

1 Corinthians 1 Notting Hill

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the distinction between the true Church and mere profession of faith, emphasizing the Lordship of Christ and the responsibility of believers.

Scripture: Acts 2:36, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, Ephesians 4:4-5, Philippians 2:10-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 2 Timothy 2:19, 1 Peter 2:9, Jude 1:4

Topics: "Lordship Of Christ", "The Church vs. Profession"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the distinction between the true Church and the broader profession of Christianity in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 1. He highlights that while all who call upon the name of Jesus are treated as Christians, there is a critical difference between being part of the Church, called saints, and merely professing faith. Darby points out that the Apostle Paul addresses the Corinthians as the Church of God, acknowledging their gifts while also preparing to correct their errors. He stresses the importance of recognizing Christ's Lordship and the responsibility that comes with being part of the Church, especially in light of the challenges faced by the early Christians. The sermon serves as a reminder of the need for discernment in the faith community and the ongoing relevance of these principles today.

Transcript

The first thing noticeable here is the distinction between the Church and the profession of Christianity, as shewn in the address of the epistle; it is, "unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, . . . called . . . saints" (not, called to be saints), "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's."

In the latter part, you have the calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, which is the character of one who professes to be a Christian; that is profession; whereas you get others before, distinctly as the assembly, and set apart, as saints by calling.

Ques. Would that embrace the whole of profession?

Yes. He looks, no doubt, at all as sincere, and treats them as Christians, unless proved otherwise; still, you get these two characters, the church and the professing body; and I see that running all through the epistle.

Ques. Does that bring out the responsibility of profession then?

That will follow. As you go through the epistle, I think he makes the thing most distinct; only remember that he assumes them to be Christians, unless proved to be otherwise.

Ques. But he says, their Lord, and ours?

Precisely; that is the very thing.

Ques. Profession and the church of God were, then, coincident?

They were very nearly so. In the beginning, absolutely so; because the Lord added to the church such as should be saved, and He took care that it should be real.

Ques. Would not the expression, "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints," apply to all?

No; or why should he make the difference?

Ques. Is this the only epistle where the expression occurs?

So far as I know.

Ques. Is it not, then, very remarkable, considering the state of things at that time?

Yes; and nowhere is it so clearly brought out as in 1 Corinthians. If you look at verse 8, he says, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless" - not merely safe, but blameless - "in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and then he sets about to blame them for everything.

114 Ques. But what is the objection to considering the former part of the second verse as referring to the church at Corinth, and the latter part of it as extending to every true believer?

He does suppose all of them true, but He puts in another character besides that of the church, and "called saints." He addresses them not as the church, but as individuals. You get much the same distinction in Ephesians 4: one body and one spirit; and then, one faith, one baptism. You get the one body clearly enough in our tenth chapter.

Ques. Would the salutation of verse 3 apply to those who called upon the name of the Lord?

Yes; still, he makes a difference, and that with another title.

There is one great point of instruction. Those who called upon the name of the Lord were, of course, in the assembly, as a general rule; yet the Spirit of God is providing for a day when the difference should be yet more developed, and so He uses that different title in Scripture in order to provide for the coming time, that the two things might be separate.

Ques. In Ephesians 1, it is to the "saints" and to the "faithful"; would you also see a difference there?

No; except as he gives a specific character to them, and so he does in Colossians; here it is "saints, with all that," etc. In Ephesians and Colossians they are the same class of people, but he gives them a specific character, it is only emphatic there, after all.

At Corinth, as a general rule, they are supposed to be real Christians; only, as was said just now, by separating the characters, he has left a statement which would apply wherever such characters went.

In Jude, you distinctly get false brethren creeping in. I do not think we have any idea how provisional everything is until the Lord comes.

The first man was provisional; but it was the Second Man in whom all was to be settled; and so it is, I believe, with the church.

There is another thing to notice, and that is, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father," (one Father), "and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Practically, the Lordship of Christ is overlooked; it is the common address of the epistles, only it is lost sight of in Christendom.

115 There is a vagueness that has not seized the difference between the relationship of God as our Father, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ over His people.

Ques. The two meanings of the term "Lord" have often led to dangerous confusion; as, for instance, in "Smith's Bible Dictionary," "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), where this is applied to making Jesus, Jehovah in resurrection!!

