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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 22 April 1934

1 John 4 verses 18 and 19

"There is no fear in love but perfect love
casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He
that feareth is not made perfect in love.
We love Him because He first loved us"

The experience expressed in the 18 verse is based upon the sacred doctrine in the 19 verse and it is worth our consideration that all real spiritual experience flows from, grows out of, doctrine; true things which are, and must be, before they can be known and enjoyed. I know that experience is nearer to us than doctrine, that feeling, in a certain sense, is nearer to us than faith, but we need the Spirit to give us a right proportion in our minds and hearts concerning all divine things. This tormenting fear is very painful; it is known by the people of God; it makes them restless; it disturbs their lives, spoils their rest, embitters their sweets; but it is not always to prevail. At times there is a sweet and blessed deliverance from tormenting fear by the comforting of that Holy Spirit who is called "another Comforter". "I" said the Lord Jesus "will send you another Comforter that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth". It is His inward testimony of Christ, His lifting up and glorifying the Son of God in the hearts of those whom He has convicted of sin, by which He comforts, consoles, strengthens and confirms and girdles His poor people. There is a Comforter; there is an eternal source of everlasting consolation in the gospel; and there are little experiences of the enjoyment of that comfort known by the people of God from time to time, but it would be a very sorrowful thing if the comfort itself was as changeable as our experience of it. If the source of our comfort changed or diminished or could be diverted from us to others so as that it should never flow to us again, then we should be indeed miserable creatures; it would be a miserable prospect for us. But there is in this text a hint at perfection, the perfec-

tion of the comfort of this love; a period when there shall be no more tormenting fear. Sometimes we may entertain fears foolishly, and walk in that which the hymnwriter confesses

Creatures of fear we move along
And fear where no fear is

but frequently we have great reason to fear when the Lord is far off; when we have provoked Him to hide His face from us; when He withholds those consolations which we have tasted the sweetness of; when He allows the powers of hell to assault us and threaten our overthrow; when He allows our sins in some particular way to tyrannise over us and bring us into captivity. O there are many reasons for fear in us and it is only as the love of God is felt and enjoyed that we can be properly free of fears. I think one sign of love to the Lord is to deprecate distance from Him and to mourn because of that distance and to "mourn sore" as it is in the Prophet "like a dove", for the Lord's return. There is not a little evidence in those experiences. If it should be said that none love the Lord Jesus but those who live in the flaming of their hearts towards Him always, I suppose there is no person here who dare, under those circumstances, profess to love Christ. But love moves in various directions. It always moves towards its object, but there are obstacles, difficulties, and it may be we may more really, more truly estimate our love by facing the obstacles and endeavouring to overcome them and get at the object than estimate it by the amount of the enjoyment we have. Would to God that we had much more enjoyment, some of us must say, than we do. I do not depreciate the value of enjoyments, but there are two things said about enjoyments in this life. One is this

Eternal wisdom ne'er designed
To give thee always joy

and another is this - the love of God is too wise and prudent to give His people joy and comfort always. That is, when they backslide from Him, when they sin against Him, He is prudent. He abounds, as the Apostle tells us in the Ephesians, He abounds

towards His people in His love, in all wisdom and prudence. Earthly lovers and earthly parents, loving their children, may often be very imprudent in pouring out their love to their children. They may do things for them or allow things in them in love, but very unwisely. God has no unwisdom, no imprudence. Perfect He is in all His works and also in His love. This love is seen, and it is acknowledged by God in His word, in waiting for Him. In the 64 chapter of Isaiah the Lord there says "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him". If you love the Lord and do not at present enjoy a sense of the sweetness of that love, you will be waiting for Him, and I think it is not an accident that the Apostle Paul, quoting that which I have just quoted from Isaiah, uses the word "love" in place of "wait" and says "for him that loveth Him". A waiter for, a hoper in, a seeker after, the Lord Jesus, one who cannot do without Him, who says sometimes with godly sincerity before the Lord

I could from all things parted be
But never, never Lord from Thee

that man may not be enjoying at the present time a sense of divine love, but he loves the Lord and the reason is the Lord loves him, and has loved him from eternity. And love is seen also in obedience. "This is the love of God", says the Holy Ghost by John, "that we keep His commandments". That is to say, love moves in holy obedience wherever it is. If we live in wilful, persistent violation of the revealed will of the Lord then our profession of love to Him, if we do profess love to Him, is false. "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments." But it is not legal obedience which love yields; that is grievous; that is impossible to a sinner. We cannot render legal obedience to God; He will not accept it for that we are sinners. He will accept nothing from a sinner only confession of sin which He produces by His Spirit. This obedience is the obedience of love, and therefore where the love of the Lord is known at all, where the motive of love is inspired

