

# Readings on 1 Peter 2

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon on 1 Peter 2 explores the character of Christ and its implications for the church's condition, emphasizing the necessity of faithfulness amidst trials and the dangers of corruption.*

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 5:4, Revelation 1:8, Revelation 2:10, Revelation 2:12, Revelation 2:16, Revelation 3:5, Revelation 3:7, Revelation 3:11, Revelation 3:20

**Topics:** "Christ's Authority", "Faithfulness in Trials"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of Christ's character as it relates to the conditions of the seven churches, particularly highlighting His attributes of judgment and authority. In Smyrna, He is presented as 'The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive,' offering comfort amidst tribulation. Darby discusses the importance of understanding the unseen realities behind events, illustrating how God's judgment operates in both human responsibility and divine holiness. He warns against the seduction of the church by worldly influences, particularly in Pergamos and Thyatira, and stresses the need for faithfulness and separation from corruption. Ultimately, he calls believers to hold fast to Christ's truth as they await His return.

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## Transcript

In each of the seven churches, the character attached to Christ has reference to the condition of the church, as shewn in its being warned, or else by threat of judgment, or by promise.

In Smyrna, some would be put to death, so Christ is there presented as, "The first, and the last, which was dead, and is alive."

In the first chapter, the characters of Christ are very instructive. Let us look a little at them.

"As a flame of fire," is, the piercingness of divine judgment. "The voice of many waters," denotes majesty. "His feet like unto fine brass," implies firmness of judgment as regards responsibility. The Son of man is the Ancient of days. In Daniel 7, He is brought to the Ancient of days, but directly after, it is the Ancient of days who comes. Righteousness is about His loins. "Eyes . . . as a flame of fire" are connected with judgment, as fire ever is. All this shews us who and what He is.

364 Then, "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword," i.e., the word in judgment. "And he had in his right hand seven stars" - subordinate authority. "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" -

supreme sovereign authority and glory.

"Fear not; I am the first and the last," that is divine.

"I am he that liveth and was dead," that is human.

"I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades] and of death." He holds now that power in His hand.

He brings to bear upon the church these attributes of divine and human glory, for He is dealing with the state of the saints.

In living a life of sight, it is wonderful how little is seen of reality. I have been often struck in reading the histories of the gospels with facts apparently underneath, "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed" or enrolled. It was the first census ever made, a most important thing. for it was the empire bringing men under a power never known before; through it, the whole political world was set in commotion, and all was overruled to bring Christ to Bethlehem. Again, when the thief had his legs broken, that sabbath day was a high day; and they broke his legs so as not to have a dead person on the cross that day. Little did they think they were sending him off to heaven! But they wanted simply to get rid of anything that might interfere with their ceremonial.

What is most important is that which lies behind and is unseen. The Lord "withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous." We see this again in Job. The Chaldeans were going to have a razzia, but it was all taking place under God, through the devil's hands; and it has served for instruction to the saints ever since.

When we come to details, there is, I think, a double judgment of God indicated. We find, first, the judgment of God as to responsibility where we are, and then, the judgment of God as to what can approach Him where He is, and as He is. Both are His judgments, but it is just the difference between the brass and the gold. The brazen altar was judgment as regards the responsibility of man where he was; he had to bring a sinoffering, and meet God according to his responsibility and failure in it. But the cherubim on the mercy-seat were all of gold, and that was approaching God according to what He was in Himself. "His feet like unto fine brass," that is the firmness of His judgment as regards human responsibility. Just as the sinner comes to the brazen altar where the question of his previous responsibility is met, but he is not really clear and settled in his soul until he has passed right within the vail. We cannot have the full value of righteousness unless we have to do with the gold, that is to say, unless we can walk in the light as God is in the light. I cannot now have merely my responsibility as a man met, I must go further than this.

365 Well, the Lord takes a gracious character in Smyrna, because there was a process of tribulation going on. He is "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive"; therefore, though some of them might be put to death, He was both before it all, and after it all; and He Himself had died and was alive again, so that the whole thing was met. The tribulation was needed, allowed, and sent; but He was above it all, for having gone through this, He could be with them in it. There would not have been such chastening if it had not been needed, though no fault was found with them.

