

God's Grace and Man's Need

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the contrast between man's sinful heart and God's abundant grace, highlighting the necessity of recognizing one's need for salvation through Christ.

Scripture: John 15:22

Topics: "God's Grace", "Human Need"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound contrast between man's heart towards God and God's heart towards humanity, illustrating how the coming of Jesus revealed the true nature of sin and the depth of God's grace. He explains that while the law was meant to expose sin, man often misused it to seek self-righteousness, failing to recognize their need for God's grace. The sermon highlights the story of the Syrophenician woman, who, despite her unworthiness, understood the abundance of God's grace and mercy, demonstrating that true humility and recognition of one's need can lead to divine favor. Darby concludes that the veil has been torn, allowing sinners to approach God directly, emphasizing that grace is available to all who acknowledge their need for it. Ultimately, he calls for believers to embrace the fullness of God's grace and the cleansing power of Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

Here we have the wonderful contrast between the ways and actings of man's heart towards God, and the ways and actings of God's heart towards poor guilty man. These two things must be brought close the one to the other, and be shewn as they rightly are. Men's hearts were not fully put to the test before the Lord Jesus came (John 15: 22 - 24): "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father." It was fully brought out then; and what man's heart was was plainly proved. When he saw God, he hated Him.

Although God was present in the midst of Israel, He was not openly revealed. He was hid within the veil, within which the high priest, shrouded in a cloud of incense, alone approached His holy throne. Neither did man's heart come up there to see the holiness of it; nor did man come down fully to man. It was not the full revelation of God. It was that which could leave man in a good deal of darkness, and God hid; and therefore that which could not clearly detect man's heart. Consequently He says, "If I had not come, they had not had sin": not that they had not sinned; but that the Lord would not hold them finally guilty until He

had manifested Himself in Him whom He had spoken to Israel. But when God was made manifest, man hated Him. God had before revealed a great deal, but not Himself. He revealed much in the figures of the law, and which foreshadowed and veiled better things; and we find the use man made of it. I am not here speaking of the law, as trying man's conscience; though, in passing, we may notice that too, as bringing in -- not sin, for that was there already -- but transgression. The use God made of it was to prove man a sinner. It was used to make manifest -- in fact, to create -- transgression.

To turn for a moment to the use man made of the law, in contrast with God's purpose in it: God used it, as we have seen, that the offence might abound -- that sin might appear exceeding sinful. Man set about to make himself righteous by the very thing which God was proving him a sinner, and sin exceedingly sinful. This you are doing, if you are seeking to satisfy the demands of God's righteousness by your own ways. Man seeks to save himself by the righteousness of the law; but God's use was not that, for He never thought of saving any but by Jesus. When a child is forbidden by its parent, by an express law, and breaks the law, it not only makes manifest the evil disposition that as in its heart, but there is then positive disobedience, and the consciousness of sin, in that which the child does. It might have followed its inclination in many cases before, without consciousness of sin; but now not so: the conscience is affected and defiled; and by the law we are under condemnation and death.

To return to the figures and shadows of better things. Man took those very ceremonies and sacrifices, which were typical of that one sacrifice which sin had made necessary, and by them, their conscience nothing satisfied, tried to eke out their own righteousness; and they follow the same course now. We know that there were a great many sacrifices for sin under the law: for God has tried this way, that we might know its incapacity of bringing us to Him. To employ similar means is mere superstition, and denial of Christ. Men first set about to be righteous by commands which they cannot fulfil; and then they seek to add ceremonies, to eke out a righteousness of their own. That is the sum of the religion of so many -- making an attempt at keeping the law, and adding ceremonial observances thereto, and then attaching the name of Christianity to it, while all God's truth is shut out.

Further, after all, the conscience never will be satisfied; because there will be the dread of that day when God shall make manifest the secrets of the heart. The soul is not on the road to have a conscience at peace with God. Travelling on this road, the man will go on from one thing to another. He may add ceremony to ceremony, and tradition to tradition, but he has only got farther from God -- he has only got more between God and his conscience, and no forgiveness after all. The conscience gets satisfied for a moment or two by man's dealing with it in this way; but there is no peace with God. When sin is brought into the presence of God's holiness, the conscience, if not despairing, gets hardened. See what a state those Jews were in who could go and buy Christ's blood for thirty pieces of silver, and yet have scruples of conscience as to where the price of blood should be put -- refusing to put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood! Anything will suit man, provided it is not his conscience in the presence of God. Where He is detecting the state of the heart, and making it know complete forgiveness, so that it can be in His presence without sin, it is another thing. Nothing is more simple than this, glorious as is the grace that has wrought it; indeed, it is too simple for those who are not taught of God to love the truth. But, simple as it is, man's conscience is thus in the presence of God, and anything suits man rather than that.

Though God is infinitely high, He is very simple to man's wants, and to man's conscience. The washing the hands is not that which signifies, but that which comes from the heart. Here we have something more simple than all the intricacies of ceremony and tradition. God's light deals with realities; and God's purpose is, by the powerful light of His Spirit, to bring into the conscience of man all the different evils of his heart.

