

Sunday, November 27, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 47 John Nelson Darby and the Early Resurgence of Pauline Truth

**JND's: Injury and Convalescence (Dec. 1826 through Jan. 1827)**

- The basic foundation for the revival of truth led by JND was learned in solitude during December 1826 through January 1827 when he was laid aside from active ministry due to an injury. (Huebner, 1) It was during this time that JND understood that there would be a change of dispensation after the church; and he learned his place in Christ as one of God's heavenly people. Moreover, he saw that he should wait for Christ as an immediate expectation, i.e., that Christ might come at any time. (Huebner, 7)
- In the middle of the 1820s, while still a member of the Church of England, JND held many orthodox views prior to understanding the heavenly nature of the Body of Christ. (Huebner, 7) Darby stated,
  - “As regards the gospel, I had no difficulty as to its received dogmas. Three persons in one God, the divinity of Jesus, His work of atonement on the cross, His resurrection, His session at the right hand of God, were truths which, understood as orthodox doctrines, had long been a living reality to my soul.” (*Letters*, 3:297)
- While Darby was orthodox concerning many of the faith's major doctrines, he had no practical deliverance from the law of sin practically or experientially in his life. While an ascetic and viewing apostolic succession as the channel of grace in the Church of England from 1820 to 1826 his practical relationship with God was that his conscience was under the law as described in Romans 7:7-24. (Huebner, 7)
  - “When I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that, consequently, my place before God was represented by His own, I was forced to the conclusion that it was no longer a question with God of this wretched "I" which had wearied me during six or seven years, in presence of the requirements of the law.” (*Letters*, 3:297)
- “Less than two months after Dr. Magee (Archbishop of Dublin) delivered his charge to the clergy on October 10, 1826, God laid JND aside through an accident and moved him to read, among whatever else, the book of Acts, Isaiah 32 and other Scriptures.” (Huebner, 8) Darby offers the following chronology:
  - “As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could. I felt, however, that the style of work was not in agreement with what I read in the Bible concerning the church and Christianity; nor did it correspond with the effects of the action of the Spirit of God. These considerations pressed upon me from a scriptural and practical point of view; while seeking assiduously to fulfil the duties of the ministry confided to me, working day and night amongst the people, who were almost as wild as the mountains they inhabited. An accident happened which laid me aside for a time; my horse was frightened and had thrown me against a door-post. During my solitude conflicting thoughts increased; but much exercise of soul had the effect

of causing the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me. I had always owned them to be the word of God.” (*Letters*, 3:297)

- “A long time ago, F. Gill pointed out that there is evidence that this accident occurred during Dec. 1826. He called attention to the fact that J.G. Bellett wrote a letter (to his brother George) dated Jan. 31, 1827 in which he said:
  - I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from a hurt in his knee. His poor people at Calary miss him sadly.” (quoted in Huebner, 8)
- “The reference to the “poor people at Calary miss him sadly” also points to the fact that the accident happened during the two years and three months period when he went among the poor Irish mountaineers, and not after he had left that ministry.” (Huebner, 8)
- It was during this period of convalescence (Dec. 1826-Jan. 1827) that a great resurgence of Pauline truth occurred within the soul of JND.

### **Learning From God in Solitude**

- It was during his time of rest and recovery that JND came to understand the truths discussed in this section.
- *JND Saw the Truth of Total Forgiveness and the Believer’s Standing in Jesus Christ*—as JND entered into his period of recuperation in December 1826, he could not say that he had no more conscience of sins as affecting his standing before God, i.e., Darby did understand the difference between the believer’s standing and state. It was during this time that JND learned Christ as the Deliverer from this standing and state and was set free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Thus, he was brought into the standing and state of Romans 8, though the flesh remains (Rom. 7:25) incorrigible as ever. This deliverance had a profound effect upon him. (Huebner, 8) Some 50 years later he wrote:
  - “You must be aware that the teaching that Romans 7 is not the Christian state, but that chapter 8 is, has been taught as I have myself earnestly insisted on it now for nearly fifty years, only I trust with increasing clearness.” (*Collected Writings*, 23:212)
- This knowledge changed the character and contents of JND’s preaching.
  - When I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that, consequently, my place before God was represented by His own, I was forced to the conclusion that it was no longer a question with God of this wretched "I" which had wearied me during six or seven years, in presence of the requirements of the law. It then became clear to me that the church of God, as He considers it, was composed only of those who were so united to Christ, whereas Christendom, as seen externally, was really the world, and could not be considered as "the church," save as regards the responsibility attaching to the position which it professed to occupy - a very important thing in its place. At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, has nothing to wait for

