

What Characterises the Christian and Secures His Blessing

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life, character, and blessing, and explores the consequences of being led by the Spirit of God.

Scripture: Romans 8:9-26

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "The Holy Spirit"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that the essence of a Christian is characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which seals and empowers believers. He explains that the Holy Spirit not only gives life but also reveals God's presence within us and secures our blessings as God is for us. The sermon highlights the transformative power of the Spirit, enabling Christians to walk in righteousness and experience the love of God, while also acknowledging the suffering that comes with sonship. Ultimately, Darby reassures that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, affirming our identity as children of God and heirs of His promises.

Transcript

It cannot but be remarked how that, in this chapter, the whole condition of a Christian is identified with the Holy Ghost. What constitutes him a Christian is the sealing of the Holy Ghost - and this really characterises him as such. The first part of the chapter gives us the Spirit in life-giving power; then, secondly, God in us; and in the close we find the security of the blessing, "God for us." What gives us our character is, God in us; what secures us is God for us. It is entirely individual, for here we have not the church formed by the presence of the Holy Ghost. The first four verses form a summary of the earlier part of the epistle.

In chapter 5 we are shewn how God in grace had made peace for us, justified and brought us forgiveness of sins; and then the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. There alone He had been spoken of previous to chapter 8. This answers to verse 1.

In the subsequent part (chaps. 6, 7) we have the way in which we find deliverance from our state as children of Adam, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Then (ver. 3) "sin in the flesh" is "condemned" in the cross. Forgiveness and justification are thus founded on Christ having been delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification; thus as

regards deliverance from a sinful nature, by its being condemned in the cross: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." As regards power, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Then the practical result, in virtue of not being under the law, is, "that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us" by walking "after the Spirit." There is a great deal more in this than in walking right according to the law. We have Christ as our righteousness, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness," in contrast to law, which would be our own righteousness. Then we have walk manifesting the life of Christ, the Spirit of God as power for this, in contrast to the law. The law did not give the righteousness it required, and gave no power over sin. In contrast with the righteousness of the law, I have Christ as my righteousness; and consequently, in contrast with sin dwelling in me, I get the power of the life of Christ by the Holy Ghost dwelling in me, and now am to walk "not after the flesh."

The law condemned what was evil, but left me walking in it. But now I walk after something else, "the Spirit." And what is of the last importance to us is, that we have an object for our hearts. The law gives no life, no strength, no object. It tells me I must love God. What is He? Perfect silence! It tells me nothing of the God I am to love. It is His perfect, just claim of obedience. That is all it can tell me of God - that He claims obedience. It was an obliged obedience, and a curse in case of failure. It judges me if I do not obey, but gives me no object. The heart must have some object - either a good object or a bad one. Now I get the Spirit's object - Christ. He takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto me. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." There people generally stop. It is a reference to Isaiah 64, and what the apostle is stating is that it is not true now: "but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." That is just the opposite; for "we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." I have not only got life, as born of God, but I have got one who (through this blessed word as the means) reveals things suited to this life. It is the Holy Ghost who takes these things and gives them to me as the objects for the new nature to live and feed upon. God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things.

Of course, life must be there first. It supposes this, but is more. Suppose I am born of God, that does not reveal anything to me. But every nature feeds on that which belongs to it, and is suited to it: as animal nature, for example. Here I find, not a law to me as man in the flesh, but a new nature and new life, the life of Christ in us, which has certain desires, affections, and hopes. But where are the things that answer to them?

Then the Holy Ghost is given as the revealer of the things that belong to the new nature. Whatever a father has, belongs, in a certain sense, to his child; the child talks naturally of "our" house, "our" carriage, and the like, yet he has nothing of his own. This is all quite right.

Thus we have been brought as children to the Father, and have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, that we may enjoy the things which belong to the relationship.

This is a wonderful thing to say, and is a different thing from being born of God; it is more than the possession of life. Each has its place, and a different way in which it works. The Spirit is the spring and source of life, and then dwells in us. I get the truth itself from scripture: we are all the sons of God, as born of God, by faith in Christ Jesus: then, "having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit." We become sons by believing, and then after believing are sealed. God cannot seal an unbeliever. Seal sin and wickedness! It cannot be. He seals a believer. "He that believeth on me . . . out of his belly shall flow

rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet [given], because that Jesus was not yet glorified." We find the secret here of how and why we get the Holy Ghost, and why He gives liberty and joy too. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." The coming of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost is a distinct and definite thing, and must not be confounded with His working in a divine way previously. The Son created the world, but did not come into the world till incarnation. The Holy Ghost wrought, but did not come to take a place in the world until Pentecost. This depended on the Lord going away and being glorified. What was His being glorified? An immense thing! It was God taking man, the being that deserved being cast out of the presence of God, into the glory of God, in Christ Himself, and those that believe on Him. After the accomplishment of the perfect work of redemption, then He can send the Holy Ghost down as a witness that the thing is done. The moment Christ has gone up and taken His place, in righteousness, in the presence of the Father, the Holy Ghost comes down here as the consequence of Man being in the glory of God. Why is He there? Because the work of putting away sin was perfectly accomplished, and He sat down, having Himself purged our sins. Now the Holy Ghost can come down to make us sure of it. The place where He leads to is evidently the glory, because Christ is there. Christ and the saints get their portion in the same way, one after another. He whom the world rejected, God has set there; and He says, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." "Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus," and "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

