

Christ and the Spirit 1 Corinthians 2

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the wisdom of God in a mystery, the contrast between the world and God's counsels, and the Christian's position in Christ, highlighting the importance of being cast upon grace and finding glory.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:7

Topics: "Wisdom Of God", "Spiritual Insight"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound wisdom of God revealed through Christ, which was hidden from the rulers of this world, leading to the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. He explains that true understanding of God's mysteries comes only through the Holy Spirit, contrasting the ignorance of the worldly wise with the spiritual insight granted to believers. Darby highlights the importance of recognizing our responsibility before God and the necessity of being fully reliant on Christ for redemption and life. He urges Christians to evaluate whether their hearts are set on the things of God or the distractions of the world, reminding them of their glorious inheritance in Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a life that reflects the reality of being in Christ, living in the light of His grace and glory.

Transcript

We get two things very distinctly here: the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory (and that in the Person of the Christ), which the princes of this world did not know, or they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; and then we are told that, as "no man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him, so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." Therefore the world is in total ignorance of the things of God. And so we find with men as such. They may be very learned and clever; but they do not know them. Nay, it is rather their boast that man can know nothing but what he sees, together with a few conclusions which he may thence draw. And it is perfectly true too, and therefore one of the most fashionable infidelities of the day at the same time. Of all that is outside sense they are utterly ignorant; and so they must be. With all the learning and talent that is in man, if he meddles with things beyond these, he puzzles himself hopelessly. He only comes either to say, there is no God; or if there is, he does not know what that God is, just as Pilate asked, "What is truth?" He will make quantities of speculations and very clever ones, but can go no farther. Yet he has a conscience. There is a sense of being responsible to some one. There is a knowledge of the judgment of God (kept out greatly, it is true, by man's will; but God took care when man fell, that he should carry a certain knowledge of good and evil with him after eating of the forbidden fruit). So he does carry a conscience - hardened perhaps, but there it is to get hardened and perverted. You

may see it in the case of the poor woman taken in adultery: all her accusers went out one by one convicted by their own consciences.

So it has always been, whether God gives man a law, or man is lawless, still there it is - a knowledge of good and evil. And so there is an instinctive sense that there is a judgment, but utter ignorance of what God is, except that He takes account of what man does. There is some feeling, too, at times, that He is good and must be good; but there is no knowledge of the Spirit of God or of His intentions. Of course, beyond this, there is Christianity in its general truths floating about us.

205 But it is wonderfully expressed here; the wisdom of God in a mystery, hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew. There cannot be a more wonderful expression than that, for Christ is the wisdom of God as well as the power of God, and Christ they crucified. The first thing we learn is, that these counsels of God were before the world. I am now speaking not of election, but of the plans and thoughts of God before the world was. There is the distinct contrast in this verse, thoughts and counsels of God ordained for our glory before the world in which we are now living with all its responsibilities. Now these counsels, which were before the world, had been brought out consequent upon the death of Christ.

I would insist for a moment on this, that there is a world which has its own thoughts and objects; but that world crucified the Lord of glory. All that had the wisdom of this world and its power were found in opposition to Christ. The governor Pilate, the chief priests and elders of the people, Jew and Gentile, the secular power and the religious power, refused the Lord of glory. And also there is a world in which we are living which has through the cleverness and skill of man under Satan formed round man a wonderful scene so far as man's thoughts go, pleasures, sciences, and the development of the things given in creation; developing again the talents of man amid these things; wonderful combinations exhibited; great skill in turning things to man's use; beautiful music with rich harmonies: all constituting just Cain's history again. He had built his city, he had his artificers in brass and iron (and so have we now); he had harp and organ (and so have we now); pleasing himself without thinking of God, shutting God out and making the world pleasant to the natural feelings apart from Him. It was then and is now alike.

Now Christians are apt to go along with this world and all these things because they have natural powers to appreciate them. There is nothing wrong in these things of the world themselves; it is in the use man makes of them the right or the wrong consists. There is no conscience in these things, no spiritual affections in them, no moral good in them (all God's creatures, of course). Nor are the things evil. Why, in heaven we read of the harpers harping with their harps. It is the use that is made of these things that is wrong; and Christians are very apt to slip into the world's way, and not see the value of what they do, from mere natural delight in things here. It is a world that is forming pleasures for itself out of what God did create; but it does not care for God, for it rejected Him. It did not know the Lord of glory, for it is a Cain-world, with plenty of music of its own of course; and Christians take it up as something good that they can share; whereas it was nothing but Cain's world to begin with and Cain's world to go on with.

