James - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, True Religion - Love and Purity

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“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:26-27).

True religion is shown by love in the heart and by purity keeping oneself unspotted from the world. It thinks of others, for those who are in distress, in need of protection, and the help and support of love, as widows and orphans. The truly religious heart, full of the love of God and moved by Him, thinks, as God does, upon sorrow, weakness and need. It is the true Christian character.

J. N. Darby (from Gems From My Reading)

Letters 2, Bethesda and Principles; the Evil of Compromise; Infidelity; Looseness and the World; Free Church of Scotland

I was very glad to hear of you all, and of the work in Australia. I am also very thankful that our dear brother not only has labored, but been blessed.... Not, that laborers are not wanting in England, and indeed everywhere, as the Lord has told us. It must be in combat we get on. It was so with the blessed Lord Himself, perfect in all His ways, so that He gave assuredly no occasion, as we sometimes may, to the enemy -none; yet they would easily find occasions of reproach. But we have actually difficulties such as you speak of, those who preach Christ, but do not really take His yoke. I do not ask any one to join or own brethren, as they speak, but I do look to their full submission to the yoke of Christ. I have been struck lately how much the Epistle of James looks to self-will to be done with and broken, that we may be perfect and complete in all the will of God.... You will be glad to hear that here the work proceeds cheeringly. There is great inquiry into the word....God is evidently working all around, and indeed in other places; the brethren are happy, and labor according to their gift: it is a happy feature of the work here. The coming of the Lord is evidently spreading, and taking effect in souls. Infidelity meanwhile raises its head.... But we wait for the rest that remains. I am content to labor, most thankful to be permitted to do so, but my heart longs for it too. Here, but from the happiest cause, as at Boston, the labor is very severe, and from distances, the hours late; but it is all well....

Ever, dear brother,

Affectionately yours in the Lord.

1877.

Letters 1, Present Path, Our

Beloved Brother,... The better I understand your position, the more clearly I see that you have nothing to do but to remain quietly where you are just now. Sowing is not reaping; it is not the season for reaping, the plants would be plucked up without any fruit, but to have the harvest we must sow. This is what I felt in Ireland: they wanted to see those who were separating themselves front nationalism come amongst brethren all at once; for my part, I tried to enlighten them; they had neither the principles nor the facts-for Bethesda, which was opening its arms to them, was in question-nor had they faith to bear the reproach of Christ. I waited; already there is much progress.... Some are quite clear, others in the way of getting on. I am thinking of going back there; but, while following duty we can leave God to act.

... You have only to keep up your relations with those brethren by presenting the truth to them in a clearer way, and allowing it to work in their hearts, committing the result to God; you cannot, I believe, do a more useful work for your country at present. In the disputes in which—and have involved Christians, you have only to go on with your work, while keeping yourself entirely outside everything; it is sad, but our place is an outside one: "the fruits of righteousness are sown in peace." This may leave us, for the time being, very few; but it leaves us with God: only pray much for the poor sheep. Your position is the best possible one, but that it may be so, you need to love these poor souls much, without giving up the sure ground of Christ; if one did that, what good would it be to be interested in them? I bless God you are there. -

May your work be positive and not controversial, as far as possible, so that those who have heart for the Lord may get on. Devotedness and faith are the chief things nowadays: there is movement enough, what is wanting is what answers needs; supply this as far as you can according to the requirements that come before you, and be content to sow, happy if you reap; the Lord says, "One soweth and another reapeth;" if we are doing His work we shall reap in His time, if we do not grow weary.... I am overwhelmed with work, but it is all right. Keep near the Lord, He will give you strength; He renews our strength: we go from strength to strength, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. He is ever good, ever faithful: "He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous."...

Yours affectionately in Christ.

London,

January 23rd, 1866.

Christian Truth: Volume 35, James 5:1-10, Comments on

The portion of believers is not in this world. Christ has won them for Himself, that they should be in His likeness in glory, co-heirs with Him. His love would have them enjoy all that He Himself enjoys, for His love is perfect. But if so, they must suffer with Him. If it is given to us to suffer for Him, it is a great privilege, but it is not the portion of all. Nevertheless, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

It is impossible to escape suffering with Him, for if we have the Spirit of Christ, we feel as Christ felt. Holiness suffers at the sight of the sin which is around, and in seeing the condition of the 'church of God and of His people. There is also sorrow on all sides and the need of souls who will not have Christ or salvation. Each one ought to take up his cross. Besides this, God permits us to suffer because in so doing, we learn patience and that our inheritance is not below. Experience, which is the realization of practical truth, is confirmed in the heart, and hope becomes much clearer and stronger. This, it is true, supposes that the love of God is shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost, and if this is not the case, God allows suffering, and also sends it, to renew the heart. He chastens whom He loves.

