

# 2 Corinthians 5

by John Nelson Darby

*John Nelson Darby's sermon on 2 Corinthians 5 emphasizes the transformative power of Christ's love and the believer's responsibility to share the gospel in light of eternal glory and judgment.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:1

**Topics:** "New Creation", "Ministry of Reconciliation"

## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on 2 Corinthians 5, emphasizing the eternal weight of glory and the transformative power of Christ's love. He discusses the new creation in Christ, the responsibilities of believers, and the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Darby highlights that while we groan in our earthly bodies, we are assured of a heavenly dwelling, and that our ministry is driven by the love of Christ. He contrasts the gospel of humiliation with the gospel of glory, illustrating how both reveal God's grace and purpose for humanity.

## Transcript

We have had the subject of ministry, and the vessel for it, and he has spoken of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and now we have the purpose of God as to the servant, the glory of God by us, and next the way that all this bears upon the responsible state; and then, lastly, we have the love of Christ constraining him. We have the whole scope of this in the new creation, just touching on Ephesian ground, and then the whole basis of it in Christ Himself. First, we have the counsels of God in bringing us to that weight of glory; then he takes it up and contemplates it on the responsible side; and then comes the love of Christ constraining him. All link with this world is broken by the death of Christ; and at the end of chapter 5 the ground and basis of all that in the gospel of Christ's death. It is not then the gospel of the glory; incarnation and death are the two great facts.

333 In the opening of the chapter, he says, "we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be, that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life," v. 1-4. He has this death, and now he says the thought of God goes beyond all that, and I have a "building of God, a house not made with hands"; but I am not tired and weary, wishing to be unclothed, and done with all the trouble; but what I am looking for is, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. That is, the power of life

comes and swallows me up entirely, so that all that is mortal is lost in life.

Verse 3 is supposing that these are Christians: there is no thought about losing the reward. "Naked" is simply what Adam was before God clothed him. It is quite true that all those at the great white throne are naked of Christ, though each has got his body; this is not mortality swallowed up of life, but, on the contrary, it is going into the second death.

Verse 3 brought in the idea of death. I am groaning and burdened, but then I have seen such power in Christ, that I am not weary and seeking to get out of it all. See verses 1-5. Then from this he begins the responsible side down to the end of verse 12; verses 12, 13, are transitional: and that introduces to the new creation; but it is not now responsibility, which is Romans ground. Then we have the love of Christ constrains us, and hence the committing the ministry of reconciliation to him.

As to the difference between the gospel of the glory and the gospel of the humiliation, the latter is pure grace in God, manifested in Christ here. John's writings shew God revealing Himself in Christ to man in His life down here. What we have habitually in Paul is man manifested in righteousness before God. The gospel of humiliation is perfect grace; it is God coming down here to man where he is, visiting him in his condition as such a one on earth. The gospel of the glory takes this treasure and unfolds it. In Philippians 2 we have the whole line from the time when Christ was in the form of God till He was on the cross, when, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death. There is the manifestation of God down here among men as sinners. Well, I say, here is God come right down to me in love, and if I cannot trust anybody in the world, I must trust God now. The woman that was a sinner loved much; she did not know her sins were forgiven, nor could she have explained it theologically, but she trusted Christ, and loved much; and that is the bearing of the humiliation. But in the gospel of the glory man is looked at as the old man totally set aside, yet man is in glory in virtue of the complete work that redeems us and justifies us, and gives us a place in the glory. The glory is the testimony to the efficacy of the work; the humiliation is the testimony to the greatness of the love. Of course it is all the same gospel.

334 I must have faith in Christ as a sacrifice. If I do not eat the flesh and blood, I cannot properly eat the bread come down from heaven, because I must come to God as a sinner. Death is due to the sinner; regrets will not do. We find the women weeping after Christ as He goes to the cross, but He tells them to go and weep for themselves, for judgment is coming on them. If I realise that the work of Christ for the sinner is death, then I can freely look at all the blessedness of the grace of God and enjoy it.

The gospel is both the gospel of the glory of Christ, and the gospel of the grace of God. It was grace to put the best robe on a man, and to bring him into the house. After all it is not that Christ is in glory merely, but in the riches of His grace God visits me as a sinner. If one sees a poor vile sinner, then it would be the riches of the grace that would be made conspicuous. The person of Christ comes out greatly in all that; it is not simply, Here is forgiveness for you, but "God was in Christ reconciling," and this is His person.