Wherever we have administration in a general way, we have the Lord.

Ques. Is that why, in 2 Timothy, it says, "them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"?

Yes; and also in calling on the name of the Lord as sent to Israel; whosoever did so, should be saved.

Ques. And so it was in Genesis?

Yes, it was. I look on it now quite practically for us, not that there is anything special in the doctrine, but the Lordship of Christ is very little thought of - that there is a Person ordering and directing everything. Paul besought the Lord thrice; and he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

All administration is referred to the Lord.

Ques. So chastening, too, in the end of chapter 11, "chastened of the Lord"?

Just so. Whereas I am a child with God our Father; personally, I am a child.

Ques. Does not the Lordship of Jesus run all through this epistle?

Yes; you get it in the gifts; the power was by the Holy Ghost, but the administration was by the Lord. And, still, it is one God that works all in all.

Ques. But is not, "our Lord Jesus Christ" distinctly a church character?

If you put in "our," it is; but He is Lord of all, Lord both of the dead, and of the living. Again, "Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Ques. How is He the Lord of the dead?

Because He has gone down among the dead, and got a title over them, and He will bring them up, to judgment or to glory.

He is Lord of all. His Lordship extends over everything; all things shall bow to Him, things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth. "Under the earth," in Philippians, should be "infernal"; it is not

simply, "under the earth," as in Revelation 5:13.

116 Ques. What is the difference between Master and Lord?

Master, would be more intimate, I should say.

Ques. Is there a difference between Lord and despotes (despot)?

Yes, there is; despotes is more the master of a slave. Despotes is used in Jude, where the one who bought them is denied. Christ has bought everybody, and they will not own His authority. The word is only used five times in reference to the Lord: Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4; and Revelation 6:10.

Ques. How do you distinguish between Lord and Head?

They are two thoughts. Christ is Head over all things to the church; and He is, too, Lord of all. He is our Lord, and we own Him, Lord, for ourselves; while He is also Lord over everybody that will not own Him.

Ques. One of the great errors of the Corinthians was their reasoning from the possession of gifts, through the Holy Ghost, to claiming a freedom in the use of them without responsibility?

Yes; and I see moderns now taking the same ground, though the Holy Ghost set it aside long ago.

Ques. Is not the denial of Jesus as Lord the great root of the apostasy, while acknowledging Him as here?

Only it goes much further; that is the way of its coming in, but not the way of its going out.

You get the coming in of it in Jude, and its going out in John, and there they deny everything. John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." That is the full character of apostasy, openly leaving us; but that goes a long way beyond Jude.

Ques. What would answer to John now?

Denying Christ altogether.

Ques. Socinians and such people?

Well, it is more open infidels. There are, nowadays, numbers who deny Christianity altogether.

Ques. But in John they had made a profession; and after they had owned Christ as Lord, they denied Him?

Just so; but in Jude they were still within, and they were practically denying authority, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. In John, you have the additional element of their going out, that is open apostasy.

117 Ques. What would you say, then, of those who "separate themselves, . . . having not the Spirit"?

They did not absolutely separate themselves in an outward way, because they were "spots in your feasts of charity"; but they set up to be something like the Pharisees. Now in John, not only had they gone out, but they denied the Father and the Son, and also, that Jesus is the Christ.

That is public infidelity after profession. A Pharisee set up to be a superior kind of Christian, and then he shewed his superiority by licence; of course, among the Jews, it was to be a better kind of Jew.

Ques. At the agape, love-feast or feast of charity, was the Lord's supper taken, too?

Not necessarily; though very often they might have it at the end. In Corinthians, they brought their suppers, too, that poor and rich might be together at what we call a tea-meeting; a very nice thing in its proper place; only, in Corinth, we find they began to abuse it, and then the two were disconnected by authority; 1 Cor. 11:33, 34.

Ques. In John, it is final; it is the "last time"?

Yes, he says so; whereas Jude takes in the whole time; when he thought to write to them of the common salvation, he had to turn and exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. And then he refers to these men that had slipped in, crept in unawares; they are those of whom Enoch testified, that such were to be judged at the coming of the Lord.

So you get in Cain, natural evil; in Balaam, ecclesiastical evil more; and in Core, rebellion; the three characters of evil; natural, ecclesiastical, and apostate; and in Korah's rebellion, they perish.

