If, therefore, we want to see the practical exhibition of eternal life, we find the perfect manifestation of it in Him, who was the obedient and dependent One. Thus, He is not only our object as the exalted One, but as the lowly One He is our pattern, and if the Spirit engages our hearts with Him in glory, it is that "the life also of Jesus might be made manifest" in us down here. (2 Cor. 4:10, 11.)

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