

Lecture on 1 John 5:1-13

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's lecture on 1 John 5:1-13 emphasizes the inseparable relationship between love for God and obedience to His commandments as the essence of the Christian life.

Scripture: 1 John 5:1

Topics: "Love and Obedience", "Christian Identity"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the inseparable relationship between love for the brethren and obedience to God's commandments as foundational to the Christian life, as outlined in 1 John 5:1-13. He explains that true love is characterized by a dependence on God and a spirit of obedience, reflecting the nature of Christ. Darby highlights that love for God's children stems from our relationship with Him, and that genuine love is marked by obedience to His commandments. He reassures believers that Christ's work has made them fit for God's presence, and through faith, they can overcome the world. Ultimately, the sermon calls Christians to recognize their identity in Christ and the transformative power of His love and sacrifice.

Transcript

The first verses of this chapter have a special character and that is, the testing and searching out what the true love of the brethren is, and then the apostle goes on to the great basis of Christian walk as set out in certain testimony which we shall presently see. As we are aware, in this epistle, the love of the brethren is that which characterises the Christian. It is one of two things, the other being obedience to Christ's words and commandments - the spirit of obedience and the spirit of love to the brethren. In speaking of loving the brethren, he shews us who these are, they are "born of God," and such we love. Dependence on God, obedience, and love are the characteristics of divine love. Various developed in us they surely are, but we find them all in perfection in Christ. "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." There we have dependence. This has a double character. You have a strength that you cannot do without even though you are not dependent; and besides this, there is confidence in the strength provided. The Blessed Lord having made Himself a servant, we find in Him both dependence and obedience; and also love which was in Him the principle of activity. In us, it is mixed with imperfection, but it is the same thing in itself. This epistle treats especially of these two traits, namely, obedience to the commandments and love of the brethren. They manifest divine life in us, and they are always inseparable, because love to the brethren must have, after all, its eye upon God. It was so with Christ in everything. He gave Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God. He did love us, but it was to God, and God was the object of His service; and therefore, when going to the cross, He says, "That

the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." There we see the principle of love and of obedience. These two are inseparable. So you have those who are dear to Christ, but along with that the path of obedience, or it is not the path of real love. Love that is not obedient is never divine love. I cannot have divine love in my heart and not refer to God. When Christ came as a man, He never went out of the place of obedience. So with us; where they are true, these two things are inseparable, and if they are not true, they are not it at all. Just as a man has a body and a soul, but the moment they are separated, neither is a man.

454 Then the apostle gives us the mark of the brethren, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," and he adds, "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." Love to the brethren is characteristic. I ought to love every poor sinner, but love to the brethren flows from a specific relationship, which shews the value of what Christ loves. It is not here the activity of evangelising grace, but that which is distinctive in that a certain set of people are loved for the sake of another to whom they are dear, whatever their own individual character may be; and therefore it cannot be outside obedience.

"This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." Who are they? All God's children, "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ," etc. Then you get a counter check, and in this way, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." It is not loving a certain set of people we may know, but loving the children of God as such, because I keep His commandments; I know I love the brethren because I love God.

Both sides are checked in this way, and very important it is. Practically, I may find one is more agreeable than another, and I have more fellowship of heart with one than with another, and so on, and there is nothing wrong in this, if there is more suitability the one to the other; but still I love all, even though the more abundantly I love, the less I be loved, and that is because of the character of the love. The characteristic of God's love is that, in its strength, its purpose, its activity, and its energy, all is dependent upon the love that loves, not upon the object loved.

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The great, immense, proving, revealing act of the love of God is, that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. There is often a difference of communion between the soul and God, but still the love is characterised by this, that it does not flow from the object loved, but from the heart of Him who loves. With my heart and mind thinking of God and looking to God, whatever belongs to Him is dear to me just because it is of God.

"Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." If I am extremely attached to a person, I love his children, and not merely because his children are pleasant. But if I love others as God's children, it is proved and shewn to be love to them as such, because we are obedient to God Himself; but it is not the love of God to His children if it is not marked by the spirit of obedience. The two things are inseparable. I love the children because they are God's children, and if I love God I keep His commandments. This is just the spirit of the Christian, that Christ being precious to him, love to the brethren and the path of obedience are always before him, and therefore also he is really pleasing himself.

455 Well, then, he next turns to where difficulties are found. "His commandments are not grievous." To the natural man they are exceedingly grievous, for "the carnal mind . . . is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The only thought that the flesh has about these commandments is that it must never have anything its own way. Whether child or old man, each one of us likes his own will. Doing my

own will is not obedience. But love to God makes His will the motive of my conduct. When we speak of Christ's obedience as the pattern of ours, as to its spring, it is not in that way that the law deals with man. There is a certain character of obedience in all of us which is submission to another's will when we do not like it. You see a child, who wants to run out and play, sit down at his father's bidding to do his lessons; very nice it is to see such obedience, but Christ never obeyed in that way. He never had a will one way, and then gave it up to do His Father's in another way. And the "new man" lives by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. It delights in obedience, and therefore, in the epistle of James, God's will is called the perfect law of liberty, because if I tell my child to run out and play, instead of sitting down to his lessons, it is obedience surely to do so, but it is also what his nature delights to do. The new nature is perfectly obedient, and finds its delight in that it obeys. In Christ, it was, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." In us, we can trust God enough to wait for God to act; the new nature has not such an idea of its own importance that it sets about to act for itself before it has got a will from God.

In the case of the Lord Jesus, in John 11, they sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick," but He abode two days still in the same place without stirring. He had not a word from His Father to move. God was letting Lazarus die that He might shew the power of resurrection over death. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." Presently, nothing will stop Him. "The Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" But that was no hindrance. We find the true principle of Christian obedience which makes it a perfect law of liberty (and yet it is obedience) because the new man delights in it. Quite true, of course, that a great deal of breaking down has to come in, because of our actual state; whenever self works, it must be judged and broken down, for the true spring and motive of our conduct must be that God has a will. It is a terrible thing whenever the flesh is not so broken down as to have no will. Flesh does not like that. Flesh will reason, 'Am I never to do anything to please myself, what a God you have got?' Ah! that betrays where the heart is. But it is perfectly natural to the heart, and therefore His commandments are grievous to the flesh. The way obedience is made a delight and a blessing to us is, "His commandments are not grievous, for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." It is what is in the world that makes it difficult, but "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." It is subjective, for it is a life in us; but it is also objective, for Christ is its object. That is where the heart of the Christian is set. The new man born of God cannot live on itself, it must have some object. As the apostle says in Galatians 2: "I am crucified with Christ," there is the end of the old man for faith; "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." That is what he lived for, and upon, too. And that is what Christian life is, but the way by which it lives is by an object which is not in the world at all, it is Christ.

456 Then, mark the blessed confidence and the joy which are in it. Is there compulsion? No. "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." The apostle finds the most blessed motive possible - Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Not only has He redeemed me from sin for glory, but He has won my heart, redeemed me out of self into love to Himself. There I find the motive and spring. Therefore the victory that overcomes the world is faith; not looking upon the things that are seen, but having the sentence of death upon myself, "that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." Power is there. The moment this is the case, the power of present things is gone. I am living (I speak as to the principle of it) by this Christ Himself, who has loved us, shed His blood for us, and given Himself for us. There I get the object that fills my heart with singleness of eye, and takes away every motive that would turn my heart in another direction. True, we have a great deal to learn, and hindrances there are, but this is, in chief, the

principle.