When God's light shines in, that evil of which conscience before took no notice -- a vain thought or the like, that passed and was forgotten -- is now made manifest. That which comes out of the heart is what defiles a man.

God is dealing with realities. He wants nothing from man. He is shewing him what he is. He is bringing into man's conscience what is already in his heart. When God's light shines in, it detects what is in the heart, and thus there is a manifestation to a man's conscience of all that comes out of his heart. That light soon teaches him the vanity of washing his hands, and such things (v. 2 - 8). It tells him that to draw near to God with his mouth, and honour Him with his lips, while his heart is far from Him, is all in vain. It shews him that all mere ceremonial offerings and prayers are worse than useless. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." The light detects the evil of man's heart (v. 11 - 20): "Not that which goeth into the mouth, but that which cometh out of the mouth, defileth a man. For out of the mouth proceed evil thoughts, murders," etc. Thus God's light comes in and shews what comes out of the heart. Take the first index of what is there, when seen and expressed in the light -- an idle word, perhaps (James 3). But farther, He does not say simply, You have done this or that, but He traces the evil to the root. He traces the conduct or the words of man to some source -- to what? to the heart! If there are idle and corrupt words, there is an idle and corrupt heart; and out of the abundance of the mouth speaks. That is what man's nature is, what he is. So that, though men have the fairest conduct outwardly, God unmasks what is within, and shews the vanity of all their outward ceremonies as a means of eking out a righteousness of their own. He regards not the mere outward conduct of man, but measures the heart; and tracing all the evil to that, asks, Why is this? For out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts (v. 19), and there He closes with man. His purpose in all these dealings and ways with man, is to shew him what he is before God.

Then we turn to the other side of the picture, in which God's heart is brought out (in the case of the woman of Canaan) (v. 21 - 28). This woman had not the pride of human distinction in which the Jews gloried. She was neither a Jewess nor a Pharisee -- quite the contrary; she belonged to a city which God held up as a most reprobate city; Matt. 11: 21. She was a Syrophenician -- a Canaanite -- of a race held in the Old Testament to be accursed (Gen. 9: 25 - 27), whence nothing of repentance could be expected. The Lord comes into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, peopled by the descendants of Canaan ("cursed is Canaan"). That is where grace ever comes. And she was one of these outcasts in the fullest sense of the word. She had no privileges, no claims. Well, she recognizes Him here as the Lord, the Son of David, and salutes Him as such. As such she knew what mercies He had brought among the Jews; and she comes and asks for blessing. He does not answer her a word. He takes no notice of her whatever. His ears are closed to her request, at least so far as that He gave her no answer. A repentant Jew might have appealed to Him under this title. He was in the place of the promise which Messiah came to accomplish. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," v. 24. But for this there must be some claim to the promise. If you meet Christ on the ground of what He is as promised to Israel, you must have some fitness for the promise, some claim to it. If you are seeking by righteousness to get the help of grace, that is not my errand, says Christ; I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Why is there no answer? the heart may say; for she had recognized His lordship. She had, and could have no claim on or connection with Him on that ground; with the Son of David a Canaanite had nothing to do. The disciples were anxious to get rid of her by satisfying her demand, but He would not allow it; He holds to God's order. If she came to the Son of David to get help, she must come as a Jew. But here (v. 25) she gets a step farther, she ceases to address Him as the Son of David (the ground on which she supposed,

giving Him the due honour, she might expect something), and her sense of want constrains her to cry out, "Lord, help."

Are there none here expecting that, because they entitle Christ aright, because they give Him His due title, and honour Him, He must answer them, and are astonished that He does not? The poor woman felt her sorrow; she wanted something, and there was the simple expression of her need; but, even then, He answers, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs." My errand is from God; I do not go beyond that. Her owning and addressing Him as the Son of David was in the way of righteousness, which was true. Her need still makes her go forward, and she says, "Lord, help me!" But He answers, I am come to the children -- to seek for fruit on the vine which God owns. You might think God would own righteous, well-conducted people, and that they might then take the fruits and blessings God attached to that. But you have no claim on that ground: you are sinners. As far as God's ways were revealed outwardly, the Jews were God's people. But she was outside everything -- a dog. She is looked upon as a dog, and now she takes the place of a dog. What now, being a dog could she hope for? Why not give up hope? Why, because she abandons all title and claim in herself, but the need which cast itself on pure bounty; and there was, she asserted, an overflowing abundance of grace, which could even give some supply to the dogs: "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

There was bounty in the house of God for dogs themselves. Be it she was a dog; she made no pretence to take the children's place, and therefore it was no answer to her to call her that, because the Master could look beyond the children, and there was an overflowing supply of grace and fulness that did not leave even the dogs without provision (v. 27). And such was the poor woman's real state. She knew the Master of the house was infinitely rich. She knew God and Jesus ten thousand times better than the disciples around. She knew that there were bounty and plenty enough in the Master's house and from that superabounding supply of grace He could let the dogs eat. The vilest and most hopeless could find food in the Master's house. The real understanding of God is according to our understanding of our total vileness and nothingness. Israel had never understood divine love as it was here exhibited to the dogs -- fathomed by her need -- fathomed by her wretchedness. She reached up to the source of from whence even the children are fed -- the fulness of the love of God Himself, which did not shut even dogs out from His bounty. She passed by all dispensation, even to what God Himself had done, seeing He had come down, not to hide His holiness, but to shew what He really was; and when the sinner was brought to a confession of her own nothingness, He swept away everything between the sinner and Himself, as He did with the woman of Samaria.