Then we have another thing. After saying, not for that we would be unclothed, "but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up in life," he says, "now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God." God has wrought all us Christians for the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He has not given it to us yet, but He has wrought us for it, and given us also the earnest of the Spirit. We have not it yet; God has wrought us for it and given us the earnest. This it is that gives me confidence. He calls it "our house," not my house. Thus I have two truths certain. I am wrought for it, and I know it now while here, for God has given me the Holy Ghost. Now, supposing death comes: well, it is "I am always

confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," though "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord": such is the certainty of being clothed with glory.

335 Then comes in the sad fact of death and judgment; but by getting Christ in the glory I have all I can possibly need to meet that - "willing rather" ("pleased rather," is the word) "to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." I am looking for the mortal to be swallowed up of life; but if I die, I must wait a while with Christ. As to the judgment, does it take away my confidence? Not at all; it stimulates my zeal, for I have not to think about myself, but only about other people as to that. They are all dead in sins, and so he says, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," for we must all be manifested at the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." The judgment takes effect upon them; yet Christians too shall "be manifested," and I am manifested. It refers to all. We shall "receive the things done." If Paul has built with wood, hay, and stubble, he will suffer loss; that is only an illustration. The wicked will receive the bad, and if I have gone on very poorly, I shall have the effect of that. It has all nothing to do with righteousness for me: this Christ is already. The wood, hay, and stubble are to be burned up, though that scripture has its own special connection. So he says, "Wherefore we labour (or are zealous) that, whether present or absent, we may be acceptable to him."

We are on the responsible side here: Paul says, "Whether I am dead or alive, we are all going to come before Christ." First, we have the purpose, and then the responsibility, but it does not destroy Paul's confidence - "accepted" is no question of judgment. "Therefore we labour," is what Paul is bent upon doing. We have a complete thing - security and confidence - and we gladly labour because of it - not to get it. "The terror of the Lord" is the fact itself. He says, "we persuade men." The thing the judgment sets Paul to do is to persuade men - other people who have reason to be afraid. The love of Christ constrained him. Paul, then, in the view of this, judged everything as a present thing, as it will be judged in the day of judgment. Paul and everybody must be judged, and that makes him persuade other people, for he himself must be manifested too. He adds, "We are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." It is all out before God, and I trust it is so before you. They might have charged him with being beside himself, and he says, If I am out of myself, I am with God; or if I am in myself it is for your good; that is the difference between the two states. It is wonderful how Paul did keep himself dead; and most humbling to us. Mark, it is not a question of gifts at all; but there was not one bit of flesh living: practically he was always bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus.

336 Now we go farther than responsibility into the unconsciousness of the state that people are in, which was learnt in grace; but the effect of the fulness of grace was to make him say that not merely the people had sinned, but also there was a day of judgment. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." What is the use of his going down thus into death, if men were not all there in that horrible pit? The epistle to the Romans takes up the conduct of men, and there is Christ's work. The Ephesians takes up the state of men, and then there is a new creation. And that is here: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more; therefore, if any man be in Christ, it is a new creation." We have done with man altogether. I do not know anything on the world's side of Christ's grave except this, that they are all dead in sins. Christ coming down into the world was Christ's coming to men in this life to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; but He there tested man, and the cross shews there was no ground to go upon. Now we know a dying Christ, for men would not have Him, and so everything is gone, and God does not own this world at

all. That is the way Peter meets the Jews as to the very fact: God hath exalted Him whom ye by hands of lawless men have crucified and slain, and that is where you are with God.

In interpreting "If one died for all, then were all dead," if people would get God's mind, they would not say absurd things. As for all dying with Christ, I deny it altogether, and do not admit that we must get God's mind through the Greek. It is a total departure from the apostle's argument, and contradicts the next verse. The theory is that people live and die; but "they which live" are those who are not left in that state. The next sentence is demonstrative of it: "He died for all, that they which live"; that is not all. The aorist gives the historical fact, but it does not say that the historical fact is the consequence of Christ's having died. Why did Christ go down there? It was because they were all in the pit; and then the point is that some live (not all), and if they live, they are to live to Him that died for them and rose again. If it were translated, "then all died," it would be historical. There is no consequence in it, and "then" is not time, but "consequently"; the Greek in this verse for then is *ara*, which is nowhere time. It is not consequence, though it may be a fact. The proper force of *ara* is illative in later Greek. (That is, it introduces an inference).