save the coming of the Saviour, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which is already his portion in Christ. . . The practical difference in my preaching, when once I began to preach again, was as follows: When a parson, I had preached that sin had created a great gulf between us and God, and that Christ alone was able to bridge it over; **now, I preached that He *had* already finished His work. The necessity of regeneration, which was always a part of my teaching, became connected more with Christ, the last Adam, and I understood better that it was a real life, entirely new, communicated by the power of the Holy Spirit; but, as I have said, more in connection with the person of Christ and the power of His resurrection, combining the power of a life victorious over death, with a new position for man before God. This is what I understand by "deliverance." The blood of Jesus has removed every spot from the believer; every trace of sin, according to God's own purity. In virtue of His bloodshedding, the only possible propitiation, we may now invite all men to come to God, a God of love, who for this object, has given His own Son. The presence of the Holy Ghost, sent from heaven to abide in the believer as the "unction," the "seal," and the "earnest of our inheritance," as well as being in the church, the power which unites it in one body and distributes gifts to the members according to His will; these truths developed largely and assumed great importance in my eyes. With this last truth was connected the question of ministry. From whence came this ministry? According to the Bible, it clearly came from God by the free and powerful action of the Holy Ghost." (*Letters*, 3:297)**

- "We began to meet in Dublin, Ireland, 1827-28.\* It was not dissatisfaction with the apostolic succession of the English national episcopal body. I had found peace to my own soul by finding my oneness with Christ, that it was no longer myself as in the flesh before God, but that I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places in Him. This led me directly to the apprehension of what the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven: I at once felt that all the parish was not that. The tract I then published was no attack upon anybody, but upon the unity of the church of Christ. When I looked around to find this unity I found it nowhere: if I joined one set of Christians I did not belong to another. The church, God's church, was broken up, and the members scattered among various self-formed bodies. I found membership in scripture was not membership of a voluntary association on earth, but membership of Christ, a hand, a foot, &c" (*Letters*, 1:515)
- *JND Saw that Believers are Accepted in the Beloved*—"This mind-prostrating truth of God's grace displayed in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus was what came before the vision of his (Darby's) soul. Union with Christ in heaven means that Christ's place (as man) before our God and Father, is our place before our God and Father. This is what it means to be "in Christ." Christ's place before the Father is the measure of my place (Eph. 1:6). Yes, Christ's place is my place before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter into this favor *in the Beloved*. Christ, the Beloved, has entered into a place, as man, before our God and Father consequent on finishing the work given Him to do, and being "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4), and entering that place. All that animated the Father morally was in action in raising Christ from the dead. The place Christ entered, as man, before the Father is now our place—"in the Beloved." . . . So JND came to a great turning point when this was opened to his soul. Since this was