James addresses the rich who have possessions in this world and who do not consider the poor, while "blessed is he that considereth the poor" (Psa. 41:1). He who despises the poor because of his poverty despises the Lord Himself. The Lord Himself in the Psalm preceding the one from which I have quoted says, "I am poor and needy" (Psa. 40:17). The Lord had pronounced His blessing upon the poor; to such the gospel was preached. It was a sign announcing the Messiah. We all know that a poor man may be just as wicked as any other, but riches are a positive danger for us because they nourish pride and tend to dispose the heart to keep aloof from the poor with whom the Lord associated Himself in this world. He who was rich "for your sakes...became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Here the rich had been foremost in evil. They oppressed the poor and kept back from them the wages for which they had labored. James places before us a view of the last days. The cry of the poor had entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts. He exhorts the rich to weep and howl for the miseries that should come upon them. They had lived in pleasure on the earth and had been wanton. But not only this, they had condemned and killed the Just, for when one lives in pleasure, he does not like anyone to come and disturb his happiness. They wished to secure the enjoyment of the world in a false tranquility which thinks neither of God, nor of judgment, nor of death.

If conscience was aroused, they were disturbed and they hardened themselves as far as possible that it might not be aroused.

God does not for the present alter the course of the world. If He did so, He must execute judgment, instead of working in love for the ungodly and sinners. He is not willing to smite them; nevertheless, He is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish. The Christian then must take courage, must be patient and submissive to outward evil until the coming of the Lord, even as Christ Himself who did well, and suffered, and waited patiently. Thus the Christian should walk in His steps. Our portion is not in this world. If we suffer for well-doing, this is acceptable to God, and still more so if it is for Christ Himself that we suffer.

The life of our Savior was all suffering and patience; but now He is glorified with God the Father. Soon He will come a second time into the world, in the glory of the Father, and in His own glory, and in the glory of the angels, and then He will be glorified in His saints and will be admired in all them that believe.

In that glorious day, when the poorest of His own-Christians, oppressed by the enemies of the truth-will be like the Lord Himself in glory, we shall make our boast in having been permitted to suffer for Him, and in having maintained patience and silence through the unjustly imposed sufferings of the Christian life. Blessed are they who are found watching, for He will gird Himself and will make them sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them. See Luke 12:35-44. What joy! What grace! It will be the glory of the Savior Himself to give us to enjoy the blessings of heaven in the Father's house, ministering all with His own hands. It is well worthwhile to suffer for Him a little, and for a little while, and then to possess heavenly blessing, communicated by the hand and the heart of Jesus Himself. We shall reign with Him, and enjoy the fruit of the work which we have been permitted to do for Him. If it is only a cup of water given in the name of Jesus, it shall not lose its reward. But it will be far better still to sit down in peace, enjoying those eternal blessings in the Father's house which Christ will abundantly minister to us-precious testimony of His approval and of His love.

Note how the coming of Christ was a present hope. The oppressed one was to have patience until that coming. "Be patient," says Jesus, "until the coming of the Lord." Some one may say, "Then they were deceived." By no means. We may die before the Lord's coming, and, in fact, we know that these saints did die. But they will reap all the fruits of their patience when the Lord comes. And till that moment, they are with the Lord-absent from the body, present with the Lord-and they will come with Him and then will enjoy all the fruit of those sufferings which they had patiently endured for the love of His name seeking to glorify it down here.

This exhortation clearly shows how this hope was a present one which was interwoven with the entire thread of Christian life. It was not a theory in the head, a point of acquired knowledge, or a dogma of belief only. They expected the Lord in person. What consolation for the poor and the oppressed! What a check upon the rich to be constantly expecting the Lord! How good it is to know that He will soon come, that troubles will cease, and that we shall be with Him who has loved us! Nothing produces separation from the world like waiting for the Lord-I do not say the doctrine of His coming, but true waiting for Him. His coming will separate us from it forever. The heart waits until He comes.

The Lord's supper expresses the Christian state-the Lord's death at His first coming, which we celebrate with thanksgiving, remembering Him who has loved us and feeding on His love until He comes to take us to be with Him. It is the formal expression of the practical state of the Christian as a Christian-of Christianity itself. Let us add, that it is by the Holy Spirit alone that we are able to express this in truth.

But remark yet another thing in this exhortation-"Be patient, brethren." We are always waiting for the Lord, if we really understand our position, but whatever may be our desires, we can neither command the Lord to come, nor can we know when He will come. And blessed be His name! the Lord is patient. As long as there is yet one soul to be called by the gospel, He will not come. His whole body, His bride, must be formed; every member must be present, converted and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Then He will come and take us. Christ Himself is seated on the Father's throne, not on His own throne. He also is waiting for that moment with more desire than we are, and therefore the patience of Christ is spoken of-this is the meaning of Revelation 1:9. Also in Revelation 3:10 we read, "because thou hast kept the word of My patience," and in 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (J.N.D.), "the patience of the Christ."

