

What Does the Coming of the Comforter Mean?

by John Nelson Darby

The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the coming of the Comforter and the role of the Holy Ghost in Christianity.

Scripture: John 14:16

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "The Church"

Description

John Nelson Darby addresses the significance of the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that He could not come until Christ was glorified. Darby argues against the notion that the Church is merely a continuation of Israel, asserting that the Church was formed from those called out from Israel after Christ's resurrection. He highlights the essential role of the Holy Spirit in establishing the Church and the distinctiveness of Christianity, which is characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers. The sermon serves as a defense of the scriptural basis for understanding the Church's identity and the timing of the Holy Spirit's arrival.

Transcript

{Serving as a reply to the second article on "The Church in the Old Testament" in "Our Banner" (an American Periodical), April 16, 1877.}

{Bible Herald, 1877, pages 223-256.}

I have no pleasure in mere controversy, and as I noticed Mr G.'s previous article* on the church only at the request of those interested in the subject, I take notice of his reply for the same reason, but only of what refers to the main subject, which is all-important.

{*See Bible Witness and Review, Vol, 1, p. 240.}

I have no doubt, though unacquainted with him, that Mr. G. is a good man, and I have no wish to violate in any way the amenities of Christian charity with one who is a brother in Christ, as controversy tends to do. One should ask oneself now "Is this what I should wish it to have been when I come before the Lord? " If I should fail in this I must, anticipating, beg Mr. G. to forgive me. I have no consciousness of an ungracious feeling, but Mr G. will not deny that "What is the Church?" is an important question for us all.

I will reply, then, to his article in Our Banner of April 16, in what touches that question, and even so, I do it reluctantly. Positive truth is happier service. Mr. G. insists that the Church was Israel. That it was at first composed of Jews no one denies. God, as I said before, waiting on Israel in gracious patience, consequent withal on Christ's intercession on the cross (Luke 23:34); the third of Acts, not the second, being the reply of the Holy Ghost by the mouth of Peter thereto. This was not only addressed to Israel but about Israel, calling them as a nation to repent and Jesus would return, the words of the Holy Ghost answering to Jesus' prayer "When the times of refreshing;" ver. 19, should be "so that the times of refreshing;" ἀΐψυχοῦσιν, ἀΐψυχοῦσιν has no other sense in Greek. The Jews' repentance would be the occasion of God's intervention in their favour, and then the blessing and peace of the world promised in the prophets would be established, commonly called the millennium. But in this case there was no gathering. The Jewish authorities would not even allow the Apostle to finish his speech. But Mr. G.'s argument as to Acts 2 has no force whatever. The Apostle's sermon was addressed to the Jews, to Israel, if you will, but what has that to do with the Church being Israel? The effect of the sermon under the power of the spirit was to gather out of Israel, three thousand, to form, so far, the church - to begin it among that people, though the doctrine of it was not taught till Paul's time. He was a minister of the church to fulfil or complete the word of God (Col. 1:26). But to argue that the church was Israel, because Israel was preached to, and many gathered out of Israel to form it, has no possible force. If a missionary gathers a body of christians from among the heathen in India, converted to God by grace, are they still heathens, and christianity a continuation of their religion? No doubt they were by natural birth, as the Jews were Jews, but to say that the church is heathen it absurd. Those called out from Israel who were saved from that untoward generation, were the church, or assembly of God. Israel remained Israel, and was, for the time, hardened in the heart and cut off.

Mr. G. must allow me to complete the quoted prophecy of Joel, "The promise is unto you and to your children." There Mr. G. stops. The Apostle adds "and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord your God shall call." Now that God did not reject the Jews till they had refused to receive a glorified Christ, as well as crucified a humbled one (a measure of sin and unbelief completed in the stoning of Stephen, who sums up their conduct from Abraham to that day; where also Paul, the minister of the church, first comes upon the scene), is quite true, and hence that God waited and did not reveal all His counsels as to the union of Jew and Gentile. But the language omitted by Mr. G. throws it open in principle, and if it does not, why does he omit it?

The promise was given to Israel especially, but by adding all flesh, the prophecy was in prospect carried out farther. It is the accustomed term for this in the Old Testament. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." "By His fire and by His sword shall the Lord plead with all flesh." The "specially to Israel" does not exclude this. He was to be a light to lighten (to reveal) the Gentiles, and the glory of His people, Israel. Let my reader consult Jer. 25:15-33, where the Lord declares He will plead with all flesh, beginning with Jerusalem (18-29, see Num. 16:22). So to Christ, power is given over all flesh. But let the reader only take a concordance, and he will at once see the force of these words, its absolute universality, and where needed, contrast with Israel. He will readily understand why Mr. G. omits it, and what is far better, how God uses it, and how, while preserving the promises to Israel, it extends blessing and judgment to all, and putting the Jew first, goes out to the Greek.

Repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name, beginning at Jerusalem. So even Paul, who knew no difference, for that all had sinned, yet went to the Jew first, and also to the Greek, saying that Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to

the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written. Till the Jews rejected a glorified Christ the patience of God dealt with them as a nation for repentance, and gathered the members of His assembly from that people, calling then Cornelius by Peter, that all might be one, but using Paul as the instrument for unfolding the doctrine of the assembly and the ministration of the Gospel to the nations, a mission the others gave up entirely to him (Gal. 2).

Did Mr. G. see the Lord's coming and the setting up of Christ's kingdom by power, I might go further into this. Let him here only ponder this, that the little stone, cut out without hands, did not become a mountain to fill the whole earth, till after it had executed judgment. The knowledge of this would help in the understanding of Joel* and interpret many passages now obscure and falsely applied by those who do not see it. But I must now confine myself to my reply.

{*Thus in Joel it is before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes that there is deliverance in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and with this chapter 3 is connected.}

As regards my alleged mistake of taking organization for privilege (and christian privileges do occupy the greatest part of my paper), I shall only quote Mr G.'s words, "To them (the Jews) pertained the adoption, glory, covenant, giving of the law, service, and the promises (Rom. 9:4). Nothing more can be said of the church now." Any one can decide whether this applies to organization or privileges, and whether it is not an assertion that they had all that the church has now.

As to the coming of the Holy Ghost, the most essential point of all, I do mean to say that the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, did not come till after Christ was glorified. The word of God is positive and express as to this, and it is what is at the root of the question. What I have said about this, or rather what the blessed Lord and the word have said of it is quite plain. The Holy Ghost as God, is everywhere. "He inspired," I said, "the prophets, and wrought all through the divine history." But and if Christ and the divine word tell us the truth, we must so believe, the Comforter could not come until Christ went away and was glorified. "Christ," I remarked, "had created the world, but He did not come till the incarnation." "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father"

I shall repeat what the word of God says on this point as it is the real and vital question. It is a scriptural fact which constitutes Christianity, and the denial of the plain scriptural statements on the subject, or the neglect of them, is what has judaized Christianity, plunged the assembly of God into the world, and made it as it now stands, the powerless prey to infidelity. The death and resurrection of Christ are the foundations of Christianity, the presence of the Holy Ghost as personally come into the world, that is, to believers in it, is the essential living power and characteristic of Christianity and the Christian.

And I add now, that Christ glorified as man, received Him (the Holy Ghost) afresh when so glorified, to shed Him forth on His disciples. Christ had not received Him to this end till after His ascension, Acts 2:33 "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear."

I am not going to reason as Mr. G. does, but to quote the word of God. Mr. G. speaks of "pouring out," as giving in abundance, and that such only is the difference. When was the Spirit of God poured out before Pentecost? But I will quote the texts, and to them I can claim the submission of every child of God. I have done so, but I press this point as a cardinal one, constituting Christianity as revealed in the New Testament.

In John 7 Christ not then showing Himself to the world according to the yet unfulfilled type of the feast of Tabernacles, says on the special, last (eighth) and great day of the feast, " If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," and the Evangelist adds: "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet (given), for Jesus was not yet glorified."

Compare Acts 2 already quoted. There is no question of a greater or fuller measure. What is said is the Holy Ghost (ἅγιος πνεῦμα... ἅγιος πνεῦμα) was not yet. That is, as come and dwelling in believers. So the baptizing with the Holy Ghost was the second of the two great works of Christ. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but He on whom, as man, the Holy Ghost descended and abode, He it was who would baptize with the Holy Ghost. This took place, as regards the one hundred and twenty, on the day of Pentecost, according to Christ's word (Acts 1:5), and Christ being exalted and glorified according to John 7 shed forth the Holy Ghost according to the promise in Joel.

The difference of the Spirit in the prophets, and the presence of the Holy Ghost as come down from Heaven, is clearly marked in 1 Pet. 1:11-13: "The Spirit of Christ which was in them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory (glories) which should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

There was a testimony beforehand, by the Spirit of Christ in the prophets, but with the gospel the things were, not brought, but reported with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and then we are told that the things will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, for which we must wait. The distinction, then, is perfectly scriptural, and the distinction made in scripture, that distinction being marked by "sent down from heaven." But further I add the positive texts (John 14:16), "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter that He may abide with you for ever;" (25, 26), "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

But the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things." (15:26), "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth." (16:7), "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; But if I depart, I will send Him unto you, and when He is come." And the Acts and Epistles confirm these plain testimonies. The former I have quoted.