in the heart, it is true - "His commandments are not grievous". The law is grievous to us, a galling yoke which we cannot bear. It says - Do this and live, and O, what it commands, it commands universally - continuous obedience to the law in every faculty of our whole being and it will accept nothing short of that absolute perfection, and, failing to obtain that, it curses, it condemns. The gospel is a gospel of love; it communicates love; it fits the sinner for redeeming love; and it is a motive of love unto obedience. "We love Him because He first loved us". This obedience is Godward and it brings the man where it really prevails, this love of God brings Him to yield himself a servant to God. Universal obedience is in the heart when the love of Christ is felt; what wilt Thou have me to do? There is not a precept that you would escape, but consider every precept of the gospel to be your privilege. When the love of Christ is in your heart, the precept to love the people of God is a privilege, but it is a grievous thing to a proud person, a person who is far off from the Lord under the power of sin, under the power of the law. It is grievous to think of it; he would fain avoid it. But is not it true in experience that when you feel in your heart divine forgiveness, a sense of the Lord's goodness and favour towards you, is it not true to say that you then feel very little, very humbled, and is there a child of God that you would not then minister to? Is there one in whom is the grace of God that you would not fain love and pray for? O there is a sweet liberty in obeying the precepts though we always come short. We shall never obey the precepts of God in this world in such a way as to be satisfied with our obedience, but the privilege of being permitted to walk in the commandments of the Lord is a high privilege. The motive, I repeat, is that of gratitude and of love.

Another evidence of love to the Lord is mourning over sin. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted". All the people of God mourn over sin and that for the reason of love. It does not need that we should come afresh under the terrors of the law and the dread of hell. I believe if we were properly to examine this point in our own experience we should find this,

that a sense of the goodness of God in any measure felt in our hearts will cause us more to grieve over our sins than any fear of hell or terror of the law will do, and this is love. It comes from love in the heart to the Lord. You mourn that you should grieve Him and connected with this mourning is hatred to sin. It is a very wonderful thing for a sinner to hate sin; for a man, whose nature is depraved, to really abhor sin and himself for being a sinner. That is love to the Lord. "Ye that love the Lord" is the injunction in the Psalm "hate evil". That is accomplished by the love of God in the heart. His love produces this hatred to sin; it makes the man understand a little what a Pharisee or a legalist could not understand; he understands what it is at such a time to hate the garment spotted by the flesh. I am firmly of the opinion that grace is an absolutely holy principle and when that grace is animated with divine love in the heart, then that man is for the time being much moved in holy obedience. There is no merit in this obedience. The liberty of it lies largely in that there is no merit in it. He does not need merit; all the merit, all the meritorious obedience, all the righteousness, all the goodness, is in the Lord, his Head. From Him He is influenced into this obedience. He does not work for life; he does not obey the Lord with a view to making Him his debtor; he does it out of gratitude and love, not out of tormenting dread. Those of you who can understand the distinction are highly favoured people, who can find a comfort in obeying the Lord, a comfort not derived from a hope of Him blessing you because you obey Him, but a comfort in the obedience, as it is written - "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed". So says the Holy Ghost. In being allowed to obey the Lord, the blessing comes. It is an honour to walk in the steps of the Lord Jesus. And you will notice that the Apostle Paul couples faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all saints together, for which he commends the Colossians. He commended their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love to all saints. And in the 17 John the Lord Jesus Christ Himself declared that the world should believe that the Father had sent Him in observing

that the saints had love one for another. Dr Owen says that professors do what they can to confirm the world in unbelief by living in disunion.

"We love Him because He first loved us." Thus, all the love that ever we feel is to be traced up to God as a source. Now before we proceed to that branch perhaps it would be proper for me just to express what some of you are now feeling. Are you not feeling in your hearts

Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is cold and faint

It is a complaint; it is mine

But I love Thee and adore
O for grace to love Thee more

Now love is increased in the heart when the Lord enables His people believably to meditate upon Him and upon His love. All goodness, all gracious hope, all expectation of further good, all mercy manifested, all answers to prayer, every token of God's favour, all this is traceable to God as a source. O the infinitude of divine love. You have a sermon on it in the hymn you sang just now. "Because He first loved us". This love is the love of the Trinity, the love of God. The love of God cannot be divided; it is one everlasting love. You cannot divide the love of God; you cannot divide the will of God; you cannot divide the unity of the Trinity. But Scripture distinguishes the particular acts of divine love in and through the Persons in the Trinity and will have the people of God consider them. "He first loved us." When did this love begin? When did He first love us if we are His? In the Ephesians we are told that He has foreknown and predestinated His people unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, that is the Father, that they might be without blame before Him in love. From eternity then the Father did foreknow and predestinate His people in love and adopting them for His children that they might in time come

