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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 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"

A great truth is expressed in this chapter in that God is love and the religion which He bestows is a religion of love. Love begins it, carries it on, continues it unto eternity. God is the source of all true spiritual love. The unity in the Church which is expressed in various parts of the Scripture and this chapter is the result of that love. The centre, the source and the fountain of it in God, flowing out to all the members and uniting each member to the other as uniting each member to the source, and thereby separating the people of God from all the people upon the face of the earth. Nothing is more abhorrent to our nature than separation. Nothing, when insisted upon as necessary in the Church, so stirs up the enmity of people in religion who know not God nor themselves. The great cry today is union, comprehensiveness, embraciveness; and truth, God, His character, His law, His gospel, His commands and precepts, all of them must yield to the clamour of union. I have said at home once or twice lately what I believe and will repeat; it seems that we are heading for a union in the world, outside which, presently, there will be none but the people of God separate. We can unite according to most men today with any heresy providing we have not the spirit of truth. This loving Epistle of John expressing a great deal about love is very solemnly discriminating with reference to love's object and the effects of love. So far from love embracing all, John expostulates, directly commands his children, the people of God, to whom he writes, to make a test, not to simply accept all religion and all religious people, but to test the spirits - try the spirits; not merely make a judgment of words, but of the spirit behind and in the words;

not merely see if the life is consistent and circumspect, but if the Spirit of Christ is there. We are to honour all men, according to Scripture. We are, so far as lieth within our capacity, to do good to all men, but we are not, according to Scripture, to say a confederacy with all who say a confederacy. The love spoken of in the text is an especial love, not natural; not natural affection; not universal charity; but a love that only the loved ones are capable of feeling, enjoying and exercising and the spirit which has this love in it is a spirit which testifies of and witnesses to the Lord Jesus. It revolves about, centres in and flows from the Son of God's love. Therefore one may truly say that the foundation of love in respect to experience and exercises is knowledge. It is naturally illogical to talk about loving any object which is not known, not believed in; with which you are not at all conversant. So spiritually, there must be, before love to God and therefore to God's children, a knowledge of Him and the knowledge of God is given, not acquired; bestowed freely and sovereignly by the Holy Ghost - "Who by searching can find out God?" We may determine to become religious; we may say that we will agree to this or that particular denomination; we may thus come, by dint of intelligent interest, to acquire a good deal of acquaintance with certain things in religion. But we cannot by these exercises of our natural judgment, know God. Knowledge of God is a revelation. It is a distinct and a particular communication from God by His good Spirit. When God begins to make Himself known, and therefore real, to any son of Adam, there is in the mind more or less created a trouble, a disturbance, a sense of insecurity, a realisation of being contrary to that God who makes Himself known. True religion does not begin with love, that is to say, in the enjoyment of it. True religion begins, if Scripture is true, and that is our standard, not what people say, with conviction of sin. "And when He", the Spirit of Truth who is the author of every shred of true religion, "is come" He shall reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me;" The chief root sin of all, which we must be convinced of and are convinced of, as under the Spirit's teaching, is unbelief and that the work of God is

to believe on Him whom He hath sent. Therefore religion may be summed up very briefly - it is a knowledge of God in Christ. Faith in the Son of God is eternal life. He that believeth in or on the Son of God hath life; he that believeth not hath not life. Very simple, very terrible in its simplicity, in the straight line of separation it draws between man and man. Fear rises from a knowledge of God, because of sin against Him of which the sinner, under the teaching of the Spirit, is convinced; a sense therefore of the wrath of God, His displeasure against the person so convicted. Never slur over this. My friends if there be no walking through the experience of conviction of sin, if there be no opening up of the depths of our human depravity, if there be no solemn sense of being before God a condemned, guilty sinner, whatever we may think or say about love, we know nothing of it. We know very little of it, any of us have to say, but if ever we come to the love of God in a sense of it, it will be through the communications of that love to our souls in Christ in respect of propitiation, in respect of the making reconciliation for our sins. Therefore again I say it is quite illogical to talk about love unless we have some experience, feeling, painful feeling, about sin. It is only the sick person who knows the value of a cure; only a drowning person who knows the value of rescue; only the lost sinner who can understand the meaning of the term "Saviour" in an experimental way; and only a man who has a solemn, a terrible, apprehension of God's character, who can in any way apprehend the greatness of that - God's grace, in that He who is so holy, can and does, look upon sinners with mercy and deal with them graciously and with lovingkindness.

