

The Christian a Representative of Christ 2 Corinthians 3

by John Nelson Darby

A Christian is a representative of Christ, and Christ's love and sacrifice should be the motivation for our actions.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:2

Topics: "Transformation through the Spirit", "Representation of Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that Christians are representatives of Christ, as evidenced by the transformative power of the truth in their lives. He addresses the Corinthians' doubts about his apostolic authority by pointing to their own conversion as proof of his ministry. Darby explains that true Christianity is not merely about outward conduct but about having Christ engraved on the heart through the Holy Spirit. He contrasts the ministration of the letter, which brings condemnation, with the ministration of the Spirit, which offers righteousness and freedom. Ultimately, believers are called to reflect Christ's love and grace in their lives, serving as living epistles to the world.

Transcript

This chapter brings out the way in which the power of the truth works on our souls to bring us into the presence of the Lord. It begins with the effect of this in testimony to others; and then lets us know how the effect is produced - what a Christian, and so what the church, really is.

The Corinthians had been calling in question the apostolic authority of Paul. How does he meet this? He appeals to themselves, to their own calling of God when they were turned from idols to Him, "as the seal of his apostleship." It is as though he said, "If Christ has not spoken by me, how is it that you are Christians?"

So chapter 12:3-5 is not at all a precept to doubt, to examine and call in question their own Christianity. The apostle is shewing the absurdity of their doubt of him. "If you want to examine me, examine yourselves: you commend my ministry, because you commend Christ."

Then he goes on to tell us what a Christian is. He is a representative of Christ, just as much as the tables of stone were the representation of the law. Only in that case the writing being with the Spirit of the living God, not with ink, Christ is engraven on the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, and they known and read of all men. The world ought to see Christ engraven on the heart of a Christian, just as much as Israel could see the letter of the law on the tables.

It is written on the "tables of the heart," by the "Spirit of the living God." Thus merely outward conduct (though there must be that for the world to see) will not do, but Christ within, as the motive and end of all we do.

There is a certain external respect for right and wrong as the result of the Bible and professed Christianity in these countries, which we do not find among the heathen. Thus a man may be following lawful pursuits, and be all that is correct outwardly and morally, yet, if Christ is not the motive, it is all good for nothing. God did not send His Son into the world to bring in a negative Christianity. There must be that result which is worthy of the work. It must be evident through the power of the Holy Ghost. There will be failure, for we are poor feeble creatures; but the world will see where we are going by the road that we take. A man may get on slowly or stumble, but it is evident what road he is going.

242 We have to look to ourselves and see how far we are devotedly following Christ, with full purpose of heart - how far we can say, This one thing I do; but we must take care at the same time not to get into legal bondage by this standard. If I say, "Here is a rule of conduct: follow it," this cannot reach the heart, the affections. The ministration of the letter brings only failure, condemnation, and death; for it prescribes a rule which man, being a sinner, can never follow. It does not change man, but it puts him under death; it proves him "ungodly and without strength."

We may turn even Christ into that letter of condemnation; we may take His life, for instance, and make it our law. Nay, we may turn even the love of Christ into our law; we may say, "He has loved me, and done all this for me, and I ought to love him, and do so much for him, in return for this love," etc. Thus if we turn His love into a rule of life, it becomes the ministration of death; for the only thing a rule can do is to condemn. With the children of Israel Moses put a veil upon his face, for they could not bear the sight of the glory - it condemned them. Man tries either to hide his condemnation from God, or his conscience from His condemnation. He excludes himself from God - from the glory of His holiness and from His glory as seen in Jesus; and when His glory shall be revealed in the end, it will only bring out condemnation more fully.

In contrast with this ministration of death and condemnation, we see the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness. Now have we this? It is not Christ down here. The Holy Ghost here supposes Christ to be gone: and now it is the power of the Spirit of God revealing the glory of Christ to the soul. What has the Holy Ghost to tell us of Christ? He reveals Him not only as the pattern of godliness, but as always manifesting grace. The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of vile, miserable sinners: and Christ says "him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

The whole life of Jesus was a manifestation of grace. He laid Himself aside for others. He gave Himself to all who came to Him. He "had no time so much as to eat"; in the midst of a world of wickedness He was the perfect manifestation of the goodness of God. And this was not all. He died for sin, put Himself under the whole power of God's wrath for sin - He was laid in the grave - He ascended into heaven; and sent down the Holy Ghost as a witness to His glory, and as the minister of righteousness. So it is now God ministering, not requiring.

243 If I am brought to look at Jesus, I can say, He bore my sins - I did them, but He bore them - He gave His soul an offering for my sins; He has taken the whole charge of my sin. I trace my sins up to the cross and there I have done with them. They are all gone.

Where, then, do I see the glory? Is it on Sinai; or in the face of Jesus Christ who has put away all those sins which were revealed and condemned at Sinai? He has entered into heaven, because they are put away. In Philippians 2 we see Christ in heaven, not only in virtue of the glory of His Person, but because of the work He has accomplished. "Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him," etc.

We are thus able not only to bear the sight of that glory of God, but to rejoice in it. Our souls rest in it. We do not ask to have it veiled, but that we may see every ray of it. Our hearts can satiate themselves there, because it is the testimony to the love of God, and the perfect putting away of sin.

There is also the ministration of righteousness. "Seeing then we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech." It is not a little hope here and a little despair there, but it is a message of perfect righteousness to the vilest. "By the obedience of One many were made righteous." Now, it is God putting in fruit, and not requiring righteousness.

What is the practical effect of this work of Christ received in the heart? Not to make a man careless about sin. Not to give him liberty to sin because Christ has borne the wrath due to it. The last verse shews how we are made this living epistle. Contemplating Christ we become like Him. If the Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shews them to me, I can say, "What a Christ I have!" and there is the spirit of holiness at once. I long for Christ, and look at Christ, and thus I get like Him. The very thing which brings an accomplished righteousness to my conscience makes me like Him. Then, mark, there is no veil on the heart or on the glory. The Holy Ghost dwelling in us has taken it away. And it is said of Israel, "When they shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." When Moses went in to the Lord, he always took off the veil; but the children of Israel could not bear the sight of the glory; so he put it on when he appeared to them.

244 For believers, there is no veil anywhere. They can look at the glory because it tells of salvation, not of judgment - accomplished salvation and effectual righteousness. What perfect liberty to be in the presence of God and enjoy Christ in all His fulness! (v. 17). "The Lord is that Spirit"; that is, Christ is the mind of the Spirit in all these Old Testament things.

Then what is the consequence of this ministration of the Spirit? What follows my knowing that I am the righteousness of God in Christ? that God delights in me? I have a constraint upon my heart to serve Him and follow Him. If I think of His love, have I any fear? I do fail constantly: has God any afterthought about me, or about my sins? There is no uncertainty: nothing is between me and God but the love which has placed me there; without spot and in perfect freedom, for He has given Christ for me. It is now, not God requiring anything from me, but God giving things to me; and this, that His Son may be glorified in me: not that man may be glorified, but His Son Jesus glorified. God is making a marriage for His Son. We have to be the epistle of Christ We have this privilege - to glorify and manifest Christ. We should be delighted to be this epistle, cost what it may. Christ died for me, and I have to represent Him. Of course I may fail, often and again; but the heart at liberty before God will run in the way of His commandments; and this because the affections are set upon God and the glory of Christ. My life, my daily path, must be an answer to the love of God. I am debtor to Christ, for He loved me and gave Himself for me. What an amazing privilege to be permitted to glorify Him in any little way in our path down here!

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