In the Old Testament type the man was first washed with water, then sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with oil. This is the way in which we get the Spirit of God. The Comforter comes down when the whole thing is accomplished; Christ having gone up on high, when He had purged our sins. Of this the Spirit is the seal, being in us the revealer and earnest of all that Christ has gone into. When I have found the work of Christ as an effectual work of deliverance, being made white as snow, I am sealed by the Holy Ghost, who has borne witness to me of the blood of Christ, and is then the power of life in Christ dwelling in me, for liberty and joy.

Then the Spirit is the power of life, because of righteousness. You get this unfolded till we come to verse 11 of this chapter, where He is also the power of our final deliverance - the body being renewed for the glory. You have the Spirit first as giving the objects of this life. The law tells me what is right, as far as it goes, but the Holy Ghost gives me objects to satisfy and fill the new man. He produces righteousness, for "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace," &c. He does it by taking of the things of Christ and shewing them to me, thus giving me a divine object, so that I live by the faith of the Son of God, "who loved me, and gave himself for me." "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may be sanctified through the truth." All the things that are true I get in the person that I love, and I am attached to them. There are qualities that I may admire. When I find them in my father or my mother, do I coldly estimate them? No, I delight in them, because they are in my father or my mother. So with the things of Christ. I find the qualities in the person that I love. The Spirit takes of them and shews them to me, and I am changed into the same image, growing up into Him in all things, whom the Spirit keeps before me. So the apostle was labouring to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus - taking of what is in Christ and planting it in my heart, that Christ may be formed in me - to make me grow up to Him in everything.

What are "the things of the Spirit"? Could the Holy Ghost take the things of the world and make them objects for you? It would be blasphemy to say so. "To be carnally minded" is not a state of mind, but the nature. "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." There is joy and delight in these things of the Spirit; the

conscience has nothing to say against them, and the heart delights in them; and the character of the Christian is formed by them. All these traits in Christ become objects on which the heart lives, and thus become characteristic of the Christian.

This is what James calls the law of liberty. Supposing my child wanted to run into the town, and I tell him to stay and do his lessons instead. He obeys; but this is not the law of liberty: that would be to tell him to go into the town. The law says, Do your lessons, instead of what you like. Grace says, Go to heaven, and gives me power to go! The heart and the commandment go the same road. This is the Christian in his path. As far as he is governed and ruled by the Spirit of Christ, he has this perfect law of liberty to walk in: his desires are not according to the flesh.

There are three ways in which the Spirit is presented in connection with the Christian. Though born of God, until I know the completeness of redemption I have the thought of meeting requirements, and looking at what my state will be. This is not liberty, but bondage. But I have been redeemed by Christ out of that condition, and through grace have got into this place of liberty. I have learned that I am not in the flesh at all, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in me. I am in Christ, and in the Spirit, and there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. You are in what is perfectly contrary to the flesh in your position before God - in the Spirit, not in the flesh at all. What is of God is in contrast with the flesh; hence "the Spirit of God."

The second way in which He is spoken of is as the Spirit of Christ: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." This is not purpose or election, but character. We are brought into Christ. You cannot say a man is a Christian until Christ dwells in him. Till the prodigal came to the father he had not the robe - did not belong to the house, but was on the road to it. So in Egypt; when the blood was on the door-post they were sure to get out, but they were not out, and were frightened out of their lives! They had not salvation till they were clean out of Egypt. They were afraid of death and judgment, the very things that brought them out. But when they had passed the Red Sea into a new condition, delivered by God, they sing of the "salvation" of Jehovah. This is complete deliverance, and I have found this new place; I am in Christ, or rather "of" Christ. And if Christ be in me, the body is not allowed to live. I say to the flesh, I have nothing to say to you; the body is dead. If it moves, it is sin. What life is there then? The "Spirit is life," as that which will produce righteousness - the formative power of it.

Then, thirdly, as "the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead." It is the same Spirit always, but with different results. Here my resurrection is a consequence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in me: the actual body is delivered. We have had, first, the nature of God in contrast with the flesh. Secondly, as forming Christ in me. Thirdly, for final deliverance - not short of the body being glorified. The cry, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is all answered; delivered in spiritual power; then we are given objects belonging and suited to it; and, lastly, completely and finally in body of glory.

Now comes another thing, the second part of the chapter. It is my personal condition; but in that condition personal relationship that is treated of now; still founded on the Spirit. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God; for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." It is not that you are to see whether you are sons by the Spirit; but "we are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." The Old Testament saints had not this, though as faithful as we are. "The heir as long as he is a child differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all, till the time appointed of the father; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under

the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." So here we are sons of God, as many as are led by the Spirit of God; and if sons, then heirs. Of whom? of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. We have not received the spirit of bondage to fear - like the Old Testament saints dreading death. We are sons, and know our place as such, according to the word of the Lord, "my Father and your Father, my God and your God" - and the Holy Ghost now becomes the earnest of the inheritance.

