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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel on December 28th 1960

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.” Acts 20:32

Paul had been among these Ephesians for three years and reminds them that he “ceased no to warn everyone night and day with tears.” He was about to depart from them and I have felt that at the end of another year it might be profitable to consider what we are occupied with – those things that relate to eternity, into which we must enter. The first words are impressed on my mind ‘And now brethren.’ This refers to what he had preached unto them. I set before you, brethren this great God, and as he says in verse 20 “I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and taught you publicly and from house to house.” He had declared unto them this great God as set out in the 17th chapter. He came to Athens and saw the inscription “To the unknown God” and he said “whom ye therefore ignorantly worship, Him I declare unto you.” The main theme of his preaching was repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Now brethren I commend you to him whom I have declared unto you.

In the 39th Psalm David says “and now Lord what wait I for?” He had surveyed the earth , seen its vanities and that every man was walking in a vain show, heaping up riches and not knowing who should gather them and then comes back to himself and says that, having considered these things, what wait I for? What am I waiting for – anything better than they are seeking and follow after? So here Paul says ‘Now brethren I have finished my ministry among you and I commend you to that great God that I have preached and to the word of his grace.’ It should be profitable to consider this great God. Most of us here have heard about this God all our days and now I commend you to this God.

This embraces everything really and is the only ground of hope and point of rest as we are given to realise what we are in ourselves and where we are in this waste howling wilderness. In consideration of the end of all these things ‘I commend you to God.’ All things are to be dissolved and whilst we know not when the world shall pass away, the great thing that should concern us is that we shall soon pass away however long it pleases God that this world shall stand. That should be our great concern and therefore I commend you to God. It is a proper disregard of everyone else and every other power. Isaiah had a view of this God in contrast to everything and everyone else and he was commanded to cry and to preach “What shall, I cry All flesh is grass..... the grass withereth, the flower fadeth... surely the people is grass.” But he Lord encourages him “Lift up your voice with strength, lift it up. Be not afraid, and say unto the people ‘Behold your God!’” (Isaiah 40:6,7,9) Do you feel that your heart is withered like grass? Do you feel that the sands of time are sinking? Is your lot cast in the midst of affliction, weakness and pain, adversity and tribulation? I commend you to God. I believe that if the blessed Spirit should help us we shall find that the text directs us away from self, from the world, from the wilderness unto the great Rock that is higher than we are.

It is a great mercy that the great God has revealed himself. First of all in creation. Indeed that was the first declaration that Paul made on Mars Hill; “Him who you ignorantly worship declare I unto you; that God who made the world and all things that are therein.”(Acts 17:23,24) We are inexcusable for our ignorance of God if we have no other revelation of himself than he has given us in creation. All his works praise him. Every labour of his hands shows something worthy of God and

this is viewed in his wonderful works. How wicked and foolish pride is, that man who is dependent upon God, would if he could be independent of God. But those who are possessed of living faith view in the works of creation their Redeemer.

‘And now brethren I commend you to God.’ To know him together with Jesus Christ is eternal life and therefore to be ignorant of him is eternal death. We may know about him but O to *know Him*. He has made himself knowable through the condescension of his dear Son in becoming man. There all the divine perfections meet. It is indeed a point of strength and rest to believe that God is what he is. Everything hangs upon it, the being of God that is infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent and immutable. All these attributes or perfections of Jehovah are incomprehensible, and yet they are made in Christ a benefit to poor sinners. You will feel this and nothing less than this will do - some manifestation, communication or transmission of what God is to your soul through his dear Son by the Holy Spirit. You must have it – anything less is mere theory or notion.

‘And now brethren I commend you to God.’ This word ‘commend’ also takes in referring you to God whatever your case, age and condition may be; whatever conflict of your soul, whether you be walking in darkness and have no light, whether in bondage and in the prison house, whether under temptation of the devil, driven and pursued – I refer you to God – nobody else. With respect to providence or circumstance I refer you to God, he whose wisdom is infinite. If you are in the midst of impossibilities and trials I refer you to God who has in mercy left on record the declaration of his divine sovereignty. “I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for me?”(Jeremiah 32:27) O faith receives such divine sovereignty as a great comfort and strength. I refer you to God if you have got things too hard for you – impossibilities, enemies that you cannot manage, families that you cannot manage; a body of death that troubles you. I refer you to God. Nothing is impossible with him.

