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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 17 October 1923

Hebrews 3 v 14 and 15

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold
the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;
while it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden
not your hearts, as in the provocation"

We are undone to all eternity if we do not partake of the Lord Jesus Christ, if we live in a carnal atmosphere, if our appetites always, every one of them, find satisfaction in something the world can provide; if we never have an appetite for, and partake of, the Lord Jesus, we are undone for ever. The curse must rest upon us, the curse of a holy God. Sin has involved the whole human race in a terrible enmity against God, has incapacitated human nature, so that it cannot serve God; so that the human will, as depraved, will not serve God; so that the human affections, as they are defiled, have no taste for God and heavenly things. O the poor world, the whole human race, is by sin perishing. If we believed this truth, what would become of all our petty pride? What become of all the high thoughts we have of various things in this life? The short-lived pleasures, the vain glorious things which some of us have been left to covet. O how they would be put into their proper insignificance if we believed in this truth. How many there are who come into this world and go through the short span of their mortality without anything more than, if as much, without anything more than a mere name to live in religion, the Lord only knows. Of Moab it is written, he had not been emptied from vessel to vessel; he had been left quiet, and still and satisfied. His taste had not been changed, his scent remained in him. He had not gone into captivity and therefore he was dead. It is no hiding place to say that we have never done anything which has brought us into disgrace before our fellow men; that wont be a refuge in the day of death and judgement. There is a Scripture in the Acts, a very blessed one and a very solemn one, which runs thus: "There is no other Name under heaven whereby we must be saved but the Name of Christ", and we must be saved or lost. If we are left, if the Name of

Christ is never known by us, if we never touch the hem of His garment, if we never taste His grace, if we never long for His mercy, if we never look for His coming, we are lost. All notional ideas of absolute mercy in God, all our natural ideas of tenderness, are overturned when we are taught what God is, and what we are. O, the holiness of God. Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? Who can come and appear before Him of whom it is said, "The heavens are not clean in His sight". Which one of us dare appear before Him, dare hope for mercy from Him as respects our own case and life? And in order that there may be an escaping in the experience of any person from the curse, in order that we may stand before God, in order that we may be saved from the just doom which we deserve, we must have some knowledge of Christ. If we live and die ignorant of the Lord Jesus, whatever our own self-esteem may be, and whatever the esteem of others towards us may be, whatever refuge we may think we have found, we must be lost. "There is no other Name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved", and that Name must be known. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you". Thinking about Christ is not enough. No, many think about Christ. Many talk about Christ, but it wont save the soul. There must be union with Him. There must be, out of that union, an experience of communion. And this is very solemn as our lives are drawing on and eternity is before us and our span will soon become an inch and the inch soon be gone, of time. It is very solemn to consider some of us how little we know, if anything, of the Lord Jesus. A great separation will be made one day. Everything that is taken up for granted, that will have to be put down by necessity, and only what God has given, only what He has communicated and taught our souls will stand. This chapter speaks - the Holy Ghost in it by Paul speaks - of unbelief, that master sin, that damning sin, unbelief. We all have it, but the point is, whether we have faith. You need not enquire whether you have unbelief; if you are taught of God you know you have, and possibly it will be one of the heaviest burdens, one of the greatest troubles that you have. And therefore the Apostle says, "Take heed brethren". Do not be heedless of this thing, do not think that you are superior to it, do not take it for granted that you are able to overcome this thing, this damning sin. "Take heed brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" - It is unbelief that makes us fly from God, not

faith - "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Then the Apostle gives to those to whom he is so solemnly writing, a word of encouragement, as I take it to be. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Who can exaggerate the blessedness of a person who really has communion with the Son of God, that communion coming out of union with Him? Who can exaggerate the blessed estate of one who is by God Himself brought into an indissoluble union to His own dear Son? But there is a beginning to the experience of this union, though not a beginning to the union itself. The union was formed in eternity; men do not partake of Christ by anything they do; do not merit to partake of Christ by any act they perform, but they come to Christ because they have been eternally united to Him. But there is a beginning in experience and here the Apostle reverts to it. He says "we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." "The beginning of our confidence". Perhaps some of you say immediately in your hearts, well then this verse shuts me right out, for I have no confidence. Well, let us look at this confidence a minute to see if we may see, by the Holy Ghost, what it is. In order to a confidence that is well-grounded, a confidence that will stand every shake, a confidence that will stand the fire, a God-given confidence, there is of necessity a work to be done by God in the soul. This is the work of shaking, of killing, of disturbing, of emptying from vessel to vessel the sinner where God will, according to His eternal purpose, lay a ground of confidence. Naturally we all of us, I suppose, have self-confidence. Ignorance of God leaves a man self-confident, but the knowledge of God communicated by the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit's work in the soul, according to Christ's own word - convincing of sin, of righteousness and of judgement, shakes a man out of his confidence, empties him from vessel to vessel, disturbs him from this and that point of rest, and makes him sooner or later come to know that in himself there is no stability. In himself there is nothing, not a speck, not an inch which he can bring before God as a standing ground. Ah it is not a mere word written in the Scripture to a child of God: "This is not your rest, arise ye and depart, it is polluted" It becomes a solemn experience. The Lord writes in the heart of every one whom He prepares for a good confidence that solemn word "lost". O what that word means to some no