Stephen was taken away because of a declined state of the Church, though it is, of course, a privilege to suffer with and for Christ. When the Church does decline, persecution becomes an instrument in God's hand, and it overtakes others who may not be the prominent defaulters. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." How remarkable the Lord saying, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison"! And

what then? You must be faithful unto death.

Ques. What is meant by saying "they are Jews"?

They are the concision, not the circumcision. They were the pretended successional religion, and this God did not want.

Ques. Not really Jews?

Oh! they may have been Jews, but Christ does not own them. The object is to shew up successional religion in contrast with spirituality.

Ques. What were the means employed by Satan?

At Philippi, it was the ruling power, or the jailer would not have put them into prison; it may have been that popular violence demanded it. Those called Jews here, are not assumed to be inside.

366 Ques. Do the "ten days" mean ten years?

No; still, I should think it was a specific time; the devil could do no more than the Lord allowed him; it is like saying, 'I have measured how long it shall last.' And the promise here, "he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death," meets this state of things, as it always does in each particular temptation of the Church. Take the case of Ephesus, with its promise, general to all really; and then the last church, where to those who hold good and do not fail the promise is, that they shall sit with Him upon His throne; so every Christian will be on His throne.

Ques. Are we to understand that every saved person is an overcomer?

I suppose so, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" There may be specified things to overcome. But few only are overcomers in the separation here indicated.

Ques. What we have been going through in Timothy would shew the place of the true overcomer, would it not?

Yes, as to the present day. Remember, the devil is still here, until the Lord takes to Himself His great power and reigns. It is all right, though it is not all explicable.

In Pergamos, we find seduction coming in. The sharp sword with two edges is the word applied to judge; and He warns them that He will come to execute it, if they do not take care. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is"; that is to say, the professing church is in the world. "And thou holdest fast my name," etc.; but even so, there are, "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam."

Satan's seat was there; he had been a roaring lion, but now, as a serpent, Satan was trying to mix up the Church with the world. And this is spiritual fornication.

Holding, too, the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes; that proves the state was bad. Previous to this, it was a question of the "deeds," now it is of the "doctrine." We have here superstition, idolatry, and fornication; Satan was seeking to seduce the saints of God. But in Thyatira, Jezebel is the mother of corruptions, and thenceforth there is no hope.

Ques. What would answer to Balaam now?

367 Drawing the saints of God into the world, and corrupting them, and teaching error for reward. See Jude as to this.

Balaam was an extraordinary character; he had the revelation of the name Jehovah, and he was connected with Satan's power. He says, "I could not go beyond the commandment of Jehovah, my God," and yet he sought for enchantments. See Numbers 23:4, 16; chap. 24:1. Balaam was using the name and authority of Jehovah, and taking the guidance of the devil. And this is what the professing church is doing. When Balaam cannot curse Israel, he tempts them to fornication; and then he gets them to worship Baal. The whole of it is Satan's power in Popery. When one gets into Papal countries, one finds plenty of winking Madonnas, and such things, which it is impossible to account for.

Not that the full corruption was there as yet, but it was coming in as plain as could be in many ways. Later on, heathen practices were Christianised, the tombs of the martyrs took the place of that of Hercules. They used holy water at the idols' temples; the practice was then transferred, and the Christians sprinkled themselves. It is a curious thing that as soon as the council at Ephesus decided that Mary was the mother of God, the heathens came in en masse. In Switzerland alone, seven great temples became Christian at once. The great body of worshippers came in; instead of having the mother of the gods, it was the mother of God, that was all. Nobody denies it. When they came over to convert England, directed by Pope Gregory to do so, they were not to pull down the temples, but only to change their use, and to change also their feasts in the same way. This was in the seventh century. It was all done deliberately and systematically. And then they worked miracles at these places. If one goes into a church dedicated to Mary, one will find a holy well, and a bush covered with bits of rag - votive offerings - just as it used to be to Esculapius. A great deal of it is ignorance, but Satan is in it.

Ques. Satan?

Do you think that if I go to the mother of God and worship her, it is not of Satan? I do not believe that mesmerism is all imposture. Nor do I limit spiritual fornication to Popery, the religious world is in it in measure.

In chapter 17, the woman has a golden cup with which people get intoxicated. Ritualism is this, in principle, but without the Pope.

368 Ques. Do you expect miraculous power to be largely put

On the devil's side, I do, especially after the church is gone; there will be "signs and lying wonders."