into the knowledge of adoption; the love of the Father settling upon His people these blessings, all spiritual blessings in Christ, giving them to them in Eternity in Christ and giving the persons so loved to Christ for Him to possess as His inheritance. "The Lord's people is the lot of His inheritance" we read, and Christ continually declares especially in the 17 John that His Father gave Him the people for whom He prayed and whom He then committed to His Father's keeping as He was about to leave the world and go to the Father. He continually says that these people were given to Him. This was love; love that singled out some, that separated them in a decree, that fixed upon them eternal blessings and gave them to the Lord Jesus. He first loved us by choosing us, choosing us before we had a being. We shall never be able to comprehend this. We cannot comprehend the Trinity; we cannot comprehend His momentous acts, but they are declared in Scripture and believed by the people of God. It is when this choice is confirmed in the heart of an individual that it becomes to that sinner, an amazing thing. Says the Lord by the Prophet "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." The choice of God in eternity is proved by His work in the soul in time, a calling of him out, and so that is referred to the love of the Spirit. In the 2 Ephesians, this is expressly stated - " But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace ye are saved." Quickening with Christ may mean first union with Christ mystically when and virtually when He died for His people and rose again, for we read that a nation was born in one day, the day when Christ rose from the grave, and the sins of a whole land were put away in that one day when Christ died and rose again. But that quickening by the Holy Ghost is in the soul called regeneration, and this is an act of love and God is first in it. The new birth is an instantaneous act of love in the heart, not love enjoyed by the sinner but love acts in the sinner; God's love, the Spirit's love. Usually first trouble, conviction, darkness, wrath are felt and little is thought of love by the poor troubled sinner. He little thinks that this comes from the love of God, but it does. Some of you perhaps, reviewing your religious lives

at times, are so put to it as to whether you really have been the subject of that communication of a new nature that you are greatly troubled. It is a great thing to ascertain that, to really have the witness of the Spirit in your heart that you are born again. It may be many long months and years in some cases before the blessed witness which is indubitable is impressed upon the heart by the Holy Ghost, that heavenly Comforter, who preaches Christ into the heart of a convicted sinner and makes him feel the atonement and gives him a blessed assurance that he is a child of God. This love of God is also in the gift of His dear Son. Love is a sacrificing affection; it must make sacrifices for its object; it must do good to its object at all costs. There is no compulsion in God, but He did, out of His free will, love His people, and therefore there is nothing good He will withhold from them, not even His dear Son. "Herein is love, not that we loved God". Why you may be, yes I am, ashamed of talking about loving God. Our love is so faint and cold, it is not worth thinking about hardly, yet it is a wonderful thing ever to feel a sweet love to Him. But this is the thing, His love to us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And herein is manifested His wisdom, His goodness, His power, His faithfulness, His justice. My dear friends, consider this point for a moment. A holy, just, righteous, pure God loving people who are obnoxious (exposed) by their sins to His wrath. But He will love them in spite of their sins. He knew they would be sinners; He knew that they would deal treacherously and would transgress from their birth. That did not alienate His love, but it did provide for a recovery from that state. He loved His people so that He would not leave them to wallow in sin and die in sin. Says Hezekiah in the marginal reading of the 38 Isaiah - The Lord hath loved me from the pit of corruption for He hath cast all my sins behind His back. This loving people from the pit of corruption is the sending by God the Father of His beloved Son to be the Redeemer, the propitiation, to make peace. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". Think of it; this was love. There is no other cause for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world

than the love of God to His people and if I may turn aside for one moment to the love of the people of God to the Lord, do you not sometimes feel a love to Him for His holiness. O once or twice in my life I thought with all my vileness and corruption and sin I have loved Him for His holiness. We may tremble and do tremble at His character sometimes, at His inflexible justice, but when you see that His holiness and His love of holiness and His determination to have His people without spot and holy without blame before Him in love moved Him not to spare His own Son but to deliver Him up in order that they might be thus pure and that they might be justified freely, though ungodly, that they might be sanctified eternally and fully and completely, it is incomprehensible, but it is apprehensible, believable and adorable. "Give thanks" says the Psalm "O ye saints of His at the remembrance of His holiness". If you see the holiness of God here in what it did in sending His dear Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in Him that His people might be justified and that they may be cleansed and washed and made a bride fit for Himself, then you will give thanks, you will bless Him for being holy in saving unholy sinners and making them holy. It has been truly said many times, God cannot make a person happy without making him holy. He does both in salvation. We are unholy by nature; we have alas a great deal of the remainders of sin in us and that is our grief at times. But if we have the grace of God we have a nature that will never be fully satisfied until we have no sin and the Lord has predestinated His people to be holy before Him in love and in order to this He has given His dear Son.