Ques. Would "having not the Spirit" refer to their denying the one body and one Spirit, or to their acting in their own will?

To their acting in their own will. They had come into the thing that was there, and in the judgment they are treated as still in. The final judgment is on them, but they had slipped in. In Jude these are treated as there, among them; the character of all of them is that they "kept not their first estate."

In Peter, it is more wickedness; he speaks of "angels that sinned"; Jude, of "angels which kept not their first estate."

118 Ques. Is the separation in Jude a pretentiousness?

Yes, that is just what it is.

Ques. And in John, is it public?

Well, in John, they have actually gone out.

Ques. What, then, is the difference as to the angels?

In Jude, it is in their leaving where they were; and in Peter, it is just the fact of their sinning.

Ques. Would you make a distinction between the angels now in chains and those wicked spirits, devils, against whom we have to wrestle?

Yes, the latter are not in chains.

Then, in 1 Corinthians, we have the principles of the church as established here, just when the church was going wrong. "Ye come behind in no gift," and "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ," you get the Holy Ghost, and that they were waiting for Christ's coming. He puts them first of all in their distinct, positive place, acknowledging the good things that were in them; he always owns the good he can before he begins to

reprove anything. We also ought to do so; it opens the heart to receive rebuke. It is interesting to see this in all his epistles, except the one to the Galatians.

This epistle is looking at developed evil, and it is very profitable to see how he settles things, while distinct principles remain unshaken. You have here the Holy Ghost, the waiting for the Lord, and the certainty of being blameless - the whole Christian security and blessing. I do not say the enjoyment of communion, but the actual conferred blessing.

Ques. But that which he commends is all on God's side?

Yes, it is.

Ques. There is nothing like, as in 1 Thessalonians, "work of faith, and labour of love," etc.?

No, nothing of that kind.

Ques. But the coming behind in no gift is seen in all its activity in chapter 14?

Yes; and a pretty mess they made of it, talking two at a time! The testimony of Christ was confirmed in them by these gifts being there. The testimony of Christ is abstract, but gifts were given as confirmation that they had received it. Only the bestowal of gift incurred responsibility.

Ques. Did it embrace their testimony in the world?

No.

119 Ques. What is "all utterance"?

The power of speaking.

Ques. Would a person in a bad state of soul speak so?

Yes, he might. It is not what I should expect, but the Holy Ghost might take up such an one, in any given case - like, say, that of Balaam, though this was an extreme case.

Ques. But could such praise at the Lord's supper?

I could not say they could not, though I should not expect it. I could understand such a case in a lecture or in a preaching, but at the Lord's supper there is a difficulty. If such a person represented the assembly, you could not tell what God might put in his heart, but the natural effect would be that he would express more what was in his own heart. At Corinth, they were speaking with tongues through vanity.

Ques. Is not verse 9 emphatic, "The fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"; and does it not bear on that?

Yes, into what else are they called? It is the very essence of a Christian's place - fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ques. What is that really?

That we are brought into the same place with Christ; only, adoring Him when we get there.

The nearer we are brought to God, the more we shall own that Christ is God. Still, that is what He has done; He has made man's place in His own Person, and we are brought into it, predestinated to be ultimately conformed to the image of His Son: "He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." He is one of the company, only as the Head of it, He is pre-eminent in every thing. Remember that. Moses and Elias were in the same glory with Jesus, but when Peter would put them on a level, Moses and Elias disappear at once, and God says: "This is my beloved Son, hear him." That is what has been so lost.

Ques. Has the word 'called,' in verse 9, a qualifying sense?

Just this, that God has given them communion with Christ, that is what God has called us to, to be in Christ's place, with Him. John 17 (except the first few verses, and the last three verses of the chapter) lays the ground of it; it puts Christians into the same place with Christ and with the Father, and then with the world.

120 Ques. Has not this "fellowship of his Son" an especial reference to the assembly?

It has to the individuals who compose the assembly.

Ques. I thought it had special reference to their communion as gathered to Him?

Yes; but you must take them up as individuals; they were called as such.

Ques. But is not the point here, to shew their responsibility to Christ as Lord?

Well, I do not think Christ is ever presented as Lord of an assembly.

Ques. Is it not the standard by which Paul is going to test their state at Corinth?

