

# Obedience and Dependence Edinburgh

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience and dependence on God, and how this is demonstrated through Christ's life and teachings.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:20, Matthew 24:21, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, Philippians 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Hebrews 10:25, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 3:8-11

**Topics:** "Dependence On God", "Obedience"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the vital connection between obedience and dependence on God, illustrating that true strength comes from recognizing our own weakness and surrendering to Christ. He uses examples from the lives of Moses, Elijah, and Paul to demonstrate that without self-knowledge and the breakdown of self, we cannot effectively resist the power of Satan. Darby stresses that the expectation of Christ's return should shape the believer's life, urging Christians to remain vigilant and faithful while waiting for the Lord. He concludes that true apostolic succession is found in the gathering of believers in Christ's name, and that God's word provides guidance and strength in all circumstances.

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## Transcript

I would just say a word as to obedience and dependence.

These are the elements of the new man, and they are exhibited in Christ Himself.

But until we have individually learnt ourselves, and come to the end of ourselves, we cannot walk in them. Even when there is in Christians an honest spiritual intention to be right, if self is not fully given up, the energy of self will mix itself in it, and produce failure.

If self is at work, there is no true guard against Satan's power.

I will refer to one or two examples of what I mean. Take Moses. He gives up and refuses to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, taking his place with the people of God, slaves though they were. But he has no true self-knowledge, and so he kills the Egyptian; then he fears the first person that raises an outcry against him, and runs away.

Look again at Elijah. He takes true ground, owns the twelve tribes, is entrusted with full power by God, gathers the priests of Baal and has every one of them killed; but what then?

When Jezebel threatens him, he runs away and says, "Lord, they have slain thy prophets with the sword," when it was he himself who had been killing the others "and I am left alone." "Indeed you are not," says the Lord, "I have seven thousand left that have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Or take the case of Paul. You cannot find a more glorious example of grace than in him; but after having been taken up into the third heaven, Paul is in danger from the flesh, and is obliged to have a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

There must ever be the breakdown of self, not only the knowledge that we are sinners, but that we are without strength. Often we have not measured our weakness, and we go forward not thinking what it is, not suspecting it, but flesh is always weak in the things of God. The place of dependence is the place of power - Christ's power. That is what we have to learn, and that, too, by a process that makes us find out what we are in ourselves, and thus divinely taught, it makes us sick of it also.

If you had put Paul into a fourth heaven, had there been one, it would only have been more dangerous still for him.

The revelation of grace does not help me if I am not in God's presence.

83 In 2 Corinthians you get two things put together; in chapter 1 Paul has the sentence of death written in himself; and in chapter 4 you have the way in which it was kept up, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

Paul was constantly acting in view of the cross, so that flesh could not stir, and, on the other hand, to test it, God puts Paul through circumstances which so tested it in his case, that he despaired even of life, the effect being he received such strength that he could do all things. "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed," etc.

Now this is not merely I am dead with Christ, but the positive learning that self will not do.

Another thing, too, I would mention with reference to the utter hopelessness of all that man has built up, and that is, that true succession - apostolic, if you like - is found in "two or three" gathered together in Christ's name.

The power of binding and loosing - discipline practically - is by the word of God, connected not with a clergy, but with the assembly, wherever two or three are gathered. Of course it is merely administrative power, God alone can forgive absolutely. But administrative power was given to Peter, and then it was given to those who come after him.

God has provided everything for the church for all ages, and we have it, if we only take the word of God for our authority and guide. There is apostolic succession in the two or three.

The more difficult the times are, the more you find the word of God meets every thing. All sorts of things are arising, in these days specially, but the word of God is ready for all.

Since I was first exercised, I never found it fail me in any difficulty or heresy. I have failed it, that is another thing; but it has never failed me.

One thing more. We have looked at the failure but the present power is, the living God is with us; MY strength is made perfect in weakness, that is the character of our strength.

84 Where was the strength that destroyed Satan's power? It was the weakness of death, Christ's death, of course; He was crucified through weakness.

And it is the same principle with us.

When you look at man as man, his is a false strength, because he has departed from God. It is only evil. Such strength has to be broken down. I am satisfied we never fully get the sense of this, until it is actually broken down in us.

You may be converted and know the forgiveness of your sins, but until you have gone through the breaking down itself, you never know what the true character of your own energy is, but you are liable to fall and slip into it.

You see there is something to be done - what then? You must go and do it. Ah! did God send you? That is another thing.

The soul that has learnt itself refers to God as the first thing; it distrusts the activity of its own will. If that is there, it is not obedience and dependence, though the soul may be very sincere at the same time.