337 Again the whole object of the apostle too is lost by the change. Responsibility is not where I am, but what I have done. If He died, then indeed that is their state. The thing we do not find in Scripture is substitution for all. On the great day of atonement, there were two things in the sin-offering of the people - the Lord's lot and the people's lot. The Lord's lot was killed, because it met the whole character of God; God was completely glorified in Christ, and the gospel goes out to the whole world. Then with the people's lot, the sins of the people were confessed on its head; that is the scapegoat; in that I find Christ for His people, and in the other atonement, Godward. That, of course, was for those whose sins he confessed. In Romans 3 we hear of the "righteousness of God unto all, and upon them all that believe." It goes out toward all, and is upon believers. Many a one will say that Christ bore the sins of the world; but if so, how can God ever impute them? He could not, nor does Scripture ever say so. Then the Calvinist only takes the blood upon the mercy-seat; really he denies the propitiation. We have the satisfaction to God's glory, and then the gospel goes out and says, "We beseech you to be reconciled to God: come in." When they come I can say, I have something else to tell you; Christ bore all your sins, and it is impossible God can ever impute them or any one of them. An evangelist would not be right in saying, "Christ bore all your sins." If he makes it personal, God of course knows His own elect from all eternity, but we can only know them as they are shewn out in life.

338 Well, Christ died, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." Death has come in, and the whole world is the wrong side of the cross now, except believers. Christ was not crucified in the world, but lifted up from the world, and this is distinctly the ground Scripture takes. As Messiah He came to the Jews; but if we find Him lifted up from the earth, the world has rejected Him, and all God's counsels come out, and we find propitiation for the race of Adam. But the world is gone - "the world seeth me no more." Every eye shall see Him when He comes in judgment, but as to dealing with the world as such to reconcile it, it is all over. The devil is the prince of this world, and he is judged. I grant all the privileges as a nation that the Jews had; but it is no use talking now about a poor Jew, for he has lusts in his nature, just like a Gentile, and by nature he is a child of wrath, even as others. The very thing that comes out is, I have no good in me at all. I am lost already, I have sinned, and I have sin in me. This, for faith, cuts down the state of probation altogether. A state of probation is estimated by the day of judgment, and then we could not tell till the day of judgment what the result of probation would be. The testing of man now is by the presentation of the gospel, and he sees the

condition he is in before God by the gospel. But "if any man be in Christ - a new creation." It is one short absolute sentence. It brings in the new heavens and the new earth - everything to be made new.

If we trace the presentation of the gospel in the Acts, I do not think we find anything there strictly of the glory, though all recognise Christ in the glory. They are all to the Jews in Acts; even in chapter 13 it is so; but Paul there does not go beyond Peter. At Athens it is only his defence at Areopagus. We never find, in Peter's preaching, even that Jesus is the Son of God: but Paul preached this as soon as he began. The burden in Acts is, that the Jews rejected Christ whom God raised up. Peter says in Acts 5:30, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree"; but we do not find grace coming down in its completeness. The facts are there, of course, but the point is that the Jews had rejected the One whom God raised up. It is not even that He is the Son of God. When Peter says, it is really "servant" in that passage. See Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30.

339 The first thing a sinner needs is, that Christ died for him; to preach Christ in the glory involves this, but where the gospel is preached, no matter how far you go, if there is a real work it attaches you to the place where the Man you preach is. Suppose John the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," this goes right on to the new heavens and the new earth. All that His disciples reached is, "we have found the Messiah." If you preach the greatest glory, you will find souls saying, in the sense of contrast, "Why, I am all in my sins," and in that way the glory works in the place the sinner is in; it attaches itself to the condition of the man, and then reaches his conscience; it gets hold of persons where they are. If it reaches a man, he finds out his own sinfulness, and so it touches the conscience. It is striking in Acts 10, though you get the Gentiles there, it is remission of sins that is preached for "whosoever believeth in him." Peter says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it was he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." He testifies of Christ in full, and thereon preaches remission of sins, and then the Holy Ghost fell on those who heard. It is because there was a dealing with the Jews all through the Acts that we do not find the full and positive glory there. It is only in the last verses of the Acts that the Jews are given up. So we have no gospel of the glory actually preached, nor of the grace either in the strict sense of the term as we have been speaking of it. Even Stephen preached Jesus and the resurrection, not more.

340 In John 15 we have witnesses. "When the Comforter is come, whom I shall send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning"; and He says, "He shall receive of mine and shew it unto you." Well, the apostles had to add the exaltation of Christ, ascension too, to the repentance and remission of sins which were to be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem; Luke 24:47. But that is the furthest we find in the Gospels and even in the history in the Acts.