She had arrived at what God was. He had done away with that which brought man a little nearer to Him, that is ordinances, etc. ; and He now comes down to shew what He is, and what man is; and when man comes to his true and real standing, God is there to meet him in all His unlimited grace. Law was given by Moses, and was but a veil; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The full truth of what man's heart is is brought out by the revelation of God in Christ. Now there was not any one between God and man to veil His holiness or to conceal His love; not even any oft-repeated sacrifice; not even a Moses with a veil on his face; but man must deal with God himself -- with God in Christ. And here, you see, the Lord would not satisfy this poor woman on any other plea but on that of her own real character. He calls her really what she was, and she understood that there was in God's heart all that the Lord Jesus Christ had seen in it when He was in Heaven, for He was here to shew it. And, supposing she had been something more than a dog, she would not have needed so much grace. It is our vileness which brings out that wonderful grace which God gave. For, if she had been in less need, what would have been the consequence? Why, that

there would have been less grace manifested in God.

And what is the great truth in Christianity that is brought out by all this? That the veil is rent from the top to the bottom; and that man, as he is, is in the presence of God -- the man is there unveiled. What have we got in the Cross? The first thing is, God dealing with man in His own presence?sic But how? Did He come to require anything? Nothing; how should He come and require it? In a certain sense He did require fruit from the vine, but there was none. What then did He come for? why did He come into a world full of sin? what did He seek here? He sought sinners! Did he come ignorant of the extent of their sin? No, for He knew what was in man's heart full well before He came. He knew their sin well. He knew all that would come upon Him. But what stops the sinner? Not that he is to come to God -- we see the Lord Jesus Christ come down to him in his sins. Is there anything between Him and the sinner? No, my friends -- nothing; not even His disciples. They might quiet and get rid of importunity, but neither shew God's holiness nor reveal His love. It was the prerogative of His own love to come and touch the sinner without being defiled by the sin: just as He did to the leper. The leper exclaimed, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The Lord puts forth His hand and touches him, saying, "I will; be thou clean." And remember, if He came to shew God's love to man in his sins, so that his heart might be won, and have confidence with God, He came to take away sin from man by taking it on Himself.

The veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom, I see the holiness of God: but the very stroke which has thus unveiled the holiness of God has put away the sin that would have hindered my standing in the presence of that holiness. I see what God in His love has done for us in the Person of Christ. I see that the bruising of His Son has taken place. Here I get God himself coming down to me, and I am enabled now to go back with Christ into the rest of His holiness. In the death of Christ I see the fearful vengeance of God against sin; and the rending of the veil, which displays God's holiness and love to man. And so the more the eye of God scrutinises and searches me, the more it brings out the blessed truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin. It shews me the whiteness of the robe that has been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

If I hesitate to stand in His presence, I am putting in question the value of Christ's precious blood. You may say, I hope to be saved. You cannot hope that Christ will die for you! It cannot be a matter of hope whether Christ is to die! The way the heart reasons is, I am not hoping Christ will die for me, but I hope to get an interest in Him; I want a proof of His love. When you question this, you question whether Christ has become the friend of publicans and sinners; and, further, you question the power of His blood.

Suppose you had a title to demand some proof of His love, what could you demand more than God has given? He has given His own Son. You could not ask so much as He has already given. But if I am seeking that God should tell me something else, I am seeking some other revelation than what He has given me. He rests my peace on believing the one He has given. The soul that has come to God knows that He is love, and it is to Himself we are come.

The very way in which I know God is through faith in His Son. I know His own love, that He thought of this, and did it for me. Why is it the soul does get this wondrous simple peace, to be in His own presence without a cloud on His love? Because we are telling to God, and to our poor hearts, something short of this -- that we are dogs. Grace is to the sinner, and to none other. If I can stand before God in my own righteousness, grace is not needed. He will bring down your hearts to your real contrition. There He can act in the fulness of His grace, according to the need of the heart that has discovered its need in His presence. He is manifesting that grace according to the value of the sacrifice, now that He is at the right

hand of God. Not merely now that God can come to the sinner, but the cleansed sinner stands accepted in the presence of God -- accepted in the Person of Jesus; and that nothing stands between us and God. The Lord give us only to own the fulness of His grace, and see that way in which we are debtors to Him, who was willing to suffer all things that He might present us spotless to God. Amen.

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