The doctrine of love in the context is the work of Christ - "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins". This is a matter of faith. Jesus Christ commended His disciples to His Father because they believed that He, the Father, had sent Him. This is a profound doctrine; high, unfathomable in its depths. No mind of man can conceive the greatness of it; that the Eternal, holy, self-sufficient God - Father, Son and Holy Ghost,

should be so graciously, voluntarily, lovingly interested in poor men, as that the Father should send His only begotten into the world to make atonement for sin that we might live through Him. We shall never be able to measure the dimensions of divine love, even as divine love is manifested in the Person of Christ. It depends on who Christ is. I have sometimes had a thought like this - We face those who endeavour to minimise the importance of that ineffable mystery - the relationship between the Persons in the eternal Trinity. I thought like this - if we were compelled to believe that the Son of God who, when Incarnate, is called Jesus Christ; if we were compelled to believe that He were not the natural and eternal and only begotten divine Son of the Father in the plainest, simplest and most ineffable sense, then where does the love of the Father come in comparatively. If the Father sent, as some say, a person from the Trinity, but not the Son, or if the Person sent was a son by condition of terms, O what confusion; what a terrible heresy must necessarily result. If that error be followed up to its logical conclusion, you must either conclude with three Gods or you must deny the deity of two Persons in the Trinity. And again if you could conceive that the eternal Son was not truly the Son of the Father, what love comparatively was there in the Father in giving that Person, in not sparing that Person. Rob these Scriptures of the reality of the Sonship of Christ in His eternal deity, you rob these Scriptures of all their blessedness relating to the greatness of divine love. It is because He was His own Son and because that, being His own Son, He did not spare Him but gave Him up - delivered Him up for us all as we have it in the Romans - it is therein that His great love toward mankind is manifested. And I would say also, with reverence, it is therein and therein alone that His work on earth was valid. We could not hope to appear before the great and eternal God in all His justice and purity and holiness if the Mediator were not God the Son. There would be no efficacy in His work; there would be no prevalence in His intercession; there would be no virtue in His blood; there would be no spotlessness and no possibility of communication by imputation to a sinner of His righteousness, if He were not the Son of God's love. And in this chapter the Apostle says "We have

known and believed the love that God has to us"; known it in a very little measure; John could say in a greater measure. Some here have known it by feeling it in a little measure but believe a great deal more than they felt. When I try to speak, and it is a great venture to speak about divine love, it is not because one has had a great experience of that love, but a little of it is wonderful. And what is in the text is known by those who have felt the love of God in their hearts - "There is no fear in love" It removes tormenting fear; it takes away from the soul that dread, slavish dread of the eternal God, and replaces that slavish fear which is felt under the law with a holy confidence. It gives the man grace and ability and confidence to come to that very God with a holy boldness and to confess sin and to lie low before Him and to lay out the whole of the case, hoping for His mercy, believing that it can come to such a sinner as he is, since Christ died for the ungodly by the commandment of God, His Father.

"There is no fear in love". It does not say that there is no fear in a child of God. There is a certain fear in the Scriptures which is reprimanded by God - "The fearful and the unbelieving" it says "shall be cast into the lake of fire". That fearfulness spoken of there is a fearfulness accompanied by enmity and hatred; a fearfulness of punishment and a hatred to the God who needs must, because He is holy and good, punish sin. But there are fears in the people of God, especially until they have a sense in their hearts of this mighty love of God in Christ. Fears of damnation, fears of coming short, fears of never seeing God's face with joy, fears of sinning against God, dread of being gathered with the wicked as David deprecated - "Gather not my soul with sinners nor my life with bloody men". All these fears are the result of divine grace, of the Spirit's work. It is the work of divine love to cast them out. "There is no fear in love". It may be in the heart in a measure and there may be fears in the same heart at the same time, but in the love itself there is no fear. The same as, with reference to faith, there is no doubt in faith as a principle. It is quite a pure and an unmixed principle. There may be doubt, there are often

