

# Unrevised Notes of Readings on the Gospel of John

by John Nelson Darby

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*This sermon explores the nature and work of Christ, the significance of the cross, and the role of the Holy Ghost in the Christian life.*

**Scripture:** John 1:1

**Topics:** "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "The Incarnation of Christ"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the Gospel of John, emphasizing the dual nature of Christ as both divine and human. He highlights that Christ, the Word made flesh, came to reveal the Father and offer grace and truth to humanity. Darby explains the significance of Christ's incarnation, His role as the Lamb of God, and the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. He stresses that through Christ's work, believers are granted a new relationship with God as His children, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The sermon ultimately reveals the profound connection between Christ's sacrifice and the believer's identity and relationship with God.

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## Transcript

(Words of Faith, Vol. 3, 1884, page 261.)

John 1.

In the first part of this chapter we get abstractedly what Christ was: the Word, the Word with God, and who was God - life and light. An important element is brought out here, and that is, that when divine light came into the world in grace, the world did not know Him; and then we get quickening - "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

In verse 14 we have what Christ became, not what He was, essentially; I mean, of course, that this is another part of the truth. We have not His work yet, but His incarnation - "and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." This is very simple in one sense. He became a Man; and not only that, but He "dwelt among us" - not like God visiting Abraham merely. In outward form He was like another man - He was "found in fashion as a man." (Phil. 2:8) That is an immense truth; the Word comes and dwells among men as a Man, (more than a man, of course), "and we beheld his glory," the glory He had down here, and

those who had eyes to see through it could see the Father - "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "The glory as of an only begotten with a father;" this is really only a comparison, yet "this is my beloved Son" the Father said more than once.

If you leave out the parenthesis the passage reads thus: "And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace upon grace." But that is not all we get in this statement of His glory; there is a manifestation of the Father, and those who had eyes to see saw the Father revealed in the Son, but it is also the Son's revealed place as Man down here.

At the end of Matthew 3 we get in this connection a very remarkable passage. There He took His place publicly - He entered by the door into the sheepfold being baptised with the baptism of repentance; not surely as needing repentance Himself, but taking this place, as fulfilling righteousness, with the godly remnant in Israel in their first right step Godward. When He had taken His place there, as soon as He came up out of the water, the Holy Ghost descended on Him; heaven is opened, and the Father's voice came from thence saying, "This is my beloved Son." He stands here the expression of our place before God as our Father. But we must remark that there was no union with Christ in incarnation; no taking humanity into His Person. We are united to Him in glory, and it was after He had accomplished redemption and was risen that the Lord said to His disciples, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God" - He had brought them into the same place He had Himself as Man. What makes this scene in Matthew still more striking is that it was the first time the Trinity ever could be revealed, though we get the Son occasionally in the Old Testament, and the Spirit often. The revelations of the Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Spirit - is identified with His taking this place - making it - for us in His own Person, and now ours actually through grace.

But to return to our verse, we get Him here as "the only-begotten of the Father," not as "the firstborn among many brethren," and He "dwelt among us" - it was not merely an apparition to them - and it was as "full of grace and truth." There had been acts of grace before, but here we have a Person who is Himself the thing "grace and truth came [subsisted] by Jesus Christ." It was not merely a direction how to walk such as the law was. The law came with a claim on man; it was the perfect rule for man as man. Here we have this precious Person dwelling among us, full of grace and truth - all divine goodness was there, dwelling in the world, and the truth about everything brought out. It could then be said of Satan that he was the prince of this world, and the god of it, because truth itself was in the world, and brought this fact to light. "Grace and truth" (the singular is used in the original) were one thing in His Person. It was the bringing down to man, the humanising, in a sense, of light and love; not the abstract nature of God, but the manifestation of that amongst men.

Next (ver. 15) we have John the Baptist's testimony.