tongue can tell. Lost, alienated from God, under His curse. Lost, not a thing that you can bring that will renovate that lost condition. Nothing that you can bring that will at all mitigate your state, but simply, lost, ruined, perishing. Now the beginning of confidence in such a person is derived unto him by the Holy Ghost from something in God. If you and I have a beginning of confidence that was derived from anything outside God, that confidence is false. Now look at this for a moment, you who thought you were outside this Scripture; that you had no confidence. Can you not look back to a time when something in God was manifested to you, which drew out from you longings and cries and petitions and confessions and acknowledgement of sin and earnest supplications for the communication of that which was discovered to you? You do not call that confidence, but I call the beginning of confidence that, my friends. If you have no knowledge of God, how can you cry to Him? If you do not believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, how do you go to Him with diligence more or less as it is wrought in you? If you have no apprehension that with Him there is forgiveness that He may be feared, why cannot you be satisfied without forgiveness. Something in God, something that He is or that He has done or that He will do, is a real foundation of a right confidence in the soul. Is not that so? You who have a confidence or who have a beginning of confidence and now have lost the sweet comfort of the strength of that confidence, how did you come by it? Was it not that the Lord God by His good Spirit showed you a little of what He was in Christ? That with Him there is mercy and plenteous redemption. That His Own beloved Son He sent, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, as you now were feeling to perish, but have everlasting life. Did you not hear, and hearing believe the report of the Person of Christ? Was not some inkling of mercy through blood communicated to you which held you up from despair? It may not have been with a distinct word some people's confidence was commenced to their apprehension, but there it is. It came out of God, something that He is, something that He had done. And this is very wonderful because it puts the soul on an unshakeable foundation. It puts under him, something; a rock that can never be moved. He may not be on that rock yet, as to the sense and comfort and strength of confidence, but there it is. When God manifests to a sinner convinced and shaken out of all refuges, something in Himself upon which he may lay hold, something attractive, a refuge, a

Saviour, O that will never be taken away from under his feet. It may be long before he comes down to that rock, but the Lord will bring him to it. "If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast" What was it in God that began your confidence? Was it this? "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?" Was it that word which we read just now: This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him; I am well-pleased in Him. Was it the divinity of Christ? Did that form your confidence? Or, if you had no distinct apprehension of that, did the Name of Jesus spoken into your heart sound sweet to you and make you cling to a hope that He is your Saviour? Was that the beginning of your confidence? Well, says the Apostle, "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." It may be it was a small beginning, doubtless in most cases, but it was something in God and this is the glory, the blessedness of such a confidence, that the great God whence it was derived is infinite. Your confidence though, as to the experience of it, was proportionate to your knowledge by revelation of God in Christ, yet there is infinitely more to be known of the Lord Jesus than ever you saw then. Yes, He is changeless, but we may increase in strength of confidence in the knowledge of Him by the Holy Ghost. So it is not wise for a sinner to say he has not got all that he wants, He has not had that sight of Christ that he really cannot do without, and therefore he must despair. That is unbelief. Says the Apostle, hold fast the beginning of your confidence. And mark this, that all confidence, from the beginning to the abundant entrance into glory, is to be based upon God Himself. A man is not to begin his confidence by the Holy Spirit's discovery of the Lord Jesus to him and grow up into self-confidence afterwards. "Having begun in the Spirit are ye made perfect in the flesh?" This exhortation to hold the beginning of confidence stedfast is necessary to us and a mercy it is the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write it. We need it my friends. Christ Jesus is the only Name whereby we must be saved. Himself, and what He has done, and what He is doing, will alone be the refuge and the strength of every true Christian, and all strength, and every refuge apart from that will, sooner or later, fail.