"He first loved us". Loved us that He would cleanse us with the washing of water by the Word and cleanse us and open a fountain which could cleanse us, in His most precious blood. And the love of Christ is here and that was first. When He took His people as a gift from the Father He knew what they would be and what would be required of Him. He did not blindly acquiesce in the gift and the undertaking of the Suretyship. He knew it would cost Him agony, curse, bloody sweat. He knew it would cost Him untold sufferings in the wrath of Almighty God, in the

condemnation of sin in His own Person. He knew the cost of redemption and yet He willingly undertook

When Jesus undertook
To rescue ruined man,
The realms of bliss forsook,
And to relieve us ran;
He spared no pains, declined no load,
Resolved to buy us with His blood

That was love. "While we were yet sinners", when we were yet without strength, as it is in the Scripture "Christ died for us". I can hear some of you saying mentally, but it is the interest we are concerned about. I am glad you are; the Lord save you from being satisfied with notion and assuming interest, but do, dear friends, for a moment or two consider the thing apart from interest, for this is true, if this is not a reality, then it is no use seeking interest, but if it is a reality, if the love of God in Christ Jesus is so manifested in the Scriptures towards His people who are nevertheless sinners, then it is worth your seeking and pressing and waiting on the Lord for a sense of interest all your lives until you get it, and there is no uncertainty about getting it either, for He made peace by the blood of His cross. And, says the Apostle to the Ephesians, and some here know in a measure what he meant - "He came and preached peace to you that were far off and to them that were nigh". The peace that He made He preached by the Holy Spirit in the heart. O the love of the Holy Ghost in thus doing, in making room in the heart by conviction, by His illumination and declaration of God's law, for the Lord Jesus and His peace speaking blood, and then bringing that peace and preaching it into the heart and giving the faith to receive the peace, the declaration of it. And so the Apostle writing to the Romans says - "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the atonement" that is, received the enjoyment of peace, the reconciliation; known what it is to have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This embraces much; it embraces a sensible deliverance from guilt; it embraces also a relief from

the demands of a holy law. Peace with God; peace of conscience through the atoning sacrifice of Christ; that will make us love Him; that will make us wonder that He should condescend to suffer for us and love the Spirit for bringing the truth of this and making it a reality upon our hearts and consciences and love Him also for the painful work by which He prepared us to receive the atonement. No receiving the atonement in reality until the Spirit prepares the heart for it. The preparation of the heart is of the Lord.

And another thing, is He not sometimes loved in His provisions. Sometimes we get a little experience of comfort and a little view of the truth and a little sense of the goodness and grace of God. O what is our experience compared with what the Lord possesses and has laid up to give out. In the 31 Psalm, the Psalmist says "Oh how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath it entered the heart of man to conceive the things that God hath prepared for them that wait for Him". Sometimes we are enabled to thank Him for establishing a throne of grace. When Christ made propitiation through His blood and sealed the Covenant with that blood and was brought as the great Shepherd of the sheep out of the grave, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, He entered heaven with that blood and He became in heaven the Propitiator, the ante-typical Mercy Seat over the Ark and that is the place where these inexhaustible, everlasting blessings are stored and from whence they are given out. Says the hymnwriter - "We do thank Thee because there is a throne of grace". Did you ever love Him for the throne of grace? Did you ever get to that throne, being drawn to it by the secret power of the Spirit of God and find there a sense of divine goodness, and did you ever get an answer to prayer and were you ever able to say as the Psalmist says in the 116 Psalm "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications?" It is something to love Him for and if He has not give you all that you want, if He has given you one positive blessing; if, from the lips of His grace, He has spoken one gracious word in

your heart, when you got that did not you love Him and was it not a pledge of more to come? "We love Him because He first loved us".

One more word and I must cease. He first loved us for and in His Word. The provision He has made for His people in the blessed Scriptures of Truth is a great provision of His love and goodness. What would the world be without the Bible to you? The Bible has had a great influence in the world naturally, morally; but with respect to a believer, this is the testament of God. It is the revelation of His God and Father and Redeemer. In it from time to time He catches glimpses of the beauty of the Lord; he meets with the Lord in His ways as it is said - "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness". "We love Him in His Word" says the hymnwriter. Do we? Have you ever loved Him for the Scriptures even though many of them are far beyond your present experience? They should be. The Scriptures contain all blessedness in promises. While we are in this world we shall be needy and if we have grace and gracious exercises we shall be filled with desire, desire for things that God has promised and that He has laid up and that He will give. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly". And this love of God which He loved His people with first, never ends. No, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature", says Paul "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Well may the Lord give us to know this mighty love and cause us to love Him in return.

AMEN.