Yes; he is putting their place before them, and then judging them by it.

Ques. Will you enlarge a little on Christ not being the Lord of an assembly?

Well, He is the Head of the body - the Church.

Ques. And Son over His house?

No. In Hebrews 3:6, it is, "Christ, as Son over his [God's] house," though I know you have "own" in the English version.

Ques. But we have "in the Lord," often?

That is another thing altogether.

Ques. May you not address Him as Lord when you are praying in the assembly?

Yes, because each individual may correspond with that. But it is not specific relation.

Ques. What is the title of authority for Christ in the assembly?

He is Lord of those who compose it.

The first thing is to ascertain whether this is a fact or not.

I was led to notice the difference gradually, and I found there was no such thing in the Word, as "Lord" of the assembly.

Ques. There is the Lord's table?

I know there is; but there it is used just in the very way to shut out communion. In chapter 10, when he speaks of communion, it is the communion of the blood of Christ; but when he speaks of jealousy, he says, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy," there it is changed to Lord. We have fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and every Christian owns Him Lord, or he is not a Christian. The word 'Lord' never has the character of communion: communion with the Lord is a wrong idea, it is a confusion of mind. The moment I say Lord, I am looking up to somebody above me.

121 Headship is of Christ, and it is a much more intimate thing.

Ques. I should be glad if you would define a little more the difference between, "all that . . . call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and others. You said that was profession, and yet might include real Christians?

It is profession, and there might be hypocrites. I have no objection to putting them all on their responsibility. Take anybody who says he is a Christian, and ask him, Are you dead to sin? I affirm the responsibility distinctly, and the professing body will be judged according to its profession as the house of God.

Ques. Might we say that this epistle gives us the ordering of the assembly everywhere?

Remember, profession is not the church; calling on the Lord might be where there is no assembly at all. Profession at that time was a most excellent thing, but now it has become a very base thing.

Ques. Is this written with a view to the latter-day condition of things?

It provides for it, a priori, though left in that way.

Ques. Then it would not be separate instruction?

No. Principles are always applicable, but if you confound the then state of the church, with its condition now, you make a difficulty. To separate then from the professing body was wrong; but now I am to separate from very much that is there. In Isaiah 51, Abram was alone, and God called him, and blessed him, and increased him; but in Ezekiel 33:21, etc., God judges Israel because they take that ground, and say, "Abraham was one, and he inherited the land," etc.

Ques. It says, "with all that in every place"?

Yes; it takes in everybody that calls himself a Christian.

Ques. But the Holy Ghost wrote it for these days as well as for those, did He not?

It was written as a principle that embraces these days as well as those days, only you must look elsewhere for guidance as to the right use of it.

Ques. But are you called upon now to go out of the house?

No; you cannot go out of the house, if you try.

Ques. What introduced the actual state of profession?

122 It gradually grew up. It began quite early, and the instant the apostles went, the whole thing went totally. It is just so with everything that God originally set up right. In every instance, the first thing man has done, has been to ruin it altogether. Adam fell. Noah got drunk.

A law was given, and they made a golden calf.

Priests were appointed, and they offered strange fire.

Solomon's royalty was established in peace, but he loved many strange women, and the kingdom was broken up. Nebuchadnezzar was made supreme, and he cast three faithful children into the fire. God's patience has gone on with His saints, but I believe it is just the same thing in the church of God. As soon as the apostles were gone, the whole thing became corrupted. People are writing books to shew how others have departed from the truth; but the ground I have taken is, it is not that the church has departed, but that the church is the departure. I mean, of course, what is commonly called the church - the professing church.

Ques. I suppose Paul hindered it for a while?

Yes; but you must remember that the Pope is the successor of Peter, not of Paul.

I mean the church, so-called, always was the departure. If you want to get a history of villainy, violence, and corruption, you must go to the professing church for it, not to heathenism. And it became so intolerable that natural conscience rose up against it. It went on, and on, and on, i.e., what is called the church historically; and that itself was the departure from Christianity. And that is true of all that you get recorded from the apostles' time.

As Paul said, "after my decease" this and that shall happen. The mystery of iniquity was already at work, but there was then spiritual energy to make head against it; when Paul was gone, there was not.

Ques. Did you mean that the church corrupted everything?