206 But mark there is another thing altogether - a reality that was before the world and which is known only by faith. It is the more solemn because human responsibility began only with this world. The first Adam was the responsible man, and he failed, and all are sinners since. This is what came in; it was not the counsel of God (in a sense a counsel known to Him of course), it was not a definite design. My responsibility is not God's counsels, and that came in after these counsels were formed. And this is the way of God's dealings and the way He always dealt - He has a thought which He will bring about; but in the meanwhile things are trusted to man, just as in the case of Adam. God had the intention of having the

second Man and all His glory set up in Him. This is what God had in His mind. It was purposed in Christ before the world existed. After that God set up the first man Adam; and he - Adam--is the man of responsibility - not the man of God's counsels.

And you find the two great principles in the garden at the beginning in the two trees there - grace that gave life, and responsibility to obey or disobey. The law took up the same two, but put the responsibility first - this do and live. Again a breach followed. Man made a golden calf at once. Then when God set up the church, all went to sleep, wise as well as foolish, or said, "My Lord delayeth his coming." Then God brings out His counsel ordained before the world - that He will bring man into His own glory as well as sinless into His presence in Christ. He forms the church to reign with Christ in that glory. And nothing of this will He fail to accomplish in result; but first He puts man in responsibility, and man has to learn his total failure in himself, being powerfully convinced by the Spirit and the word of God, so as to be cast upon grace, and find glory.

Now it is the place we get into thus that I desire to touch upon. You may find it in the scheme of God, but yet a soul must go through the question of responsibility for himself. He must own failure and the way in which he has failed - that in his flesh there is no good thing at all - and then, entirely cast on grace, find Christ. Now Christ as a Saviour meets this position and need by putting Himself in charge of the glory of God which we had compromised. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, and has met responsibility completely and perfectly, both as regards our sins and the glory of God. "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree"; and again, "now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." He has completed the work, sins are gone, and God's glory is perfectly accomplished; so that all is finished, and the foundation laid, not on the responsibility of the first man, but on the accomplishment of God's work by the second Man, and thus the whole question is ended. And Christ meets the other want also. He is the life; He is both the trees; for the ruin that came in is met by Christ on the cross, and infinitely more, by Christ becoming our life. It is all met now before the things are accomplished in glory, while, as regards the peace of the soul and the redemption of the sinner, and his meetness to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, it is now a settled thing - perfectly settled; for he now has life not of the first Adam, but of the Second. In his mortal body it is now the life of Jesus that is to be manifested; it is Christ who is our life. This shews that the first thing is judged totally; if any man be in Christ, not only is he a new creature but all is new.

207 And you find this borne out through scripture. In Ephesians it is not a man living in sins but one dead in sins, so that he is not there meeting sinners in their condition as such, but regards them as created in Christ Jesus, God's workmanship. Consequently there we have the whole full result - ourselves set in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus brought out. In Romans we have the condition of the sinner most completely met. And so the whole thing is settled. There is a world that Satan has formed round the first man, and the question is whether a believer is to go on with it. We have to go through it with this testing us - shall the glory revealed by the Spirit of God, or the world Satan has formed round us in nature, possess our hearts? I am not talking now of sins; but it is a solemn question whether this world possesses our hearts or not. The character of things now is not gross immorality; but is the first man to be exalted, or the Second? Of course there is immorality; but you find persons boasting of a general improvement of society, and with some ground it may be, yet it is all beside the point. Externally it may be something less gross than in times that have passed, but which man is exalted in your hearts - the first, or the Second?

208 Now the thought and counsels of God, in Christ first as centre, are ordained for our glory that we may be practically drawn out from the world (in spirit altogether). He has called us in Christ and by Christ, and

has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. And are our hearts there? - bodies not of course yet, but our hearts? "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; and we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" - suffer truly as regards this world, though at the same time we find it too is all ours, while it does not yet appear what we shall be. Then how far are our hearts set upon that which we are going to be? It is wonderful how the scripture insists upon this with Christians. See in Colossians how it is declared we are dead and our life hid with Christ in God: we get the same share with Him. God has associated the Christian with Christ. Now as to your hearts, beloved friends, are they associated with Christ or does the world and its fashion get hold of you? It touches us all: we all have to go through it; and it is the purpose of God that you should walk by faith and not by sight. If a man saw God, the greatest sinner in the town would not go and sin in His face. Like children in a school, it is when the master's back is turned that they fall into mischief.

But mark again this - God begins by a perfect redemption: you must not have the slightest cloud upon that part of the truth. Trial of you and your responsibility have nothing to do with judgment and acceptance: on this there is no question. "There is none righteous, no, not one"; and if God enter into judgment with us, no flesh should be saved, no, not one of you: if you have anything to do with judgment, you have certainly to do with condemnation, and nothing short of it. And yet we shall appear (be manifested) at the judgment-seat of Christ - that remains quite true; but to the believer it is not judgment; John 5.