457 We have always to overcome, but when the heart is fixed on Christ, it is not like a victory between two that are fighting, but, as Paul says, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung," etc. Well, if it is all dross and dung, it is no such great sacrifice or victory; but that supposes the heart to be filled with Christ, and then it is all easy. The new man is just as much alive when I have eternal life as when I get to heaven. I know it is only gradually that self is detected, lurking in a thousand places in the heart. But a Christian who has gone through the world with Christ wonders how people can be occupied with a kind of conflict which is nevertheless very real to a person in the thick of it. It is true that Satan always tries to hinder the energy of a life he cannot destroy, but the eye of faith rests on an Object that is not the world, but the Son of God. So, "who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" This blessed truth I have, that He came and won a place for me in heaven, and all the rest is dross and dung.

Now, therefore, 'I press forward,' that is all my life. I am not perfect in it, but that is what I am doing. I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. It is not, you must give up this and you must give up that, simply as a commandment, but it is, 'there is Christ for you'; 'there is the One who is sufficient for my delight, and I give Him, My Son, for your delight, the One who has given Himself for you and saved you.' And there, through grace, our hearts rest in Him. Well, then, He says, you must run on and get this, practically I mean; and therefore it is not, you must give up, but it is deliverance from the things the old man cares for; the power of Christ becomes an object to the new man which the soul runs after undistractedly and undividedly, and thus it is delivered. When the mind is in that state, it is not a sacrifice, but a deliverance.

458 Having, in this way, put the Christian in his place, the apostle then lays the groundwork for it all. It is well, however, to have this quite clear. Man naturally is a slave, but what is so characteristic of Christianity is that it gives us an object as well as salvation; this the law did not do, it told us what we ought to do as men, but it never gave us an object or life, and it could not give power, because it was weak through the flesh. It tells me to love God, and if I ask, 'Why?' - not a word! Of course, this is only what we ought to do. The law is the perfect rule of what man ought to be (I do not now speak of a Christian), but it does not give me life, or strength, or an object, however useful it is in its place to convict me. It is the measure of responsibility for man, but it is neither the expression nor the power of grace. But the moment grace comes in, it is no longer a question of what I ought to be, but of what God is pleased to do; He has put me like His Son in His own house. This is all grace.

Then He leaves us in the pathway here below in order to have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil. And the Object that He has given us the while, is the One who is sufficient for the Father's heart.

Next, in this chapter, he takes up two things, namely, cleansing and life. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." In the water and blood, I have, not a witness, but a state produced, and then I have the Spirit bearing witness. In the first, it is the needed condition to which the water and blood apply. The witness of the Spirit has a double character, it comes and tells me all that I am by the revelation of Christ. Christ is the truth, and when the Spirit of God bears testimony to the truth, He brings Christ to me and shows thus not only what I am, but also what all men are - haters of God and full of lusts.

This is the effect of His testimony. He gives us the fulness of truth, and we shall see how deep this truth really goes as to our state, too, and how that it has no limit. There is one question that comes first, and that is, supposing heaven is revealed and Christ is the object of faith, how can we be fit? We must be made fit to be in the light as God is in the light. The moment the light comes in and the conscience is reached by it, for it is no good otherwise, just as when the daughters of Jerusalem beat their breasts, Christ, turning to them, said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves," for you are all going to be judged.

459 Very useful is the law to convict, but it is too late, for man, the being to whom it applies, is already lost, and Christ came to save the lost. If a man has lost every farthing, and you give him a rule to shew him how to employ his money, 'Why, says he, you mock me, I have no money.' Your rule may be useful to convict him of the fact. Now all Christians will say, in terms, that man is lost, and yet they will speak of him as under probation. In one sense the Christian, when under grace, is in probation, but man, as such, has been tested and probation is over. Even one of old could say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." That is all settled. "By works of law no flesh shall be justified." "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." That does not mean bad works, but such that are on that principle, for they have not kept the law. But God being fully revealed, the question now is as to whether I can walk in the light as God is in the light; it is not whether I have walked by the law rightly, but am I in a state to stand before Him? And I know I am not. The day of judgment is anticipated in the conscience, and I "cannot answer him one of a thousand." Job owns that God loves righteousness, but "if I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." That is to say, if I fancy I am right, He shall plunge me in the ditch - shew me what I am - and I shall come out of it, so that my own clothes shall abhor me; Job 9.