Then (ver. 16) John the Evangelist takes it up again: "and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;" it really means grace heaped upon grace, when one grace was given another came upon it. There was in its plenitude divine favour in the world and truth about everything. Truth in a certain sense answers to light, but truth could not have been in the world if grace had not been there too, for it would not have been the truth about God. As believers we have all received of Christ's fulness abundance of grace; here it is what is in Himself.

Do you ask, "How have we received it?"

Because all that is in Christ is ours; all the riches of grace and blessedness; His nature, too, in one sense, because Christ is our life, the source and the fulness of it. In respect of our being sinners, the way of this we get in, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." Christ is the reservoir of all blessedness, and we are connected with Him through death. Nobody was anointed with the Holy Ghost but Christ during His lifetime.

When the disciples looked back they could see what He was, because they had got (through the Holy Ghost, given to them after Christ was glorified) what He was in themselves; as communicated to us, it is said "which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passed and the true light now shineth." (1 John 2:8.) At first the Light was shining in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it, the light shone - but nobody received it; now the darkness is passing, it should be (there are many still in it), and the true light does shine effectively. When redemption was accomplished, and never till then, could Christ say My Father and your Father, my God and your God. In the earlier part of John's first epistle we get life and light, and in the latter part we get love.

The life was there objectively before the disciples, they "beheld his glory"; all is manifestation here. "The life was manifested, and we have seen it," says John.

The law was given by Moses - nothing came into the world by the law, but grace and truth came and were actually there when Christ was present. He is "the truth" - He is truth plainly out before us; and all grace was in Him, that is love adapted to the state man is in.

We are not saying here how a sinner is presented to God, but how the thing comes down from God; we do not get the sinner's side at all in the Gospel of John; we do not get the forgiveness of sins in John. It is a living Person in whom all these riches of grace have come down. It is an immense thing to see that Christ is the Fountain-Head, and that all the fulness that is in Him can flow down to us here. In all John's writings we get the flowing down towards us, not the presenting us upwards to God, that is Paul's doctrine; this other side is as just touched upon in 1 John 4:17. We have a divine Person coming down and putting others in connection with Himself, so that all the fulness that is in Him flows into and through them.

In verse 18 we get another thing: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Here we get the Father revealed; we have all the fulness that is in the Son for us, but besides that the Father revealed to us. A most wonderful thing this, that when He reveals the Father it is as He Himself knows Him. If I were to tell you about my father, I must tell you about him as I have known him myself.

Someone asks, "why have we the name of God here?" All through John's writings, whenever it is a question of God's nature or of man's responsibility we always get God; whenever the operation of grace is spoken of we get the Father and the Son. So we have "fellowship with the Father;" "God is light." "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" - there we have responsibility; "for the Father seeketh such to worship him" - there we have grace.

If you take God abstractedly, that is in His essence, which is the force of this passage, we shall never see Him - "He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6:16.) Yet we read "the pure in heart shall see God," and Stephen saw "the glory of God;" how I do not pretend to say. The angels, too, saw God manifest in the flesh. It would be a terrible thing to spend eternity in my Father's house, and yet never to see Him.

We get this expression "No man hath seen God at any time," also in 1 John 4:12, but we see a change has taken place in our position there, where the same difficulty is in question, and it is met in a different way. Here in the gospel we read, "The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." In that place where He was the sole and absorbing object - in the bosom of the Father where He dwelt alone, He has made Him known to us as He knows Him. Then in the epistle, we read, "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us" - by the communication of the divine nature and by the dwelling of God in us we inwardly enjoy Him as He has been manifested and declared by the Son. Christ did reveal the Father when He was upon earth, and, when He had died and risen again, and the Holy Ghost had come, God dwelt in the believer. Thus we know God inwardly - "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God," that is, the Father.

Some one wishes to know, "what place the cross has in connection with the revelation of the Father?" All revelation of God, whether in His nature or relationships, is based upon the cross. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, but now since the cross, not being here Himself, He has ambassadors; and in principle this continues always - Christ having finished the work and gone on high, ambassadors were sent - the present action of God in reconciling sinners is by ambassadors. "God was in Christ:" this refers exclusively to His life - true all through His life - not His death. What is so very wonderful in the cross is that we get there the complete righteousness of God against sin and the perfect love of God to the sinner.