The same words are used in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 as to antichrist as are used by Peter in Acts 2:22, to shew that Jesus was a man approved of God; these three words are: "miracles and wonders and signs." Another thing that makes it the more striking is, that what Elijah did to prove Jehovah was God of Israel, is done also in Revelation 13, where antichrist, the second beast, makes fire come down out of heaven. Satan will do the same, in a lying way, of course. Mesmerism is more connected with infidelity.

When Satan is cast down from heaven, he gives up his antipriestly character, and then there is only left to him to be anti-king and anti-prophet. This second beast merges then into the false prophet. And he has two horns like a lamb.

Ques. Why do you call Satan anti-priest?

This is his character as the accuser of the brethren.

When cast out, he resuscitates the first beast.

There are two almighty powers of God - justice and mercy. Of these two, the Romanists put justice into Christ's hands, and mercy into Mary's. (See Liguori's "Glories of Mary.") I believe it is this which stopped Pusey; he says he cannot get over this, and I believe it is because he loves Christ that he cannot. The whole Romanist theory is, that Mary is the mediator of mercy.

Ques. What is the "hidden manna"?

I suppose Christ. In Canaan they were to preserve a pot of manna, but it was not in the ark when this was put in the temple. The discipline that prepared people for the wilderness was not wanted there. If I have the consciousness of Christ's approbation, I have in a sense the white stone now. There is something specific in the personal approbation, besides the name not known to others. I shall get hidden manna in heaven, but not on earth. The Israelites were to keep a pot of manna, that they might afterwards know what they had been fed upon in the wilderness. We find something distinctive here, which is lost in Thyatira; there, the nominal church has become the birthplace of corruption; it is open wickedness, not merely seduction, and therefore "overcoming" now is put before the promise, not after it; the promise thus separating off the overcomer. God has given her space to repent, and she has not repented, and from that time onwards there has been no return. The character that Christ takes here is not ecclesiastical at all. He is Son of God over God's house, no matter what Jezebel is doing. "These things saith the Son of God." The moment I come to Rome, properly speaking, I find that the ground of separation from her is connected with Christ's Person, rather than with the place in which He holds this character. His eyes are still as a flame of fire. And here we have the overcomer, the kingdom, and the heavenly hope. Indeed, in the promise, the whole millennial state is substituted for the professing church, and with this is the instruction to "hold fast till I come."

369 The woman Jezebel was an idolatry within. The only way of overcoming is by separation. This epistle takes us to the close of the Church's history, and to the coming of the Lord. Popery goes on to the end, while in Thyatira, we have the promise of heavenly blessing.

Ques. What of the Greek church?

[That does not come before God's mind at all. God looks at that poor country and sees Mohammedanism.\*\*] There can be no doubt, I think, that the seven churches present a rapid but most perspicuous sketch of the course of Western Christendom. I do not believe the Greek church enters into the account. It does not come before God's mind here at all. Still, it may be part of great Christendom, and it is, practically, the same as Thyatira, but as a secondary thing.\* [It is judged as Mohammedanism.\*\*]

{\*See "Letters of J.N.D.", Vol. 3, pages 340-1 [& page 220].}

{\*\*As originally copied in hand written form.}

Ques. Does it appear that the saints then derived any comfort from these exhortations as understanding them?

I do not know but that they might have done so.

Ques. What is the meaning of verse 24?

As to "the depths of Satan," it was actual at the time. He is seeking to make them judge the flesh, and He would allow no burden to be put upon them other than that of being faithful to what they were. If we look at Popery as going down to the end, it would be a word for us to-day. We have its character now.

The time to repent has been given, and the Church, therefore, will never recover from Popery, which remains until the Lord comes in judgment. Not long since the Pope said to the Ritualists, 'Gentlemen, you are like the bells of the churches; you call the people in, but you never come in yourselves.'

Ques. Is "till I come," the rapture?

370 I suppose so; only He is looking at it more as a general thing. Thyatira has not repented, and therefore the second principle comes in, and that is judgment.

Ques. What is the meaning of "that which ye have"?

That is the truth. It is evident that the kingdom, the ruling with a rod of iron, and the morning star are regarded by Christ as that for which they were waiting, the kingdom taking thus the place of the church.