I will now say a word as to the present expectation of the Lord's coming at any moment.

People who attempt to fix time are wholly mistaken. The Father has kept that in His own power. Not that we may not discern the times; the Lord says, "How is it that ye do not discern this time?"

There are moral elements around us that a spiritual mind discerns at once; but the fixing of dates is a mistake.

It is no mistake to be always expecting the Lord to return.

The object of the conversion of the Thessalonians was to wait for God's Son from heaven.

People fancy that the truth of the Lord's return is a bit of knowledge at the top of the tree; but instead of that, it is what the Thessalonians were converted for, and meanwhile they are to serve God.

People say Paul made a mistake, but I can tell you he is going to get precious fruit from it when Christ comes again. He has to wait meanwhile, but that is no great loss, for "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Yet the apostle himself did not know how to choose between the two, because if he went up there, he could not work for Christ down here.

The present constant expectation of Christ stamps its own character on the Christian: "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding."

85 It is by this that the Christian, in his mind and thoughts, becomes associated with Christ Himself. You find this specially in the letter to the church at Philadelphia, for there, besides keeping His word, and not denying His name, you read, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience." Whose patience?

Christ's. Christ is waiting; and He is waiting a great deal more truly and earnestly than we are.

We are waiting for Him, and He is waiting for us, with all the love that the Bridegroom bears to the bride.

True, He is waiting until His enemies be made His footstool; but, for His friends, He has perfected His work; and He sits expecting as to His enemies, and then He will rise up to judgment. He does not know the time in that sense (of course, as God, He does) but it is not a revealed thing yet.

He is waiting, and we wait for Him, but so complete is the association, now in spirit, and then in glory, that save His personal glory, He cannot take any glory until He has us with Him for we are joint heirs with Him.

It is blessed association with Himself that we find in Revelation 3:8-11.

In the first four churches you find the ecclesiastical order of things in the world closing with Thyatira which goes on "till I come." Thyatira ends entirely the whole moral history of the church of God until Christ comes. Consequently, you get there both the kingdom and the heavenly part of the saints. "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." That is the kingdom according to the second Psalm.

"And I will give him the morning star "that is Christ according to the New Testament . . . . As soon as he says "morning star" in Revelation 22:16, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come."

In the first four churches, when Christ is spoken of, it is in the terms by which He is described when among the golden candlesticks, but this is not the case in the latter three.

"He that hath the key of David," has no place in that which John saw in Christ in Revelation 1.

But it is Christ's coming which is brought before us.

86 In Philadelphia we get, "I know thy works," but there is not a word said about them, the saints must be content to wait till the Lord comes.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience," that was Christ's own path down here, and we are to walk in it now - now that we are at the end of a dispensation, which, as an outward system, has wholly departed from God.

Christ down here had none of the things that belonged to Him. As a man, He simply lived by every word of God. He did not take up the pretension of power, but He walked in obedience, and that is just our place. And mark, they should, consequently, be kept "from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

At, and from, the very beginning, the Lord's coming was presented as the immediate expectation and hope of the believer; while in no case is the thought of the coming of Christ put beyond the life of those who were living then.

The history of the church is not given as a thing that is to continue, but it is all brought out in churches that then existed.

So, "the virgins" that go to sleep are the same as those who wake up.

Do not treat the Lord's coming as a matter of prophecy - prophecy concerns events in this world.

When once personal salvation is settled, then we delight in two things which are found in Scripture - the government of the world, and the sovereign grace which has taken poor sinners like us, and set us with Christ before God.

Prophecy concerns the first; but the sovereign grace which puts us poor creatures in the glory of the Son of God is a distinct thing. Christ will come and take us there, but (save in the lips of Christ Himself) you never find the "assembly" nor the rapture, except in Paul. (The mere name is used in 2 John.) Others speak of his appearing, but that has to do with the government of this world.

Ques. May I ask you for a word about "the hour of temptation"?

There is an hour of temptation coming upon the whole earth. I do not mean the special tribulation of Matthew 24, for that is Jewish, and Jeremiah calls it "Jacob's trouble," but, beside that, there is a time of trial which will pass over the whole world.

87 The "everlasting gospel" will announce that "the hour of his judgment is come," and God will not judge the nations of the earth until He has sent this message out to them.

Matthew gives you the judgment of the nations, according as "my brethren" have been received by them or not. That is here the only ground on which they will be judged.

Romans gives us the ground of the judgment of the heathen.

That is prophecy. It will be a time of trouble over the whole world, but those who are faithful to the word of Christ's patience will be kept from it, i.e., taken out of the way to the Lord.

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