We have been speaking, up till now, of the divine nature of Christ, now we get (ver. 29) His work. We have His work in two characters: He is the Lamb of God that takes away sin; and He baptises with the Holy Ghost.

First, He is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" - note, not sins. "Behold the Lamb of God," that is God's lamb, what specially appertains to God Himself - "the Lord's lot." He takes away the sin of the world, not here the sinner's sins, but the sin of the whole world; this will be the new heaven and new earth, where there will be no sign or trace of sin. We have had an innocent world, and a sinful world, then we shall have a righteous world depending on God's Lamb. God's Lamb He is in every sense, thank God, He has borne our sins too! but here it is abstract. God's Lamb is from God, according to God, and for God. In the very place of sin He has perfectly glorified all that God is - "God is glorified in him; if God be glorified in him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" - without waiting for the day of the glory with men. According to the thought of John 13:32, He goes at once into the glory of God. "I have glorified thee on the earth," He says, and as a consequence He goes back as Man into the glory He had with the Father before the world was.

As the Lamb of God, Christ perfectly glorifies God in John 13; as the Son, He perfectly glorifies the Father in John 14.

It is a wonderful thing the cross; there, and there only was God fully glorified. Where do we find the love of God in all its fulness? At the cross: "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us." Where do we find perfect righteousness against sin? At the cross: "He made him to be sin, for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Where do we find absolute obedience? At the cross, where Christ was before God in the very place of sin: "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Where was the majesty of God fully vindicated? Nowhere but at the cross: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The more we look into the cross - and we must

come to it first as poor sinners that need salvation - the more we shall wonder at God's love. We get in the cross man in absolute hatred to God and all the power of Satan; Man, much more than man, in absolute obedience; and God in perfect righteousness against sin. All man was in goodness in Christ; all man was in badness; and all God was in love and righteousness, came out at the cross. Every question of good and evil was settled at the cross. The new heaven and new earth are founded on it. Though all our blessing is wrapped up in it, "God's Lamb" is for God's glory - for Himself and according to what He is.

It is a blessed thing to study what Christ was down here, not that we can ever fathom it. What a wonderful thing that He could say, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life to take it again" - He could give a motive to God. As to comforters he had none; He went through all sorts of trials, denial, conflicts with Satan, and yet see what His spirit was in going through it all - how perfect in obedience. It is profitable indeed for us to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Look at the perfectness of the Lord, in another way, in Gethsemane: He was sweating great drops of blood when He was only even thinking of the cross, and yet He can go to His disciples and speak to them just as quietly and gently as if nothing was the matter, and then go back again and pray. We get possessed with things, they overwhelm us, but it was never so with Christ, they never took Him out of Himself, so to speak, though He suffered as no one else could suffer. We see nothing but perfectness in Him. There is nothing like it - of course there is not, but it is well to behold it, and have it always before our eyes.

Second, He is "He which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost." Here, first, we have Christ marked out by God Himself - by the Father: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him;" and then we get Him as the One who communicates the Holy Ghost to us: "The same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost;" and in this connection we have: "For him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27); "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and hath power." (Acts 10:28.) Both the expressions, "sealed" and "anointed," are used as to Christ. The character of all the life of Christ here on earth was by the power of the Holy Ghost: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (John 7:39); "After that he, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandment unto the apostle he had chosen." (Acts 1:2.)

Then, after His ascension, He received the Holy Ghost a second time, not for Himself, but for others: "Therefore being by the right hand of God, exalted, and having received the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." (Acts 2:33.) This answers to John 7:39: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified;" the Holy Ghost, as personally present in believers on earth, did not then exist.