Now God, anticipating all this, brings down the full testimony that you are total sinners, and that in your flesh dwelleth no good thing. God will shew you it all, that He may bring it home to you, by your fears even, if Christ is coming; for you would not feel easy if He came. But God will bring you to this point if you are to get peace. He has done with flesh, He has condemned it; and so you can have nothing to do with looking for good in it, because He has condemned it. The body is dead because of sin. If it is life, it is alive in sin!

209 It is not a question of amiable qualities - you find them in a dog; but it is a question whether you like to do your own will; for if you do, you are in rebellion against God. But God has perfectly redeemed the believer out of all this. He has gone through the whole scene of man's responsibility, without law, and under law; lastly He sent His Son who was only rejected and then declared "now is the judgment of this world." And there is your judgment; you are of that world and belong to it, and you have been judged in its judgment on the cross. Stephen charges the Jews that they had received the law by the disposition of angels and had not kept it - "which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" As your fathers resisted the Holy Ghost, so do ye - killed the prophets; rejected God's Son; resisted the Holy Ghost, and this of God's people on the earth!

Well, it is all judged. And if through grace we have been individually brought to a consciousness of it in our own souls, then we are cast exclusively on Christ, and the question is not whether you have failed in your responsibility, but whether God has failed in His work. This is all the question; and herein too is the truth of the gospel.

What ruined the church (that is, as a thing in man's hand, not of course God's work) was, that the sense of complete redemption was quite lost; the fact, I mean, that man does not stand before God in his condition as a child of Adam at all, but in Christ, after Christ has done God's work for him. And each one must learn this in his own consciousness for himself. Christ has borne the things God must have judged man for; and yet more: He becomes our life. Consequent on this work which He has done, we can say we have died with Him; and He is our life. The tree is ended, as well as the fruits. The body of sin is gone for faith; and

therefore one can say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." This is "I" now. I do not admit the flesh to be "I" any more. He is my life; "Christ liveth in me." This is what deliverance means - not forgiveness only but deliverance. Deliverance is that we are not in the flesh at all, not in that which has man's responsibility before God. There is therefore no question of meetness. Christ is meet for heaven; and whosoever is in Christ is also meet for heaven. You must add to the value of Christ's work before you can add to the title of your meetness for heaven.

210 Then comes another thing. The moment the Christian is seen in Christ - that not merely He has borne my sins, but I am in Christ - there is one who can be sealed with the Spirit of God. If he is born again and washed by the blood of Christ, the Holy Ghost can dwell in him. We must never confound the quickening of a soul with the presence of the Spirit which seals Christ's work. The Holy Ghost quickens my soul, and brings me under the blood of sprinkling whereby I am as white as snow: after this the Holy Ghost comes to dwell in me as thus washed clean. God sees me perfectly cleansed and the Holy Ghost is the seal of it and of me - all in virtue of the efficacy of Christ's blood.

The presence of the Holy Ghost is a consequence of redemption. When Christ had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and "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"; and further, "because ye are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba Father," and then you see at once this gives me a capacity to enjoy whatever God opens up to me. But Paul says, "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery"; but even a crucified Christ was a stumbling-block to a Jew and foolishness to a Greek. Ah! you may be a Jew or a philosopher; but are you not a sinner? This is all God knows about you. You must all meet God at the cross of Christ, or be judged.

Having brought this in, the apostle goes on to say, "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew, or they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Now here we find Christ in the glory - a man there; and, connected with Him, God can bring out all these counsels. Christ, who is the centre of it all, is actually a Man in heavenly glory; and, further, the Holy Ghost can come down and unfold all this. Man is in the glory of God, as Stephen shews at the very turning-point of man's depravity in resisting the Holy Ghost. Then the mystery comes out. The Holy Ghost having been sent down, associates us with it on the footing of a place in Christ (the old man is set aside - "ye are dead"). We stand in a righteousness in Christ which is God's righteousness, when man had none. Now the Holy Ghost can bring in all the heavenly glory, and this is what He is doing for the Christian. We have the life and the righteousness of God in Christ.

211 Let me ask you who profess the Lord, are you so distinct in judging all that belongs to nature that this is true to you? There is plenty to learn, I know. We have to be humbled and proved to do us good at the latter end; but why? Because we have been redeemed out of Egypt. You do not find this in connection with Israel until they were redeemed from Egypt. Have you really taken the place of being delivered from this present evil world? Has your heart taken its place where the second Adam has set you?