It is remarkable how we think to get something all settled and complete for a long while, and then find it is only provisional; if you take it as settling things in the world, it soon proves very provisional. Until Stephen is killed we have the fact of the Jews having rejected the person whom God has exalted. Christ intercedes

for the Jews on the cross and the Holy Ghost comes in with the testimony. "And now brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers," and so on. Grace begins at Jerusalem, and they are called to repentance; then in chapter 3 after the fact of the establishment of the church amongst the Jews (though it is striking how provisional it all is), and having told them too in chapter 2 that they had by wicked hands crucified and slain Jesus of Nazareth (judgment accordingly), next in chapter 3 he says, Repent and be converted, and then Christ shall come back again. In chapter 2 it is more individual testimony, and in chapter 3 it is wider in the character of testimony. In verse 26 it is not "raised up" in the sense of from the dead, His Son Jesus, but as Moses had said, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you," v. 22.

It is quite true God knew the Jews would not repent; and we have the church begun to be formed in chapter 2. Then, when Stephen is put to death, the offer to the Jews is over. Christ had interceded for them; Peter said, Repent and Christ will return. They would not, and it was all over. They had had the law, the prophets, the Messiah, and now the Holy Spirit. They had broken the first, stoned the second, killed Christ, and resisted the Holy Ghost. Stephen goes to heaven, and then there was an end to Christ's coming back for that time to the earth. God goes on with the Jews, but looked at as a people, it was over for them now, and the church goes on forming. God gathers in by the gospel message into the church "such as shall be saved," instead of gathering together the nation. It is the salvation of the soul, but it is the preserving those of Israel. They all thought that, if God did not spare a remnant, they would be as Sodom and Gomorrah, and that is what the Lord says to them. At the last, when the end comes, all Israel will be saved and all the wicked will be cut off. All the grace is displayed here, though all is provisional.

341 In the Acts the gospel is not developed as in the epistles, though it is the same truth so far as it goes. Death and resurrection embrace the whole thing if you regard it as to foundation. Death is the end of the old thing, and resurrection is the beginning of the new. Besides being atonement and the putting away of sins, it is the end of the world as such, and the beginning of the new creation. Satan has no more power, and neither has sin. Death is put away, so that, looked at as to the establishment of the thing, resurrection is the basis of it all. As for the church, there is much developed of blessing in various ways. When Paul states what the gospel was which he preached, it is Christ's death and resurrection. It is evident that, when a person is raised, he is brought into a new place, and that, though all the result may not be before him yet. And again it says Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection. If I were preaching among nominal Christians, I should bring out the whole scheme of what God's intentions are.

The church is relationship to the risen Christ; 'children' means relationship to the Father. They are both immense privileges. In Ephesians 1 the mystery is not exactly introduced, but God puts us in a place and as it were says, I can tell you My mind: and that is how the church comes in. Saints were children and heirs, but differed nothing from a servant; but when the Son comes out, they get the place of children. Then, being in this blessed place, He says, "I will unfold to you all that I am going to do." We might have children without glory, but not the church without Christ in glory. The basis of all is laid in resurrection. When we see Christ's place is that of Son naturally, then He takes manhood to bring us into such a place, but there is nothing to do with the church in that; as we have in John, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." There is not a word of the church as such. We are with Christ a glorified Man, members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, and there we have the mystery.

342 To look again at the gospel of the humiliation, as it is called; it gives a character which the gospel of the glory does not. The gospel of the humiliation is God in grace, whereas the gospel of the glory is man in glory - fruit of grace, of course. Romans 5 and 8 are very like to the two. In chapter 5 we have the grace of

God on to our joying in God, and higher things than in chapter 8, though we do not have the man as high. In chapter 5 it is more the revelation of what God is and of our joy in Him. But if we take people then in chapter 8, we have them higher up in Christ. They are the two passages which give the blessings that belong to Christians. In chapter 8 we have that fact of the gospel that the man is in Christ before God, but we have a great deal more of God in the first part of chapter 5. In a certain sense it is a lower part of the work, for it is only meeting the sinner's need by Christ "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." There I have what led him to say in our chapter (2 Cor. 5) that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"; but in the second part of Romans 5 we have what led him to say, "for he hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." In the gospel of the humiliation we have God in Christ, and in the gospel of the glory we have man in Christ. The latter is a glorious result of the other, no doubt, but it is a different aspect of the gospel.

Notice the omission of the "you" in verse 20 of our chapter. "Did beseech by us": there is the verb only without the pronoun: he is saying how he preaches to the world, begging them to be reconciled. What he says is, "when I preach the gospel, this is what I do": of course it means to the world. If he is an ambassador, he is an ambassador to somebody. It would be confined to the apostles to go as absolute ambassadors. There are not now ambassadors in quite the same way, but in some degree.

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