Peter says, you have a lamp, and you do well to take heed to its light, until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts. Prophecy treated of the government of the world, and how it would end, and they would do well to take heed to judgments, until they had a better motive, and that was Christ's coming; the prophecies remaining good, all the same. It is all very well to look at prophecy, but the morning star in the heart is a better thing for us before the kingdom comes. But besides substituting the kingdom for the church, we get heavenly things. In Psalm 2, the Son of God is looked at as born into the world; but Christ is seen here, over God's house, and this is a great deal more, for He is lifted thus above a mere official place.

In the three previous churches, Christ had been seen in connection with the saints, but here He is seen above the church, and with eyes of fire; He holds the character in which He judges the church. I do not think there is any real difference between the morning star in this passage and in chapter 22. The truth here is specially applicable to the dark ages, though Popery still continues.

Now we come to Protestantism. What is said to the churches applies at all times: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Except for the fact that Christ has the seven stars, we have nothing now of His original characters, as given in chapter 1. The authority of Christ is maintained as regards Protestantism.

Ques. Does that refer particularly to ministry?

No, not as far as I see; it refers more to the responsibility of those who stand before Christ. The seven spirits of God are the same as in chapters 4 and 5, and they have eyes always. In Zechariah 3, we have the seven eyes upon one stone; it is one stone laid there because the Lord is in Jerusalem when the millennium begins.

The seven eyes give us the variously characterised action of the Spirit in the government of the world. All the characters are millennial, not ecclesiastical, and they are connected with Christ's coming.

371 We need to have a real faith in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture.

What is so solemn in Sardis is, that they are going to be treated like the world, not exactly with awful judgments like Thyatira, but just as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5, "That day" will overtake the world as a thief. So Christ will come on them as a thief, and treat them as the world. There is in Sardis the form without the power, though not the corruption that is found in Thyatira.

Ques. Are the few in Sardis looked at as walking in separation?

Nothing is looked at here as in separation, for Christ is judging the state of the church, and this has nothing to do with the individual merely as such. Nor in that which is punishment to the church from Christ's hand, is there any direction as to what I am to do. I have no individual direction in the seven churches, except to listen. I may, of course, draw consequences.

The thing people so frequently insist on, is to be allowed to go on with evil, and I have sometimes said, Well, then, go on with Laodicea, and be spued out of His mouth. I believe that what chiefly characterises Ritualism, is the effort to go back to Thyatira.

"I have not found thy works perfect before God"; this is a striking expression, for it shews that God never goes back from His full and original claim. His claim never falls below what He has put a person into.

Ques. Is the "book of life" the same here as elsewhere?

Everywhere it is one and the same book of life, and therefore it is supposed here that they have life, but if God has written the name in it before the foundation of the world, it will not be blotted out.

It is a most remarkable thing that nobody is ever ashamed of a false religion, while even the truest Christian is in danger of being ashamed of his.

When we come to Philadelphia, the character of Christ is that of the holy and the true, but there is nothing here of the characteristics of Christ as seen in the first chapter. It is altogether outside of what is ecclesiastical.

372 Ques. Why is the key of David brought in here?

It all refers to the Lord's coming; but in Laodicea, He takes the whole character of substitute for the church; that is to say, the witness is gone, and He presents Himself as the witness instead of the church. It is Christ Himself at the end of the dispensation. So He opens, and no man shuts. One cannot have truth in the inward parts without the truth of God.

Ques. Is Philadelphia, then, the revival of evangelical truth?

It is more. Protestantism was that, but it has dropped down into the mere abstract notion of private judgment; and, as opposed to this, the Catholics have been clever enough to put up church authority, but neither of these is to be found in the word of God. A man has no right of private judgment. If God has spoken, I have no right of judgment; I have nothing to do with private judgment, but to sit at Christ's feet like Mary, and to obey. There is no threat here; it is simply, "Behold, I come quickly."

In these three churches we have the Lord's coming.

Ques. Are there not saints now with a little strength, like Philadelphia, and who are walking outside the established order of things?

Well, that is true, but I have nothing here of established order.

Wherever is found pretension to traditional religion in contrast with the word of God, there is the synagogue of Satan. The point here, is not so much what is inside or outside, but Christ personally as revealed in the word, and, further, that not having much strength, we are holding His word, and not denying His Name.

When He takes the key of David, He will have authority over everything. In Shebna, we have, typically, the setting aside of antichrist; and in Hilkiyah, the key of David given to Christ. And when He comes, all the human security of the antichristian power will be put down.

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