What is the consequence of this? "We suffer with him." We cannot have the Spirit of Christ without suffering. I must in my measure have the thoughts and feelings of Christ. He could not be in the world and see sin and misery, and not suffer. We cannot but suffer. It is not suffering for Christ, that is a privilege given us; for "unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." It is with him. We cannot but sorrow, if there is any heart, as the consequence of the consciousness of sonship. Yet we reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed to us. This is the time of the "earnest expectation of the creature," not yet the "manifestation of the sons of God."

Just see now what the consequences are. First, relationship with God is settled; secondly, I am an heir in whom the glory is to be revealed; I am a son, I am an heir, I am going to have all that Christ has; not only the Father's house, but the kingdom, the inheritance in heaven of all things.

They are revealed to my heart now, and they are His; there is the great and blessed thing.

Take the Mount of Transfiguration, the New Jerusalem, the Father's house; all these things tell me what I have got, and my heart is bounding onward in the power of the Holy Ghost, rejoicing in the Lord always. The Spirit of adoption shews me all the blessed things Christ brings me into: they are not manifested yet. I belong to heaven, and am yet in a body that belongs to earth, so that I must and ought to feel things here. What brought the creature into the bondage of corruption? How did it get in? Through us. And how will it get out? Through us, when the glory comes! It is a beautiful thought! The effect of the glory of the new creation is to make me feel what the old creation is. We brought them into it, and shall bring them out of it. (vers. 20-22) We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the liberty of the glory of the children of God. It cannot get into the liberty of grace - the body cannot; I have to keep it down. But when the deliverance of glory comes, this is all over. We get the glory, but creation gets deliverance. This body connects me

with all the sorrows of this world (ver. 23); "Ourselves also which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body." We are not wishing for the soul to be saved, but for the body to be delivered.

Meanwhile, what does the Spirit do? He helps our infirmities. We groan within ourselves. It is not selfishness: it is the Holy Ghost puts us into it. It is the Spirit of love, of God, that feels the evil in the way of love. Is it merely selfishness to feel what it is to be in a world like this? Not a bit. Christ sorrowed in love. In virtue of the very joy and glory as the first-fruits of the Spirit, I groan. What is that groan? It is the Spirit of God. Our hearts become the voice of a groaning creation going up to God. And He that searches the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit. What a word is this! What does He find? Does He find sin in it? No; but the mind of God: that is like Christ. He comes and searches my heart, and there He finds the mind of God - what is "according to God"! It is the Spirit of God in me feeling things in divine love as in Christ, and He carries up the groan to God. Where does it come from? From the Spirit of God. While I am waiting for the redemption, I have got the relative condition of son and heir, which makes me the vessel of

the sympathies of God, having a link to connect me with it all. The very consciousness and knowledge of all this blessedness make me conscious of the state of the groaning creation till the power of God delivers it. I do not know what to ask for, or how to ask, but I do know this, that God makes all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are called according to His purpose. I cannot pierce through the trammels of evil in the world, but God holds the thread. I have got the Master of the whole scene, although I have a heart that cannot enter into all, and He makes everything work for good.

Now God is for me. This is not a work in me, but for me: not God in me, but God for me. What shall we say to these things? When Paul has considered the whole case, felt the joy and felt the evil, well, he says, I know through the Holy Ghost that He has given His Son for me when a sinner; and the conclusion is, God is for me. There may be plenty of adversaries, but what of that? God is for me.

One word for the closing part, to point out that what we get in it is good for us, and nothing of the work in us. It is the gift of the blessed Son of God. "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" In the gift of His Son God gave the very best thing in heaven already, and of course He will give me everything else that is good for me. Do I want a proof that He loves me in something less? He freely gives me all things. That is all very well; but what about sin? Here God is not giving, but it is God that justifies; who shall condemn? Thus I have learnt it all. There is an end to that question. All is well. But death is in the way, and life is awfully dangerous. Death? Christ died; O then death is the very best thing for me. Life? He is my life. Height? Christ is on the right hand of God, the very place where I learn all the blessing. Depth? He has descended into it for me. What shall separate me from the love of Christ? "Of Christ," because He is a man. The moment I say Christ, I take it from the throne of God to the depths of earth, and from the earth up again to the throne, and I find nothing but Christ!

Further, nothing can separate me from the love of God. All else is a creature, and God is necessarily stronger than that which He has created. It is divine love. Though Christ as man was in all my circumstances passing through the power of evil - all I might think would separate me from His love. He has come into and triumphed over everything that might be against me.

Thus we have had the Spirit as the power of life to walk in righteousness; then taking part with me in all the sorrows of the path here; and, finally, we have been brought to "God for us." What I especially desire is that our hearts should apprehend what it is to have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, because we are washed by the blood of Christ. Are you going to use your body for sin, if it is the temple of the Holy Ghost? There are a thousand things flowing from it. Even the resurrection of the body is because of His dwelling in me. This is what characterises Christianity. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." May we abide in the consciousness of this, knowing that Christ dwells in us, and we in Him.

"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9, 10.)

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