Thus, first, we get Christ Himself anointed and sealed, its perfect Man; and then, having wrought redemption, which brings us unto His own place - "Because as he is so are we in this world." (1 John 4:17) - He gives us, from the glory where He now is consequent upon His work at the cross, the Holy Ghost, so that we are consciously in it. The Holy Ghost is given, notice, to those that "believe;" this is not the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, but what follows the place we are in through faith: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6.) Not only are we sons "by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26), but, through the Holy Ghost, we have the consciousness of being sons.

By Christ's death everything as to man's relationship with God is changed; the veil was rent from top to bottom; Man - much more than a man - has entered the holiest, and, consequent on His entering there in the virtue of His sacrifice for us, the Holy Ghost has come down to give us the consciousness of our place

before God, and with this He is the Spirit of Sonship; He sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts; and He is the earnest of the glory, which we have not yet got. Hence the possession of the Holy Ghost is what characterises the Christian: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9.)

The Holy Ghost has always quickened souls, from Adam on, but that is a very different thing to what we have here: Christ as Man - having wrought redemption through His death, having gone through judgment for us, having been made sin for us, having His place as Man at the right hand of God - sending the Holy Ghost to dwell in believers; so that, "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." (1 Cor. 15:48.) There was no accomplished redemption, and no man in heaven to be revealed in the Old Testament.

As a child of Adam I am washed and forgiven, but what place have I got? Suppose I owed a million and it was paid for me, and that was all, I might starve afterwards. There is the work of Christ as regards our old state; all has been totally put away, both sins and sin - "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3), this takes away the fruits - "In that he died he died unto sin once" (Rom. 6:10), and we have died with Him, this takes away the tree for faith: then as to the place we have got, we find its full character in Ephesians, where Christ is not looked at as the quickening Son of God, but as Man dead, and then when God raises Him from the dead, He raises us with Him - the same power takes Him and us up together.

The Christian is a person whose body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; who looks back and sees by divine teaching the value of redemption, and who, possessing the Holy Ghost as the earnest, looks on to the glory he has not yet got. He is not in the flesh; Paul says, "when we were in the flesh" (Rom. 7:5), and "ye are not in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Rom. 8:9.) In Romans 7, after the first few verses, the man, as in the flesh, is still weighing his place with God by what he is himself, like the prodigal son before he had met his father - "make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15), reasoning from himself to what his father might be; not from what his father was, as he knew after he had met him. God puts us into Christ, and gives us the Holy Ghost to give us the consciousness of it - "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus;" "for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20) "Us" is always the word of the Holy Ghost.

The difference between "anointing" and "sealing" is that anointing is the figure of our receiving the Holy Ghost and sealing that we belong to God. Sealing is for the individual - I am sealed for myself, you for yourself; but as there is only one Holy Ghost in that way we are one - "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13)

In Romans 8 we get three characters of the Holy Ghost: He is "the Spirit of God," in contrast with the flesh; "the Spirit of Christ," as that by which Christ as Man walked, and which forms our characters; and "the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead," as the power by which our bodies will be raised.

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his," means, we are not Christ's till we have got it; we may be on the way. The operation of the Spirit in quickening is one thing, but that my body is the temple of the Holy Ghost is another, and much lost sight of. When the blood was put on the lintels God had really taken the Israelites in hand, and they were safe; saved is a much stronger word than safe. If I am saved I have got out of the flesh into Christ: "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus;" we do not get salvation till Romans 8. This alters everything. When the blood was on the lintels God's character was that of judge: He did not come into them; and this was mercy. At the Red Sea He became their

Saviour: and the Israelites "saw the salvation of Jehovah," as those who had passed out of the condition to which judgment and all the power of Satan attached.

Christ was delivered for our offences; this clears me as a child of Adam, and in that state it is mercy securing me for the judgment of God. "In Christ" I am before God in Christ's place of acceptance and blessing.

The natural order of blessing, so to speak, is what we find in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The only thing that hinders the reception of the Holy Ghost is the want of simple faith in the work of Christ. The moment the Holy Ghost is received the soul cries, "Abba Father." If any one can cry "Abba, Father," he has the Holy Ghost; he has the known place of relationship with God as a son.

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