The beginning of our confidence. Now it may have been in these particulars, the beginning of confidence. First, what Christ is. Not that you knew much of Him then, but the Person - and you may have

learned by the Holy Spirit more concerning that same Person that you knew but little of then, since, through mercy - the Person of God's eternal Son. My friends, the Son of God is the Saviour of sinners, the Friend of sinners. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified Saviour is the Son of God. And have not some of us been brought away from ourselves, away from our guilt and yet with it; away from our bondage sometimes and away from our fears of hell and yet with all those things, to this blessed Lord Jesus. "Out of self, to Jesus lead" is the petition to the Holy Spirit, and has not that been, was not that, done for us? Ah He is the fountain of life and the poor soul who is dead in himself as to his feelings, brought to Christ finds some communication of life to his soul. The doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ is a living doctrine, and it does communicate life to the soul. Even the doctrine of His Person, the Son of God, meritorious, infinitely so; His death that put away sin for ever, that one sacrifice. O what strength of confidence does that communicate to a poor, weak, panting soul. Hold it fast. Christ is all this. You knew but little of Him when you said in your poor, trembling way, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." He is the same Person and perhaps, if you have not, you soon will, learn that He is just as willing as He is able. Hold it fast. But then, how do people hold fast the beginning of their confidence? How can a poor, tempted, driven, afflicted, fearful sinner, hold fast to Christ? His strength is gone; perhaps you feel that if the conflict lasts much longer you must give in, and if the Lord does not come to you you must be overcome and perhaps you have great fears in your hearts lest what little confidence you once had in the Lord was not a living confidence, not a gift of the Lord, but a false one and the sooner you are rid of that confidence, it may be suggested to you, the better for you. Well now what is it for such a person to hold fast to his confidence, the beginning of his confidence? Not for him to look back to the beginning of it and try to argue himself that it was a living and true confidence; that is not holding it fast. That may be a lie of the devil and that wont bring any living comfort into your soul. What then is it? Well, hear one man holding fast his confidence who was greatly tried, tried by many, many things, tried by his own experience of his impetuosity and of his unbelief, and tried also by the unfaithfulness of many others, tried to the quick, even Peter. The Lord Jesus said to him "Wilt thou also go away?" He might have

turned round and argued that he had been with the Lord so long, or that the Lord called him at the beginning, but he did not do so. That was not the ground of his confidence, but Christ's Person was, and so he said "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ the Son of the living God." If you by faith can cleave to what Christ is in the midst of storms, even the Sent and Anointed of the Father, even the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; if you can hold fast to Himself, what a mercy it will be. And that may be an aspiration now to the comfort of any past experience; only when you are brought to that you will find past things renewed. You will find the Lord Jesus the same and what He has done He has not undone. You will find Him as kind now as when you first heard His voice, as when you first cried to Him for mercy. You will find Him just the same. It is good so to hold fast and this is by the Holy Spirit. O but perhaps someone says, if He would but say that to me, then I would have hope. If He would but say "Wilt thou also go away" I would tell Him that I would not. Well perhaps He is saying it to you by His dealings with you. Perhaps He is trying your faith. Perhaps He is testing where your affections really are, where you trust. You need not an audible voice. God does not speak with an audible voice to His people; He speaks by His dealings. "I will guide thee with Mine eye". "Be not as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle". Well if the Lord is saying to you by His dealings, "Wilt thou also go away?" may He enable you in your spirit to say to Him, - He will, as the Holy Spirit is with you - "Lord, to whom shall we go" You will be brought to a stand. There wont be anything here that will really satisfy you. What a mercy it is to be dissatisfied with everything but living streams; to be dissatisfied without Christ and His mercy and His presence and His power and His pardon. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." But perhaps one may say, my confidence is gone, it is shaken right away; my hope is removed and I am dead; I feel dead. All I can feel is pain that I cannot feel and can I be a Christian? All I seem to be able to think is evil. I can only groan and hardly do that, and I feel dead. Is it possible I ever had a confidence? Is it possible I am an elect child of God? Is it possible I have been regenerated? Well it is very solemn if you are in such a place as that, very. It will be heavy work for you if you