‘And now brethren I commend you to God and the word of his grace.’ The word of his grace refers to several things, for instance, the scriptures given by inspiration of God which contain the word of his grace or the gospel of his grace. It is sufficient to thoroughly furnish a man unto all good works, is profitable for doctrine, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect or complete. There is no case or condition that pilgrims come into but what there is something in the word of God to meet it. Oh for diligence and prayer in reading the scriptures! I commend you to the word of his grace. In may be in looking back over the past year, one of those things that we have to deplore is our negligence of the Word of God. Not perhaps that we do not read it but how we read it. Perhaps just that consideration may bring about a real exercise of mind and searching of heart. How have we read this word of his grace this year? Casually? Just a cursory glance? A chapter? When has the word of God really *read* us? How often have we been brought to a standstill in reading a chapter and been searched? What authority has the word of God had in our lives? What direction has it given to our ways? We do well to consider how we read the Word of God because it is the second richest gift to that unspeakable gift of Christ.

‘And now brethren I commend you to God and the word of his grace.’ But the word of his grace also and especially is the Incarnate Word. The incarnate word in all the richness of his fullness is contained in this gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy there for every malady, a cure for every disease, and especially with respect to the soul. Circumstances, trials and afflictions will soon be over and it is a mercy if they are sanctified and used by the Spirit to purge us. If in the chastening

of the Lord, and the fires where these chastening bring us, refine us as silver and try us as gold, then there is divine teaching in chastening and we have learned who God is. In his solemn dealings with us we have been given to sing songs of deliverance and proved the immutability of the love of God. His omnipotence to deliver, his infinite wisdom to direct - then the changing scenes of life will have been profitable to us.

'I commend you to God and the word of his grace' because every grace and every favour come to us through Jesus' blood. It has pleased the Father that in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead should dwell bodily so that we worship God in his Son. That fullness is communicable and contains that which every individual of his people will need to take them to heaven and to fit them to be there. That is the essential thing, the salvation of our souls.

'I commend you to God and the word of his grace.' That takes in the whole gospel. In the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is the matchless condescension which brought him to 'wretchedness and dust that guilty worms might rise.' There is no other way no other hope, no other refuge but what is to be found in him. We shall be brought to feel our need of it. As we see the multitudes, the mass of mankind who are ignorant of Jesus and of God and see that darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people; what a mystery and a mercy it is if ever the true light has shined into our hearts to give us to feel our need of Christ and to see that in him there is that which alone can satisfy and save our souls. This makes him precious to us; precious under a sense of the opposite which is within us. In this blessed word of his grace opposites meet. If the gospel only came to that which was of the same nature we should be hopeless. If righteousness came down to find righteousness we should be in despair. But I commend you to refer to the word of his grace where opposites meet - where grace meets sin; where unsearchable riches meets bankruptcy and desolation; where life meets death; where heaven meets hell.

Another mercy is this, that it is provided for none other than the worst, the uttermost and the chief of sinners and it is free. Now brethren there is no alternative, no substitute for this blessed, eternal, infinite and holy God and the word of his grace. That he can and does communicate from himself that which is eternal to poor creatures of a day that are crushed before the moth, is indeed the mystery of godliness. There is the mystery of godliness as it essentially in God's dear incarnate Son but there is a mystery of godliness in the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul and as that is accomplishing the purposes of God as revealed in the gospel. I commend you to the word of this grace. Anything different or outside of it is death. You will feel it when the blessed Spirit reveals this gospel as he takes of the things of Jesus and shows them and brings them into the heart - it is an anointing and it teaches. Oh I do commend it and do seek, my friends, that inward anointing of the Spirit in the gospel. Some of you may feel that the very expression 'divine anointing' is altogether beyond you and has nothing to do with you at all. Well you are very much mistaken. If I were to attempt to express the very least anointing of the Spirit I would say that where the Holy Spirit gives a really deep sense of the need of salvation and therefore a need of Christ that from the urgency of your heart you confess 'Give me Christ or else I die!' then that is an anointing which will abide. If you have had that and such a sense of need in your soul by a discovery of what you are and some apprehension by faith of what Christ is and the fullness that he possesses nobody, no power could ever divert your affections from that blessed object and nothing else could supply your needs. If you should come to a place where there was merely bodily exercise it is not only a question that you would not agree with what was said but it would be no good to you. It would be an indication like

taking a hungry man and showing him a cookery book You will want the very thing and this is to be found in the gospel.