thousands of doubts in the hearts of those who possess the principle of faith, but these graces themselves, and the love of God itself particularly, is absolutely pure. It is not mixed with fear; it scatters fear where it is shed abroad in the heart; it creates, I say, confidence and trust. It does not minimise sin. Why if you read the Scriptures and read your own experience by the Scriptures you will know this - that it is in love God chastens His people; it is in love He corrects them when they go wrong; it is in love He hides His face from them to show to them His disapproval of some things and to draw them after Himself with great intensesness of desire. Love is pure; love is wise; love is unquenchable - God's love. And it is very, very discriminate; it is set on His own children. And John, in the third chapter of this Epistle, speaks of it. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"; the sons of God in Christ. That is what love does.

"Perfect love casteth out fear because fear hath torment". Tormenting fears. Who that fears God here does not know what tormenting fear is? A continual, sometimes a continual fearfulness. Not that fearfulness which has in it hatred to God, but a fearfulness which has in it really, if you could analyse it, love to God. Fearfulness of entertaining things that are contrary to Him; a fearfulness of going astray from the truth; a fearfulness of being led into things which are contrary to the revelation of the Spirit; a fearfulness of walking in any wrong thing in your spirit. O the fear; and the fears of enemies - the devil and your own hearts and wicked men and religious professors; what nets and snares they may lay for your feet. All these things may be felt by the people of God and a fear as to what is coming next. Perfect love casts out these fears, when it comes, when a sensation of it is in the heart.

"When Jesus, with His mighty love
Visits my troubled breast
My fears subside, my doubts remove
And I'm completely blest

You, some of you, know that. You may say "I do not live in it". Who does live in it? But it is a thing greatly to be remembered, if we know it; the occasion of it; the circumstances of it; the result of it in our hearts; the holy deliverance it gave us from man, from the fear of man, from the dread of dying, from the slavish dread of a holy and just God; the deliverance it wrought with respect to circumstances. Why, when that love reaches and touches the heart, it makes the man say "I will not fear, what can man do unto me?" Why? Because God loves me. How do you know it? How do you know God loves you? Well, short of the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart there are evidences of His love which the people of God get, and which make them love Him in return. One thing is this, an answer to prayer. O it is a great thing for a sinner to have in his soul a real answer to prayer; when he gets a return to his poor supplications from that great, invisible, holy, just, sin-hating God, No-one can express it who does not know. People may have natural answers to prayer, that is to say, when I say natural answers to prayer, I mean they may pray about circumstances to God naturally, and I believe get answers in their circumstances without knowing God in a saving way. I wish to speak cautiously, but I think the Scriptures, and observation, will bear me out in that. But to have an answer from that great God with respect to the soul and to have a token in your heart that He has regarded your supplications, it will make you say what the Psalmist said - "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications". And you will love Him because in that answer to your prayer there was a token of His love, an exercise of His love to you. Did He ever speak peace to your conscience? Did He ever express in your heart that He was your salvation? Did He ever make you feel the warmth of His love in a gracious declaration of it in the Scriptures? Did He ever speak to you lovingly, comfortably, as the word - "I will speak comfortably to them" That comfort is comfort of love. "If there be any comfort of love, any consolations in Christ" says Paul to the Philippians. There is; it is felt and the result of it is twofold. It casts out tormenting fear and it produces a response of love to Him whose love is felt.