No; but the so-called church was the corruption. It was in the church itself that the clergy were substituted for the Spirit as the power of ministry; and the sacraments for absolute acceptance by God. I mean the historical church after Paul had gone.

Ques. Is that what those became who called upon the name of the Lord?

Quite so. The apostle had sacraments, and elders, too, and they are very serviceable in their place; but while they may constitute an outward thing, they are not my place before God, and my place is not in virtue of them, though they are right in themselves. They are institutions from Christ; but I am in Christ, and that as down here. What is essential to my existence as a Christian is, that I am in Christ and Christ is in me.

123 But in the historical church, they got the forgiveness of sins by baptism (and baptism is all right in itself), and they had nothing after; they had no idea of a man being perfected in Christ.

Nowadays, take, say, the Evangelical Alliance; it makes the clergy and sacraments to be the essence of Christianity, and therefore it will not receive Quakers, and so-called Plymouth Brethren, because they reject both clergy and sacraments.

Ques. Is there not also a positive work of Satan going on by imitation, as well as by the departure and the corruption of what is really good, and is not all this shewn by the "tares," and by the "foolish virgins," and finally, by the "great whore"?

I fully admit that; heresies had, and have, their part, ending one way in antichrist, and otherwise in Babylon.

Ques. You mean Revelation 13 and Revelation 17?

Yes.

Ques. Is there, in any of the fathers, any trace to be found of our being "perfected for ever"?

No; not a bit; and I have gone all through them. They got forgiveness through baptism, and then were at their wits' end to know what to do with sins committed afterwards.

Ques. But if the very essence of Christianity was lost with the passing away of the apostles, what an absurdity it must be to talk about the bulwarks of the Reformation?

Well, the Reformers brought out justification by faith, but as to the church, they knew nothing about it.

There are three distinct positions in which Christ is viewed: on the cross, working redemption; then, at the Father's right hand, sending the Holy Ghost; and lastly, He is coming again. At the Reformation, the first was owned, and justification by faith was declared, giving the value of what Christ had done on the cross, and that much clearer than is now done by most of the evangelical people; but the other two positions of Christ were unknown. His coming again the Reformers rejected as heresy. In reality, this last truth makes the first all the clearer.

Of course, everybody owns that Christ will come again in some way or other, even if it is only to judge the quick and the dead; but Protestants at large, as well as Rome, ridicule the idea that the Lord will come as we are now expecting Him.

124 The thing the church of Rome is faulty in, is not so much foundation truth, as the application of it, and that is as faulty for us as if it were in itself wrong. They own the Trinity, and Christ's humanity, and propitiation, but not substitution; but when they come to the way God applies it, they stop His channel, and open their own, which is sacraments and work.

They talk about the unity of the body, but in a way that is false, for it is the use they make of it that really denies it.

Ques. The church of Rome is not only a corruption of truth, but it is also an imitation of truth?

It is both. If you take the trouble to inquire about what they say of catholicity, the greatest number of Christians is outside of them. In their reckoning, they deny the Greek churches altogether, though these include some sixty or seventy millions.

In itself, Rome is the greatest scene of barbarism in the world. Look at its history, and you will find that as soon as one pope put another pope out, everything was called into question; notwithstanding infallibility, he broke all the ordinances of his predecessor.

Ques. And Christendom at large owes its condition very much to not seeing what the true church is?

Just so. And we know how bad its condition is. If Paul came, and had not been ordained, he could not preach; but if the devil came, and had been ordained, he could preach.

Ques. Is it important to see that Paul does not treat the Corinthians as corrupters, but rather as being corrupted?

He takes care first to own them as the church of God, before He begins to blame them.

Ques. How soon after the apostles' departure would you say the evil came boldly in?

Not "after" at all, but before they were gone, only they resisted it. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work," Paul says; only, while it was working there was, so far, apostolic power to stop it.

Ques. In verse 10, You have again the Lordship of Jesus?

Yes; you find it all through the epistle; it is the common title here; of course, He is Lord everywhere.

125 Ques. Is it special in connection with divisions?

Well, he uses the name "Lord," as the ground of exhortation, whatever it is about.

Then he puts down man's wisdom altogether: "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," and that is what takes the place of human wisdom.

Ques. Does he not put it down by the cross?

Yes; by the foolishness of preaching a crucified Christ, only that is a little lower on.

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