- true of him, he knew that it is true of all believers now. He saw this was the position of those composing the true church.” (Huebner, 9-10)
- *JND Saw that the Church was Heavenly*—“he saw that Christ’s place was his place and this led him directly to what it was that constituted the church to be the church. It is clear that he saw that the church was heavenly, as each Christian is heavenly. This stands necessarily in contrast to Israel, which is earthly.” (Huebner, 10)
    - “. . . I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places in Him. This led me directly to the apprehension of what the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven:” (*Letters*, 1:515)
  - *JND saw Dispensational Truth*—“seeing that Christ’s place was his place before the Father, and that the church was heavenly, he saw Israel’s earthly place in the purpose of God. So, connected with the heavenly scope of truth, he saw from Isaiah 32 that there was a different dispensation coming; and it followed, from what he was learning about the church and the immense change in the coming dispensation, that Israel and the Church were distinct.
    - “In my retreat, the 32nd chapter of Isaiah taught me clearly, on God’s behalf, that there was still an economy to come, of His ordering; a state of things in no way established as yet. The consciousness of my union with Christ had given me the present heavenly portion of the glory, whereas this chapter clearly sets forth the corresponding earthly part. I was not able to put these things in their respective places or arrange them in order, as I can now; but the truths themselves were then revealed of God, through the action of His Spirit, by reading His word.” (*Letters*, 3:299)
    - “But I must, though without comment, direct attention to chapter 32 of the same prophet; which I do the rather, because it was in this the Lord was pleased, without man’s teaching, first to open my eyes on this subject, that I might learn His will concerning it throughout - not by the first blessed truths stated in it, but the latter part, when there shall be a complete change in the dispensation, the wilderness becoming the fruitful field of God’s fruit and glory, and that which had been so, being counted a forest, at a time when the Lord’s judgments should come down, even great hail, upon this forest; and the city, even of pride, be utterly abased. That the Spirit’s pouring out upon the Jews, and their substitution for the Gentile church, become a forest, is here adverted to, is evident from the connection of the previous verses.” (*Collected Works*, 2:108)
  - *JND saw that the Organized Church was Corrupt*—“connected with what came before his soul from the Word of God concerning the heavenly character of the true church, how did the church answer to all this in practice? Was the church showing that it is heavenly? Was it expressing the truth of God in practice? . . . He saw that the church, viewed in responsible testimony, was fallen:” (Huebner, 11)
    - “The careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early church, which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state, though still as ever, beloved by God. At that time I had to use crutches when moving about so that I had no longer any opportunity for making known my convictions in public; moreover, as the state of my health did not allow me to

attend worship, I was compelled to remain away. It seemed to me that the good hand of God had thus come to my help, hiding my spiritual weakness under physical incapacity. In the meanwhile, there grew up in my heart the conviction that what Christianity had accomplished in the world in no way answered to the needs of a soul burdened with the sense of what God's holy governmental dealing was intended to effect. . .

- At the time I was occupied with these things, the person with whom I was in Christian relation locally, as a minister, was an excellent Christian, worthy of all respect, and one for whom I have always had a great affection. I do not know if he is still living, but since the time I speak of, he was appointed to be archdeacon. It was, however, the principles, and not the persons, which acted on my conscience- for I had already given up, out of love to the Saviour, all that the world could offer. I said to myself: "If the Apostle Paul were to come here now he would not, according to the established system, be even allowed to preach, not being legally ordained; but if a worker of Satan, who, by his doctrine, denied the Saviour, came here he could freely preach, and my Christian friend would be obliged to consider him as a fellow-labourer; whereas he would be unable to recognise the most powerful instrument of the Spirit of God, however much blessed in his work of leading multitudes of souls to the Lord, if he had not been ordained according to the system. . .
- This is not mere abuse, such as may be found everywhere; it is the principle of the system that is at fault. Ministry is of the Spirit. There are some, amongst the clergy, who are ministers by the Spirit but the system is founded on an opposite principle; consequently it seemed impossible to remain in it any longer." (*Letters*, 3:297)
- *JND saw the Coming of Christ Without Intermediate Events*—"during his convalescence JND learned that he ought to daily expect his Lord's return.
  - "At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, has nothing to wait for save the coming of the Saviour, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which is already his portion in Christ." (*Letters*, 3:897)
  - "The coming of the Lord was the other truth which was brought to my mind from the word, as that which, if sitting in heavenly places in Christ, was alone to be waited for, that I might sit in heavenly places with Him. Isaiah 32 brought me to the earthly consequences of the same truth, though other passages might seem perhaps more striking to me now; but I saw an evident change of dispensation in that chapter, when the Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish nation, and a king reign in righteousness." (*Letters*, 1:515)
- "Thus during Dec. 1826/Jan. 1827 JND learned that he ought daily to expect the Lord. What do these words mean as JND used them? He meant that there were no intervening events that had to take place before the Lord would come for His own." (Huebner, 12)
- *F.W. Newman Learned the Daily Expectation of Christ, Without Intermediate Events, From J.N. Darby in 1827*—"F.W. Newman was in Ireland (Dublin) during 1827/1828. There he was tutor in the family of Edward Pennefather for 15 months. . . F.W. Newman was a friend of JND in the years 1827-1830, but became an Arian. His comments,

written after he had thus denied the Trinity, testify the fact that both JND and he had learned the daily expectation of Christ. This corroborates what JND said about holding the daily expectation in 1827. F.W. Newman would not have a partisan motive to lie about it, and thus it is difficult to see how anyone can deny his testimony. Part of what is quoted below took place in 1827. Another point can be fixed and that is F.W. Newman's autumn visit to Oxford in 1828, a date which is documented below in the quotation. Therefore what is here transcribed from him took place before that." (Huebner, 12-13)