"There is no fear in love". But accompanying this feeling of love and according to the measure of the feeling of it, there is always a tenderness of conscience which produces one fear only, and that is a fear of sinning against the Lord, so good a God. If we have any gracious understanding of the doctrine of love, that which we cannot feel in the fulness of it, for it would overwhelm us, and if we have any little experience of the feeling of that love of God through the atoning work of Christ, we must know this - that it does make us fear sin. It is the only fear that is left when redeeming, pardoning love is shed abroad in the heart. You wont fear a creature; you wont fear circumstances; you wont fear your greatest enemy. And although it is a trembling thing to say, for the moment, you wont fear the devil because a greater than the devil is with you in His love when Jesus Christ is with you. The only thing to fear then is to sin against that blessed One who has loved you and given Himself for you. Perfect love. Perfect love is God's love; uncaused, perfect because it has nothing outside itself to influence it; perfect because nothing can alienate it from its blessed objects. Nothing can quench it; not sin. And if you and I receive that truth with an understanding heart, of all the things that will make us loathe, and fear and flee from sin, that truth will - that sin cannot quench the love of Christ. Some people say that the doctrines of grace lead people to live licentious lives, make them careless about circumspection. Well, the only answer one can give to that is that if people so express, they expose the ignorance of those doctrines in their own hearts. Perfect love, and perfect in this that it gave, made a sacrifice for the yielding up of the most precious of all objects. Love is a sacrificing principle. Naturally love must have an object to go to, upon which to pour out itself, and God is love in Himself. He needed not a creature in the exercise of it. The eternal Trinity was sufficient for Himself in all the exercise of His divine perfections. But He willed to create, and He willed to express and communicate His love to some creatures and to some sinners. And therefore, because His character forbid that He should embrace the objects of His love as sinners without satisfaction, He gave in His love the greatest thing that could be

given. O the love of God to sinners; the love of the Father in giving His own Son that we might live through Him. It was love that sent Him; love that brought Him; love that took the Lord of life and glory to the cross. It was grace that imputed to the Son of His love all the sins of His people; it was love in the Son that received that imputation, and who bore the curse due to this imputed sin. One hymnwriter has spoken of the cross of Christ as the measure and the pledge of love, and it is in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and in a feeling interest in His dying and deathless love, that this tormenting fear is cast out. O how perfect is the love of God. It is sovereign. That is no imperfection; it is part of its perfection. It is fixed on objects by the will of God sovereignly and these objects, being loved with an everlasting love, become the subjects of divine drawing. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". You know the sun has an attraction, a warming influence upon the earth, and it attracts the growth of the plants towards itself. And the Lord Jesus Christ is the Sun of Righteousness and sometimes, even when you cannot begin to speak about the love of God, you may feel that warmth in your heart, that attraction, that feeling of His goodness. Our dear Pastor here many years ago I remember frequently expressed it as it really is. He said it is like a wave of divine goodness passing over the soul that has an effect. O it does; it makes a man feel that he does not fear trouble; he does not fear enemies; he is bold with a gracious boldness, and he feels sometimes when that is with him that he could face a frowning world, that he could follow in the ways of the Lord whatever obstacles were in the way, for fear is not in this love. It draws a man on in the ways of obedience, towards its blessed object - God in Christ.

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love". And some of us do fear. If we get a few minutes in which this fear is cast out how quickly fears return. New troubles come, unbelief rises, doubts come in, faith seems to almost die away, and our hearts grow cold and we begin to fear. Looking at self, and feeling what we are, makes us fear. But this love does not change and

that is one of its perfections; the fulness of love, everlasting, unquenchable love, this never changes. Some of us are guiltily fearful, guiltily fearful. There is such a thing as false zeal; there is such a thing as a boldness, an ostensible boldness in the defence of the truth which does not come from, and therefore is not accompanied with, love to the Lord or to His people. May the Lord save us from that. It will do no good. But when the love of Christ is shed abroad in the heart or when - the Apostle says here - we have known and believe the love that God hath to us; when you feel that Christ is yours and that you are interested in Him and in the Father's love through Him, then you are bold and jealous for the truth of God, for the honour of the Lord. What is the result of this? It may not make you blatant in your zeal, but it will make you grieve when you see the name and truth and cause of the Lord low. When you see that the enemies of the Lord and His people gather strength, you will be grieved. Love is capable of being grieved when its object is touched, and if we are enabled to examine ourselves with relation to this it may help us. It is a wholesome thing to do, for you may very well be guilty of a wrong zeal in a right thing. It is not easy for us to arrive at what spirit we are of and probably it would be well for us to start, in trying the spirits, to try our own. But when you feel the love of Christ in your heart and are moved by that there will be sorrow, real sorrow in your heart for anything that is against the Lord, either in yourself or in others and the consequence of this will be you will pray; pray for the cause of Christ; pray according to that word of Christ in directing His people - "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." Love makes people pray that prayer. I know, parrot-like, it is continually said in many places, but where it is from the heart it comes from love; a desire for the honour of the Lord whose love you believe in and you have in a measure tasted. Another result of this love is it gives unity and union and harmony to the people of God. "Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" and there is no fear in this love. I believe that if there were more knowledge of Christ with us, more secret communion with God in the love of Christ, more sense of the atonement upon our