I add (19), "We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost is." The same words as in John 7. So Eph. 1:13, "In whom also, after that ye believed ye were sealed by that Holy Spirit of promise" - till Christ was glorified, promised, but not come; but now come, and given to believers as a seal. Their unity was the unity of the Spirit; there was one Spirit and one body. They were not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God by which they were sealed to the day of redemption (Gal. 3:2), "They had received the Spirit by the hearing of faith." (1 Cor. 12), "All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will."

"By one Spirit they were all baptized into one body." Christianity is the ministration of the Spirit, in contrast with the law (2 Cor. 3). And it is a great mistake to suppose that miraculous gifts and prophesy were the special and most important effects. The disciples were not to rejoice that demons were subject unto them, but rather that their names were written in heaven. Men might have supernatural power (1 Cor. 13), without being converted, and in the Old Testament we have instances of it, but if sealed with the Holy

Ghost, it was as believers, and for the day of redemption.

They could then (Gal. 4) cry Abba Father, being sons by faith in Christ Jesus, they (John 16) know they are in Christ and Christ in them (1 John 4:13). They know, and that by the Spirit given to them, that they dwell in God, and God in them. His love is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given to them (Rom. 5:5). Their bodies are temples. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, helps our infirmities; we are led by the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit: He which establishes in Christ, and has anointed us is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21, 22).

He who hath wrought us for the self-same thing (the glory), is God, who hath also given us the earnest of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:5). All this is more than power and prophecy. It is the Christian state, and is contrasted (Gal. 4) with the Jewish believer consequent on accomplished and known redemption. The more the reader examines the Word, the more he will find the presence of the Holy Ghost in the believer and in the assembly, essentially and distinctively characteristic of Christianity.

I may notice one passage, as it makes a difficulty of some, John 14:17. It does not touch the question, if we take it as Mr. G. and others do, namely, that the Holy Ghost had come down on Jesus as man after His baptism, and dwelt with them in that sense, but was not in them. This only confirms what I have insisted on. The Holy Ghost coming and being in them was future: "and shall be in you." That was not yet. But the truth is, I do not believe this to be the sense of "dwelling" with them. The translators had an avowed and unhappy practise of translating the same word differently in the same sentence, as in John 5: "judgment," "condemnation," "damnation," are one identical word in Greek. So here "dwell" in ver. 17 is the same as "abide" in ver. 16. The Father was to give another Comforter who was to abide for ever with them. Christ could not; He was to go away to the Father. When sent, He was to abide with them, and be in them. Christ was there with them, but He could not abide with them; was with them, but not in them. This other Comforter would abide, and be in them. The "cannot receive" of the world is as much the present time as "abide." It is when sent. And the truth is, abides or dwells, is just as much future as present. It depends on an accent (ἰ̄¼ἰμῖ½ἰἰ̄¹ or ἰ̄¼ἰμῖ½ἰμᾶ¿-) and in the early MSS. there were no accents. But taking it in Mr. G.'s sense, the Spirit was there in Christ as man, and so with them, but in them was, on the contrary, future.

The word of God, therefore, testifies positively that the Comforter did not, and could not come, till Christ went away and was glorified. There is nothing about any previous pouring out, but a promise of doing it in the future. Nor does even shaphak mean giving in abundance, particularly, but simply pouring out. Further, in speaking of less and more, His personal coming is denied; a very weighty point. "When He shall come." He is sent, comes, wills, distributes, works, and, I repeat, Christianity is distinguished by that presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. I repeat here the immensely important truth that God's dwelling with man is the consequence of accomplished redemption. He did not with Adam, nor Abraham, nor other saints. When He had redeemed Israel out of Egypt He did. "He dwelleth between the cherubim" (See Ex. 29:45, 46). So the Holy Ghost could not come, till man sat at the right hand of God, the glorified witness that an eternal redemption was accomplished. Of this we have seen in John 7, Acts 2, John 16:7, the positive testimony. The whole character of christianity depends on it. We are not yet in the christian state and standing if we have not the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11).

Mr. G. says that the work of instituting the church is nowhere ascribed to the Spirit in scripture. That the church was not yet built or building when Christ was on earth is certain, for He says, on this rock I will build my church. Till Christ died the foundation was not laid. Here only is the church spoken of in His lifetime and as a future thing. But He died to gather together in one the children of God which were scattered

abroad, and the two characters in which the church is spoken of, body and house, are both attributed to the Spirit, baptized by one Spirit into one body, and the habitation of God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). "In whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (ἰμὶς ἕνός... ἰσμία, ἰς). There is one Spirit and one body. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, Jews or Gentiles, etc." (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Even if we come down to the low ground of external organization, Mr. G. says, "Christ instituted the Lord's supper, Christ instituted baptism." Well then, they did not exist before Christ, as so organized. But when Mr. G. says, "Christ gave the organization of the New Testament to the disciples," though the expression "the organization of the New Testament" be somewhat unintelligible, will He tell us when He did so? I read in 1 Tim. of such organization, and historical facts elsewhere connected with it, but for saying that any such were given by Christ, there is not a shadow of ground.