I must, then, be made fit for God according to what He is in nature and holiness. The soul feels that God is perfectly holy, and I am not. That is what we need, and that is what we have found in Christ. He came not by water only. We have the word of God - the revelation - and by it we are begotten, though that is not exactly its character here, true as it is; we are "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created" him, and again, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." We have thus the thought of the mind and the perceptions being completely purged by the application of the word; the spirit and principle of the thing applied to the conscience, the affections, and the heart; and the judgment of good and evil formed according to the revelation of what God is in Christ, not according to natural conscience or to the law. Where did the water come from? Out of His dead side. That is to say, that in this respect I see, not cleansing at all, but the absolute death of the old man, and that there must be a new creature. There never has been anything fit for God, in any shape or in any way, in the old man. I may reckon it dead, but it is always and simply in opposition to the Spirit of God. The two are contrary the one to the other. But the blessed word of truth comes to me in the quickening power of God, and it brings this cleansing water to my soul and conscience, and with such a revelation of God in Christ as to make me know what the flesh truly is.

460 This character of cleansing we find in Ephesians: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." "To himself!" And fit for Himself !! The word brings down to us the nature and character, the glory and purity, and the blessedness, too, of the place it comes from. If I may so speak, Christ has in a way humanised it; but man would not have it, and just because it was such, they refused it, and Him too; they spat in His face and crucified Him. So now

God comes in, in power and grace, so as not to leave one atom of flesh in His presence; we find many other details besides, but this has taken place, and the moment I see this, I am entitled to say, "I am dead."

The water which cleanses is that which brings the whole truth of God to my soul, and judges all that I am, but at the same time, it is that which, in the power of God's Spirit, puts me in the presence of God, as after God created in righteousness and true holiness. That is the water. There could be no living connection with Christ for man in the flesh; He must be a dead Christ before the water could come out which purifies, so that the purpose of God might be accomplished. Quite true, there was also the bearing of sins, but this is not all; we are cleansed, and our sins have been put away; but we must be set in God's presence according to His own character and intentions in love. It is not all the truth that Christ has met our responsibilities on the cross and that He has died for them. He has cleared me perfectly as regards my responsibility as a man. But what, then, is God to do with me? My being merely cleansed does not tell me what He is going to do with me. Since the world began man has been a guilty sinner, but before the world began the thought and intention of God was to put man in His own glory on the ground of Christ's finished work upon the cross. Not only has He cleansed my guilt, but He has glorified God by the work He has wrought, and this enables me even now to stand in God's presence. "Herein has love been perfected with us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that even as he is, we also are in this world," 1 John 4:17.

461 This is more than merely sin and guilt being put away. I have my conscience perfect, and I delight in holiness itself. It is true that Christ becomes more and more precious to us, as we grow up to Him who is the Head, but we must first know how we can stand before God. Jesus came by water and blood. Not only has He cleansed our hearts, but He has cleansed us for God's eye, and made our consciences perfect. This is what He has done, and therefore His precious blood which cleanseth from all sin has so cleansed us that God cannot see sin on us. God no longer sees what we have wrought, but what He Himself hath wrought. As of old it was said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." That was at the end of the wilderness journey. Looking back at Massah, Meribah, and Kibroth-hattaavah, we hear their repeated murmurings, and then we see Balaam at the top of the mountain, saying, "He hath not beheld, etc . . . Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" Why, He has wrought according to His own exigencies in righteousness and holiness!