consciences as we are brought in guilty and brought to the throne of grace with confession; if we were after more of this secret work, there would be more holy candour among the people of God. Fearfulness, jealousy and suspicion are not of this love. There will be a dealing out of the love of Christ for the work of the Spirit in others, and directly the work of the Spirit is manifested and apprehended by one in whom is the love of Christ, the love of that person will go out to the other. It is called in the Scripture, the bond of perfectness, which means completeness. In Scripture perfect is frequently put for complete. The Church of Christ, that is to say the whole Church of the elect, is one. It is one day to be completed; every vessel of mercy shall be filled with mercy and grace and glory. The whole building shall be erected and the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings crying grace, grace unto it. The travail of Christ's soul shall be seen by Him in every one for whom He died and He will be satisfied and when the hope of that, of an interest in that, is in the heart of a poor hell deserving sinner, and he really has a few drops of that love in his heart - "O" he says "that I might take a full draught of it and be gone". Bond of perfectness. Every one of the people of God embraced in this everlasting love. But, says the Apostle, in the Colossians - "Put on charity which is the bond of perfectness" You who are dead with Christ and risen with Him; you to whom Christ is your life and who are to set your affections upon things above, do this - put on the bond of perfectness. What does he mean? I believe he means this - be particularly careful about whom you receive in religion and be particular and lovingly cautious about whom you reject; but see and try the spirits, and if you detect Christ, the savour of His Name, a contrite and broken heart from a sense of believing love, then embrace that person; walk in love and peace toward them. Put on the bond of perfectness; and there is no fear in it. I know a good deal of what it is to fear man and we are told in the Scripture that "the fear of man bringeth a snare". And there is a good deal of pride about that fear of man. But love overcomes everything; it gives liberty; it gives the sweetest humility; it gives a holy candour; it gives you such a love to the people of God that you can pray for

them, and if you see them walking in things that are not good and hurtful you believe, you will be bold enough to tell them in love. There is no fear in it. It is our unbelief and our lack of love and our ignorance of the Lord and His truth that makes us so timid or so jealous or so envious. O the bond of perfectness; I wish I knew something more of it than I do. But the principle is here in the Scripture, and a touch of it will do this in you - it will gather your hearts and affections up to the Lord and you will pray sometimes with earnestness for all saints with all perseverance and supplication desiring their only good; mourning with those who mourn; rejoicing with those who rejoice. This is the bond of perfectness.

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love" Well there is to be a perfection of this love in all the people of God. In heaven there is nothing but love; there is nothing contrary; no enmity, no envy, no ignorance, no sinful, hurtful ignorance, no temptation, no darkness, no sin. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. "When that which is perfect is come" says the Apostle, "then that which is in part shall be done away". It is in an infinitely small part that we can know this love of God here. If you felt it for a few minutes I am sure the intenseness of that feeling has made you weep. I am sure it has made you long to be strengthened or to go and fall into the ocean of love for ever. We could not bear much of this love here. Redeeming love, electing love, adopting love, covenant love, unquenchable love; love that makes the great and eternal and holy God jealous of the hearts of His poor sinful people; love that will make them holy and happy eternally. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love". When that which is perfect is come then fear will be done away because we shall know, if we are the Lord's, we shall know even as also we are known. Says the Apostle in the 13 Corinthians "Now abideth faith, hope, charity (love) these three, but the greatest of these is charity." May the Lord forgive what I have said amiss and give us to feel, and to believe, this love toward us.

AMEN.