have to say solemnly in your heart I cannot absolutely say I have a grain of living faith. "O could I but believe" Tis very solemn. Well now what is it for such a person to hold fast? Why, for the Lord to hold him fast and for the Lord to come, as He will to every one of His own sooner or later; bring them to enquire why He contends with them; bring them seriously to question with Him, Lord hast Thou called me by Thy grace? Am I regenerate or am I dead? Is it possible Thou didst communicate life to me? Lord, if Thou hast not quickened me, wilt Thou begin? If I am deceived, wilt Thou undeceive me. If Thou didst call me wilt Thou tell me Thou didst. That is holding fast, and sooner or later the Lord will tell you, He will give you either a word or a persuasion or a discovery of Himself, a token of His love that will strengthen you, and help you to go on pressing your case for further manifestations. He will satisfy you and then make you more hungry for Himself. In thinking of this word just before coming here this evening I remembered an occasion when I was shaken in the way I have tried to describe, severely shaken, and before the Lord I tried in my poor way to beg of Him that if He had not done anything for me, He would begin; that if He had done anything for me He would tell me He had. It is solemn to come to points like that before the holy God, very solemn, but the issue will be good. The eternal God, as I hope and believe, after some long, some hours of sharp exercises in this matter, satisfied my heart concerning this matter, that He had called me by His grace, that it was His true grace in which I stood. Not only so, He did more for me than I asked Him to do; He promised me things to come. Not only told me what He had done, and what He was, for He was very holy to me then, came very near; He also told me what He would; that He would keep me. Well, says the Apostle, hold that fast. You will never find confidence in yourself. You may say to yourself sometimes O I ought to be stronger, I ought to know more. You may be ashamed, as some of us are ashamed, that we know so little, but here is our point of rest, what Christ is, what He has done. And take this point of confidence, the beginning of confidence with regard to standing before God. I mean the clearing of every obstacle out of the way. Some of you have had that confidence, a beginning to it in your souls, when redemption was communicated to you, when the Redeemer passed upon your spirit the gracious experience of the power of His atonement, when you felt for the time there was nothing between you and heaven, that your sins did not stand between you and heaven, nor

between you and God's love. Now that was confidence to be enjoyed, strong confidence. It was not in anything in yourself was it? Is that confidence shaken? It cannot be shaken in God, only in self. If you are not enjoying that now it will be well to hold fast the beginning of the confidence and how will you do it? Not by carelessly saying, O well that was only to be known once in a lifetime, I cannot expect much of that great comfort. That is not holding fast. What is holding fast the beginning of that confidence? It is a solemn enquiry before the Lord why things are worse with us now than they were then. Wherefore contendest Thou with me? Lord show me my sins; show me why and how I have provoked Thee to withhold from me those strong consolations. Lord do not leave me to be easy in an evil and unhealthy state of soul. You wont cast aside redemption then; rather you will hold it fast, you will take it to the Lord and plead it with Him and ask Him to restore to you the joy of His salvation. "If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Perhaps one here is in such a condition as that everything seems reversed. Every promise the Lord has given seems to be reversed and there seems no possibility of you getting through and coming to the accomplishment of those promises. Perhaps once you thought heaven was yours and you would enter into it. Perhaps once you thought the Lord would always bless you and that you would always live in His presence, but now you have a long time been away from Him; He has been away from you, and it is dark night with you. And worse than that, you may find your exercises dying down, your desires perhaps not really keenly felt, and you may seem to have little more than alarm in your soul. Well, if the Holy Spirit should bring you to hold fast then, it would be like this: "I am the resurrection and the life" and the Lord Jesus can bring those things that are not, into being. He can command a resurrection; a death is nothing to Him. A dead promise is nothing to Him; dead comforts are nothing to Him; dead desires are nothing to Him. "I am the resurrection and the life." It is a great thing to be brought there and if He tells you that you wont despair. No, that you will not. You will say, Lord Thou canst revive me; Thou canst revive me again. Wilt Thou not revive me again that I may rejoice in Thee. Lord, wilt Thou not revive my desires? Wilt Thou not revive my faith? Wilt Thou not warm my love? Wilt Thou not renew my poor, desolate, barren earth? Thus faith has a resurrection in the soul, faith that seems to be dead, and the beginning of confidence is held