And so I stand before God according to the perfectness of Christ's work, but I am cleansed according to the claims of God in the light, i.e., according as God is in the light. And then we have these three witnesses, and they agree in one: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. How do we get the Spirit? Can the Spirit come and help the old man, or take the spiritual part of man and lift it up? No. Christ must first be killed; there must be a total breach with man as he is before we can have the Spirit. It was a work carried out in grace, "for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." There, then, is the end of the story as regards the flesh. I am not now talking of sins. Having wrought that perfect work, Christ goes up into the presence of God, and the consequence is that the Spirit comes down. And of what is He the witness? Why, that the world will not have God at all, but has utterly rejected Christ, and that therefore the world shall see Him no more. "He will reprove the world . . . of righteousness, because I go to my Father." This being so, Christ is now sitting at the right hand of God, and the Spirit of God has come down, the witness that the world shall see Christ no more, and that those who believe belong to Him in heaven.

There can, therefore, be no longer any bond between the world, as the world, and God. Having taken His place in heaven as Man in glory, Christ sends down the Holy Ghost that I may know my separation from the world, which is crucified to me and I to it, and also that I may know my place up there in Him. Spirit, water, and blood agree thus in witnessing that man is unclean and away from God.

462 But where do I learn the condemnation of man? In Christ's bearing the judgment. Where does the cleansing come? In Christ's dying for me. Where is the judgment of sin in the flesh? In Christ being made sin. On the other hand, Christ has given me title to a place before God according to what He has done; He gives the Holy Ghost who takes of the things of heaven and shews them to me and presents to me this blessed Object, Christ, so that I follow hard after Him. These three agree in testimony. While we are waiting for God's Son from heaven, the Holy Ghost comes, as the result of Christ's perfect work, and tells us that we are fit for a place with Christ in heaven, that we are of God, and that Christ is righteousness of God to us. This place in heaven He has won for us. "Ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." These three witnesses agree in testimony as to what the flesh is, and also to the perfect work which has been wrought, and which cleanses, redeems, justifies, and unites us to Christ. Founded upon this work that Christ has wrought, we know that we have a place there where He is. This place is of sovereign grace, surely, and in virtue of the work by which God Himself has been glorified.

One word more. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." If I do believe, I have the blessed consciousness of all this, I have the power of the thing in myself; as to the certainty of the ground of it, I have the witness in myself. But a person says, 'Oh, you cannot prove that.' I reply, 'I have it.' Suppose someone comes to prove to me that I do not live, I do not try to prove that I live, I do live. He who does not receive the witness makes God a liar. "Record," "witness," "testimony," are all one word in the original. We have been speaking of cleansing, and of the witness to it. I have the cleansing by water and blood, and I have the Spirit's witness, but that which I know I have is nothing less than Christ. God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Christ has life in Himself, and He that hath the Son hath life. It is not that he has Adam or a mended Adam, but he has a totally new thing. I have now Christ Himself as the life in which I live. It is never said that this life is in the Christian, though he has it, for he that hath the Son hath life, and it is nothing less than that which Christ is. It is Christ. I have cleansing, righteousness, and the Spirit as the seal of it all, the testimony is there; it is by these testimonies that I know I have Christ, and this is eternal life. The world has not got life; responsible they are to believe the testimony, but they have not life. And therefore one cannot expect them to understand the convictions of a Christian. One may try to shew them the folly of their reasonings about the truth and the record, if one is clever enough to do it, and if you are not, they will baffle you. But the Christian has met God in Christ, and Christ is his life. I know it apart from reasoning. And now He dwells in me. When the believer has it, he has the witness in himself, and he dare not think anything else but that the perfectness of that blood-shedding has cleansed him from all sin. As to faith, we have done with the old man, sin, and the world. Our only place is in Christ, and we are therefore just waiting till He comes to receive us up into the glory, that where He is, there we may be also.

463 How far can our hearts go with this blessed truth, when He says that we have the witness in ourselves? Have our souls found deliverance from the world in the consciousness of our place before God in light, according to God's own work and God's own light? "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We are of God. And Christ is the righteousness of God to us, and there we are. The Lord give us to apprehend more distinctly what Christ came to do, and also the consciousness of His way of doing it - testifying what man was without this

- without God and hating God - but testifying also to this by loving us, and by giving Himself for us!

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