If by organization He means baptism and the Lord's supper, it is a proof that as He instituted them, such organization did not exist before, and it was when the Holy Ghost came they were carried out. Baptism to Christ's death could not be till He had died, and the Lord's supper is a symbol of the unity of the body of which an exalted Christ (Eph. 1:19-23) is the Head.

As to Christ not loving the church till it existed, it is false doctrine. In its fulness and completeness in God's purpose it does not exist yet, at least we trust that soul's will yet be brought in. "Yet to be made and defiled," says Mr. G. Did He not love the souls He saves now, before they existed? They were defiled in their own nature, and of these the church is made up, loved before they existed, defiled as sinners, and Christ died long ago for their purification, and they constitute the church when sealed. Christ did love the church before it existed. Did He only give Himself for what existed then? This is very sad. He gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious church without spot. What He will present to Himself certainly did not exist when He gave Himself for it. There could be no church but by His giving Himself for it. Its cleansing, in time, comes after this. He loved the church that He will present, glorious, to Himself.

This only shows how if one truth be given up, others, if touched, will crumble with it. If Mr. G. had given himself the trouble of examining the Greek in Eph. 3:4-11, he would have found that as the English proves nothing of the kind, in Greek there is no ground for what he says as to the Jews being the body (a monstrous assertion, really) at all. The word is ἰσμία ἕνός... ἰσμία, which could not exist till both were formed in one, according to chapter 2, to make of both one new man.

The concluding remarks scarcely require any on my part. There is not a word in scripture about any people using Melchisedec, not even Abraham, though he owned his greatness. Abraham acted as priest for himself continually setting up his altar, as did Isaac and Jacob, and the family altar has been generally recognized by christians. There is not a shadow of any assembly of believers, or professed believers, before the exodus. Melchisedec is introduced as a mysterious personage whose priesthood and life were coincident, not what priests were, or the great high priest is now, to intercede for the ignorant or out of the way, or to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin as the apostle insists; but to give, and to bless the Most High God, and Abraham from the Most High God, when through His power he was already wholly victorious. And if Mr. G. had taken the pains to read that one of the songs of Zion (Ps. 110) to which he alludes, he would have found that it was setting Christ at God's right hand till His enemies should be His footstool; and that the sending the rod of His power out of Zion is future. Then His enemies will be made His footstool. Hence when the apostle shows that there arises another priest not of the order of Aaron, Christ being that

priest, he makes the present exercise of His priesthood exclusively according to the analogy of Aaron's, though He be not of his order (Heb. 8:9), because Christ is yet sitting at the right hand of God, and His enemies, if scripture is to be believed, not yet made His footstool. A priest is not the priest of a church,* unless in popery, that I know of. The essential character of the present time is that Christ is not sitting on His own throne, but on His Father's, at God's right hand, till His enemies be made His footstool, and the Holy Ghost sent down while He is there "expecting," having by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified through it. I do not admit that there was an order known as elders when Moses returned to Israel in Egypt. There were elders, but no order known as elders. If there were, let the institution be shown. There was one established when Jethro came (Ex. 18, Deut. 1), but this was subsequent; and a special one of seventy (Num. 11:17). But as to this I am quite indifferent. The congregation was not formed, but they were a separated people, and if there be no testimony of it, for aught I know there may have been some known elders, but no such order is spoken of. Nor even in the New Testament is any appointment of elders spoken of amongst the Jews.

{*The church is never spoken of unless in Heb. 12:22, where the whole heavenly and earthly order is spoken of. }

But if there were a congregation connected with Melchisedec, of which there is not the slightest trace, or that there were elders in Israel organized as an order among the people, which is not said either, what has that to do with union with Christ by the Holy Ghost, with the glorious head of the body, or even with the habitation of God through the Spirit, formed consequent on Christ having broken down the middle wall of partition, and set aside Judaism? Were Melchisedec's fancied congregation members of Melchisedec's body? Yet that is what constitutes the church in its truest character: "the body of Christ."

How the habit of mere human arrangement blots out of the mind the divinely given revelations of a glorified Christ at God's right hand, and a body united to Him by the Holy Ghost. A priest must have a church, an utterly unscriptural thought, instead of a glorified Christ and union with Him by the Holy Ghost; Christ, too, fancied to be exercising His power as King now, instead of sitting at God's right hand expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.

I trust no harsh word has escaped me. I do not deny it is an exercise of patience to go over and over again what constitutes the characteristic existence of the church, and christianity itself commencing from Pentecost. My only consolation is that it brings out, clearer and clearer, for christians, great fundamental truths of their own standing. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.

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