fast in Christ. My friends, He is the life of every believer. Therefore our life is not in ourselves. We may feel dead, but Christ lives. It is solemn to feel dead; it is blessed to be led out of a dead self to a living Christ to draw virtue from His precious life and death. Hopes then are revived, hopes of good to come. All you ever hoped for in your beginning of confidence was from Christ was it not? Have you a confidence here to see Him? Did you look out for Him at the beginning? Did you long to behold Him? Was there created in you a real appetite for Christ that nothing but His communications would satisfy? And was the fullness of that appetite this, that you might really look upon Him as crucified for you, as your living Lord? Well, hold that fast. He is the same and He is to be seen. He will discover Himself to His people here, and He has reserved the open sight for heaven, for He has promised heaven; you will see Him there. I have gone to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself. O what a blessed thing it is to have your life hid with Christ in God. What a thing it is to have an immortal life there. And this will carry you through every exercise and every storm if you have it. Union to Christ, O who can exaggerate the blessedness of union to the Lord Jesus and who can exaggerate the sweetness of communion with Him? One little touch of His love, the least ray of His light, the least drop of His grace, how sweet it is; the least inkling of His Person. You know what nourishment it is some of you, dont you; what satisfaction it is. What a crumb of bread will do to strengthen your heart sometimes; what a drop of the wine of love will do sometimes to exhilarate you and enable you to go through sorrows and troubles and difficulties and fires. We are made partakers of Christ thus if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

You may hold the beginning of your confidence stedfast and yet feel very tottering. Yes, it is a mystery how that a poor sinner in the midst of storms, without comforts, without any light, without hardly any hope, yet in the bottom of his heart holds fast to the beginning of his confidence. Yes, he says, in effect - I believe every Christian knows this in storms - he says in effect what Luther said, "Lord I will not detach myself from Thee." You may not feel any strength to hold fast yet there is a holding fast in that way. "Lord, I will not detach myself from Thee". And again Job held fast when he

said "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Why my friends, there is comfort in that, there is comfort in that, there is comfort in this truth, that there is a Lord Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. While Christ lives, says faith in a poor dying sinner, while Christ lives I will hope for life. While the Son of God is on the right hand of God with His divine atonement, I will plead for mercy. That is holding fast unto the end. Then it looks as if it will be a struggle to the end. It looks as if this confidence will be tested and assailed to the end; otherwise why the exhortation to hold it fast to the end. Yes, there is an end and thine expectation shall not be cut off poor, weak sinner. Do you expect to see God with joy? Do you expect to drink in sweet streams of love and mercy eternally? Do you expect to find yourself above the reach of sin and pollution and weakness and fear and temptation, shut in eternally with God? Well, that will be the end. To the end; to the end of the conflict, to the end of mortality, or to the end of this particular trial. Hold fast. It is our mercy to be enabled to do so, and this the blessedness of it; all the strength to hold fast is communicated from the living God. Yes, He it is that communicates and keeps His people through the exercises of faith by His Own almighty power. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."

"While it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." To day, another day, a gospel day, this day. "If ye will hear His voice." Do not some of you long to hear His voice? Do not some of you long to hear His voice? Do not you long to hear Him speak to you? Well, says the Holy Ghost harden not your heart. What is the reference here - "as in the provocation" - this, a setting up the difficulties above the power of God. Setting up the trouble above the blessedness you hope and look and seek for, and setting up sin and unbelief above pardon and faith, of which Christ is the author. That is the provocation. Harden not your hearts by these ways. Unbelief does harden the heart. It is a great mercy to have grace to be thankful for anything the Lord has done for us, to have grace to regard every touch of the Spirit, every manifestation of Christ, even though it is but a passing hint of Him, and to hold

fast to Himself as He thus deals with us and not to set up the difficulty above Christ. You know those spies that came back from Eschol, except Joshua and Caleb, they said it is a good land, but so and so are the difficulties. The walls are very high and there are giants there and we were like grasshoppers in their sight and in our own sight when we saw them. Therefore they dissuaded the people from going up and said let us go back to Egypt. Now the Holy Ghost says here in this word "Harden not your hearts as in the provocation" There are difficulties, you will find you need the Lord to communicate continually fresh strength to you to hold you up and to enable you to hold fast, Harden not your hearts, turn not away from the Lord, for if you turn away from the Lord - though you have done this great wickedness, as Samuel said to the Israelites - you will go after vain things that do not profit. Turn not away from serving the Lord. O may the Lord help us to hold fast to the faithfulness of Christ, to hold fast by His Own power to the Covenant of Grace sealed by the blood of Christ. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."

May the Lord pardon what has been amiss. May He enable us to hold fast and bring us to that blessed fullness of partaking of Christ eternally.

AMEN.