- [\*Phases of Faith\*](#) by F.W. Newman end of page 28-37
- "The testimony of the Arian, F.W. Newman, is that both he and JND held, in 1827, the expectation of Christ's coming without there being any intermediate events. . . From all we have considered so far we can see that in 1827, JND, apart from others, had advanced considerably in truth and was in the good of the any moment expectation—no intervening events. The groundwork for the development of understanding dispensational truth was laid." (Huebner, 15)
- *JND did not Learn the Daily Expectation of Christ From J.G. Bellett*—"J.G. Bellett had written a letter to his brother George Bellett on Jan. 31, 1827 that he was going to see JND shortly. It reads:
  - "I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from a hurt in his knee. His poor people at Calary miss him sadly." (Bellett. *Recollections of*, 27)
- Reminiscing of this time years later, J.G. Bellett wrote:
  - "In the beginning of 1828\* I had occasion to go to London, and then I met in private and heard in public those who were warm and alive on prophetic truth, having had their minds freshly illuminated by it. In my letters to J. N. D. at this time, I told him I had been hearing things that he and I had never yet talked of, and I further told him on my return to Dublin what they were. Full of this subject as I then was, I found him quite prepared for it also, and his mind and soul had travelled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it." (Bellett, *Interesting Reminiscences*, 3)
 

\*("F. Gill has called attention to the date (Jan. 31, 1827 of the able letter by J.G. Bellett as giving a definite reference point that enable les us to correct the erroneous dates in a letter of reminiscences of J.G. Bellett. Cited in Huebner, 15)
- "This indicates that he had not written in his letters to JND what was being taught in London. . . The direction given to JND's mind and soul had taken place before J.G. Bellett's visit shortly after Jan. 31, 1827. It took place during the previous period of JND's solitude (Dec. 1826—Jan. 1827). JND was "quite prepared" for what J.G. Bellett told him; and, as a matter of fact, JND was very considerably beyond E. Irving in London, who thought he was living in a period of prophecies being fulfilled." (Huebner, 15)
- JND mentioned J.G. Bellett's visit in a most interesting comment:
  - "Isaiah 32 it was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a David reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed

before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J.N.D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, left behind, and let go, but I was united with Christ in heaven. Then what was I waiting for? J.G.B. came up and said they were teaching some new thing in England. "I have it!" I said." (*The Bible Treasury*, 12:352)

### Conclusion

- "With the testimonies of F.W. Newman, B.W. Newton and the dated letter from J.G. Bellett, besides all the references to this period of time in JND's writings, I suggest that the integrity of JND and his statements of what occurred regarding his advance in truth, concerning the church and the expectation of Christ—with no intervening events to be expected—during the Dec. 1826—Jan. 1827—is fully vindicated." (Huebner, 16)
- "That Christ's place was his place is the great **starting point** for the complex of truth that he saw during his period of convalescence. **Then**, he saw that the church was composed only of those so united to Christ. **Then**, he saw that one who has his place in Christ in heaven has nothing to wait for but Christ—the interlocking truth that there were no predicted intervening events before the Lord would come, and that his posture was to be one of expectancy. **After** such things, he saw the earthly side, Israel's real place, and the change in dispensation (i.e., that there would be a millennial reign of Christ). And in all this he saw the ruin of the church on earth." (Huebner, 17)
- "With the fixed point of reference, Jan. 31, 1827, the events of 1827 can be ascertained. Thus it was not until after this period of "solitude" during which JND's injury was recovering, that he found out what was going on in London, but he had already understood those truths upon which the pre-tribulation rapture, i.e., the pre-Rev. 4 rapture, hinges." (Huebner, 16)

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