Oh, but you say, I do not know the things that are there. Why do you not? Have they not been revealed? People quote this passage, "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," to shew how great these things of God are - they have not entered into the heart of man. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit": such is

the scripture - just the opposite of the common use of it. You see God means us to know them, though we may have been bad scholars at the lesson. But He has given us a title - to what? Simply to be pardoned? Is that all? Is it nothing to say, I am come to God the Judge of all; I can look down upon things that are for judgment, the reproach of Egypt being done away; I am in Christ, and see the glory of the Son of God and Son of man - the Son who earned God's love? Yes, earned it! for He says, "therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life." Is it nothing to see the Lamb slain? Have we not far more than pardon?

And where is to be your place? You are going to be like Himself. Did you never think of this? "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." "And we have received the Spirit, not which is of the world but which is of God, to know the things which are freely given unto us of God." It is not the redemption, though we must know that truly and get clear as to it; it is more. Again I ask, Have your souls never tasted what it is to be where there is nothing but holiness - not a jar with what God is? What a delight! And all around not a flaw, not a thing that does not answer to the glory of God as God and to the love of God as love! Nothing. Christ is the centre of it, and we, in a certain sense, so too, as in Him. Are our souls living there? Well, you will get a white stone; but you say, Am I to have God's approving delight upon me? Yes. And the new name. Ah, this will be a secret between you and Christ. Is there nothing in that? Is there nothing in His approbation so put upon us? Does it not come into your heart as that which is unspeakable joy? Again "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." But if I see the Lamb in the midst of the throne, Ah! I say, now I am indeed at home, that is the sight that dazzles every other, and that is the sight which is for me; the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple there. We shall sit on Christ's throne with Him - conferred glory surely but none the less real. Will this be nothing? I here will not be a thing in Christ's heart that is not satisfied towards us, and is this nothing to us? And is it nothing to us to see the Man that suffered for us glorified? Now the Spirit of God has taken these things and revealed them unto us that we may live in them.

212 And mark the order at the end of the chapter - "what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God; now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are fully given to us of God, which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" - lit up in Paul's heart, like a candle in a lantern. And now he is communicating them by inspiration. He gets them by revelation and communicates them by inspiration. Oh, what a thing it is to hear vain men babbling about the Scriptures and talking of what is right and wrong in them forsooth! Here I have such things as these in the revelation given by inspiration, and men must seek to find faults here. How busy measuring spots in the sun and the bumps upon it if they can. when it has been the light of the world ever since it was created! First there was the revelation of the things, after that the communication of them by inspiration; but then "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned; but he that is spiritual judgeth all things."

213 Here I get the receiving of what is revealed and inspired - three things in all. First, revelation, and this some would deny altogether; second, communication by the Holy Ghost, and some will not deny that the word of God is in it, but that Scripture is the word of God. I say, Nay, it was the revelation from God to man but it came out from the man as pure as it came in - "we speak not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth," and as he says again, "we have not corrupted the word of God," we have given it by inspiration as we have received it by revelation. And now I get the third step, which explains the infidelity as to all the rest - "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God": that

is the truth of the riddle. He is a natural man and does not receive the things of the Spirit of God at all, it is only by power of the Spirit of God that they are received. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ."

There is a great deal to learn yet truly, but it has all been given to us. We know in part as to details; but still the counsel of God in Christ, who is the wisdom and power of God, has been revealed, and revealed too through the cross in which the natural man has been totally judged, while also, consequent upon the exaltation of the second Adam to the right hand of God, it has been given forth to us by the Holy Ghost. Our Lord said after His resurrection, "I go to my God and your God, to my Father and your Father"; that is, if I am going into the glory, I go as your forerunner, for I take you into such relationship. It is ordained for your glory. Beloved, do you believe that, that all these wonderful counsels of God are ordained for your glory? Do you believe?

O the wonderful goodness of God! He is shewing to us the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. Are our hearts touched by it? or is this wretched world which rejected Christ still clinging to us as a briar might when we walk through a field? Has the power of the divine Spirit separated our hearts from it, and set our affections on things that are above, and not on the things on the earth? Weigh this. If Christ has died in love and given us that place where He is, see whether your hearts are living in what He has brought you to, or in what He has brought you out of. The friendship of the world is enmity to God. Our Lord give us to know the unspeakable love that has given us such things. Presumption! Suppose the prodigal son had said "the best robe is too good for me." Too good! What business had he in the house at all?

214 God has glorified Himself in the wonderful work of grace; and I must take my place according to what He has made it to be, and nothing loth to do it either. And yet our glory is in a certain sense poor, compared with seeing Him glorified. The Lord give us to live, in our life in the flesh, that inward life in connection with Christ which is practically dead to the world and alive to God through Christ, to find the blessedness of His love in these things born in our hearts.

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