I commend you to the word of God for righteousness. It is very painful but profitable to be brought to see and feel that nothing merely human is right; to feel your depravity, that everything within is crooked, everything comes short and to know and realise that you are at enmity to God. But then for the blessed Spirit through the word of his grace by the Scripture is revealed unto you, that which is right to full perfection, everything straight, everything that honours God, vindicates his holiness, his justice, his glory and that righteousness can be imputed.

I commend you to the word of his grace - the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ in sanctification. Oh what an attraction that is to one who knows his pollution. David did. Does David express what you feel? "My loins are filled with a loathsome disease; my wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." (Psalm 38:7,5) Job says: "Behold I am vile." But to view sanctification and holiness in the Lord Jesus Christ and for it to be communicated to a filthy sinner will find that he alone can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. Some of you may mourn over what you are; you look within and understand somewhat of that in Ezekiel: "Turn again son of man and I will show you greater abominations than these." Then for the blessed Spirit to take you by the hand and show you the Lord Jesus and say in your heart that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily and you are complete in him. Oh my friends in this blessed gospel of the grace of God there is everything that pertains unto life and godliness! Paul in Corinthians 3 says: "Therefore, let no man glory in men, for all things are yours.....and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." So whatever we stand in need of, either for this life or for that which is to come, I commend you to the word of his grace. "Godliness... has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8)

Now these things are able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. Oh what a declaration that is for those who feel that they are facing eternity! We have no abiding city here so Paul says "let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, for here we have no continuing city." (Hebrews 13:14) Therefore let us go forth unto him in whom is all that we need for time and eternity.

'Which is able to build you up' – we need to be built up – "But ye beloved keep yourselves in the love of God." (Jude 21) This building up is the same as growing in grace, being rooted and grounded in love, rooted and built up in him in all things. It is for the gospel, the word of his grace, to be made to be made life in the soul and sometimes you will feel the roots of faith striking down into Christ. "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ."

There are two figures used – sometimes a building but also 'ye are God's husbandry' for the soul to be planted in Christ in the gospel. What a rich soil there is, and there will be a growing in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, taking root downwards and bearing fruit upward and this has a sanctifying effect. Oh what a mercy it is to have prayer answered –

*O for a closer walk with God
A calm and heavenly frame.*

It is to be built upon the foundation which is Christ, the doctrine of Christ and his person. Then we need a superstructure and that is experience and there can only be experience where there is life;

only growth where there is life. Therefore the whole of experience is made up mainly by a continual discovery of what we are and what Christ is – a growing out and a going out of self unto him, and oh how precious this is! Peter says “Whom having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It is as though Paul here in taking leave of these Ephesians would say that there is nothing to be added to this. What you cannot find in the gospel, in Christ you will find nowhere. I commend you, refer you in all things that concern you, your soul and your body, circumstances and estate – ‘I commend you to God and the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance.’

That is a preparation, this is the end. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” And I commend you brethren to that unspeakable gift, the end of which is the gift of victory. “Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “he that overcometh I will give to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome and am sat down with my Father in his throne.”(Revelation 3:21) It is he that overcometh in us and for us and giveth us the victory – “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”(1 Peter 1:4,5) They must be a blessed people to whom such Scriptures belong and they either belong to us or they do not. So there is an infinite sufficiency in God and in the word of his grace to occupy us through our lives.

Some would say and probably our young people would say that we have our business to see to, our lives to live, our families to bring up. True! but what then? I commend you to God in these responsibilities, these cares these anxieties. What better? A blessed way of living. Paul said “the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”(Galatians 2:20) Our inheritance is eternal; time is short and therefore says Paul again “our light affliction.” Yes, when you come to this great God and Jesus Christ his dear Son, and have a sweet hope in that inheritance of the saints you can say “Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”(2 Corinthians 4:17) Amen.

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