We are taught in Hebrews 10:12 and 13 that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, waiting till His enemies shall be made His footstool. We may well wait if Christ is waiting, but we wait in suffering and conflict. He is waiting to reign, and then He will cause full blessing to flow forth for His own, whether in heaven or on earth, and will banish evil from both.

Thus we need patience that neither self-will nor weariness of the conflict should take possession of our souls, but in the confidence that the time God wills is best, for it is the time which divine wisdom and His love for us have ordained. Let us fix our affections on the Lord and on things above, because we wait for Him with desire of heart, with broken will and with unwavering faith, leaving His return to God's appointed time. We cannot change it, but the heart can have entire confidence in His love, assured that the Lord waits for us with greater love than we for Him. Let us be calm in confidence, patient in the wilderness journey. How sweet to wait for Christ-for the fullness of joy with Him! Thanks be to God, He says, "it is at hand."

James draws two practical consequences from the expectation of the Lord. First, we ought not to resist evil; the Just One did not resist. We must wait with patience, as the husbandman waits for the precious fruits of the earth, until he have received the early and the latter rain, the means which God uses to bring the fruit of harvest to perfection. The Christian should stablish his heart by this expectation, while passing through the troubles of this life and the persecution of the world which is ever the adversary of the Lord.

Second, He warns the disciples against walking in a complaining and quarrelsome spirit, one toward another. If we are waiting for the Lord, the spirit is calm and contented; it does not get irritated with its persecutors. Moreover, we bear with patience the ills of the desert, and resist evil as Christ resisted, suffering, and bearing wrongs and committing Himself to God. We are contented and quiet, with a happy and kindly spirit, for kindness flows easily from a happy heart. The Lord's coming will put everything right, and our happiness is found elsewhere. This is what Paul says in Philippians 4:5: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." Let us repeat it. How real, how mighty and practical, was this expectation of the Lord! What power it had over the heart! "The Judge standeth before the door."

Then he gives examples. The prophets were examples of suffering affliction, and of patience, and they counted them happy in their sufferings. And they have not been alone; others also have endured and have been counted happy. For example, if we see one suffering unjustly for the name of Jesus, and he is patient and meek, his heart called out on behalf of his persecutors, rather than irritated against them, then we recognize the power of faith, and of confidence in the love and faithfulness of the Lord. He is calm and full of joy and we say, "See how grace makes that man happy!" We, too, are happy when we suffer; at least, we ought to be so. But it is one thing to admire others who are sustained by the Spirit of Christ, and another to glory in tribulations when we are in them ourselves. We need a broken will, confidence in God and communion with Him who has suffered for us, in order to be able to glory in sufferings.

Letters 3, Faith Healing

I answered your questions by mistake to another person who had written to me about the same thing. The two cases were, one in the Western States where a German (for all this is German, whose religion is characteristically for this world) began by healing his neighbors, he says—and I had no reason to doubt it—by looking to God in faith; perhaps got puffed up, and worked by Satan's power so as to lay a man, who himself told me about it, like a log on the floor, without the use of his limbs; and then it turned to a system of corruption, so that he had to flee the country for his life, and said afterward that at the end it was Satan's power. The other was a more reputable case: a Lutheran clergyman who used to heal persons, but connected it with all the false Lutheran doctrines of baptismal regeneration, etc. I knew personally the case of some really good people at Boston, where it was connected with perfectionism and higher life, falsifying and discrediting by error what is greatly wanted in the church—to be able to say, "To me to live is Christ." Dorothy Trudel never had peace, nor a plain gospel, till her death bed.

But no mistakes of men take away the plain force of God's word and that He does answer the prayer of faith. James 5 supposes the church in order, and that those, who in a certain sense represented it, could be sent for—where God's order was going on and His government regularly administered in the church. That is not the case now, but if those who are practically such, and have personally faith (that looks through the ruin to the source of good according to the order) and believe, God will still hear the prayer of faith: I do not doubt it. In general it is only looking for so much physical relief, generally turning aside from what is heavenly. There may be faith in the person also; sending for the elders supposes something of this. But while I fully believe there may be such answers to prayer, the books about them seem to me full of error, and, while there may be some faith as to what is physical, not calculated to edify. But the very prayers of the Establishment for rain, etc., suppose the principle.

December, 1881.

Letters 3, Anointing the Sick; Faith Healing; Prayer of Faith

I have known two cases of anointing by request, one at Plymouth... the other in Switzerland: both these were blessed to the body; we owned we were not official but cast ourselves on the Lord. I trust by giving it out you may not have a crowd of curious young brethren. Peter thrust them all out. It is "the prayer of faith" which heals. It is not said, that I know, where the anointing should be: but anointing them is the person rather than the place (as if it was a cure), and this has its importance as to its nature.

The Lord be with you in your service.

[Date uncertain.]

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