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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 11 July 1926

HEBREWS 4 v 14

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest  
that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son  
of God, let us hold fast our profession

The holiness of God is an awful reality to a spiritually enlightened sinner. By it he realises in some measure that he is far from God, that God must necessarily keep him far from Himself. The awfulness of this makes a person understand a little of what is written in the Scripture concerning God dwelling in thick darkness, dwelling in light that is unapproachable to man. If this character of God, God's infinite Being, any view of this character, is before us, then we shall be filled with amazement and fear and filled with a horrible sense of our terrible state, of the disability that belongs to us through sin, and this will kill our fleshy impressions and notions of God and will make us feel something of that word concerning taking the Name of God in vain, that he who does so shall not be held guiltless. It will make a person tremble to think of God, to think that He is, and that he, the sinful person, is in His presence, under His eye. And when God so makes a man fear Him, when a person comes into that word - "Let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread", then in some respects the fear of man is overcome, and he sees God and is before God, a heart searching God who trieth the reigns of the sons of men, and whose eyes run to and fro in the earth beholding the evil and the good. And it is a most necessary, and powerful, and salutary instruction which God thus condescends to give to some men. It is so salutary in this, in that it preserves the person, insofar as the power of it is felt, from the awful sin of presumption, taking the Name of God in vain. My friends, God is holy; God is just; God is almighty, and God must punish sin. His goodness and His character, His justice and all the perfections that are essential to Him as God, make it necessary in Him to punish sin. And the Word of God declares this, for when God is believed then His Word assumes, in that believer, a singular importance. He feels it to be absolutely holy as

the Author of it is; feels it to be infallible, and at times is brought to feel what is contained in this chapter, that the Word of God is living, quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword; that it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. So penetrating is the eye of God and so penetrating is the Word of God. He sees, knows perfectly, and in some degree He perfectly convinces men of what they are; discerns them, tells them what He knows about them, shows them the intentions of their heart and their thoughts; makes them know what, otherwise, they would be ignorant of concerning themselves as viewed by Him. This is universal; God's omniscience is omniscience in the fullest sense of that incomprehensible word; omniscience. He sees all, knows all; there is no creature that can be an exemption to this; no person, however wise, whatever authority or power or riches or resource He may possess, who can make himself an exemption to this great truth. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, for all things, all men, all hearts, all actions, all thoughts, and every word are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. You will shrink if you feel this; you will shrivel as you feel exposed to this God. You will feel, more than ever you have been able to express, if this experience comes into your soul, the need of a covering, of a refuge, and such a covering and such a refuge is in the gospel, in the text. Paul is speaking in this chapter to the people of God. He speaks of some who fall away, are unbelievers, who appear, have appeared, to be like the people of God, but who come short, seem to come short. Now says he to these holy brethren, believers, made holy by God, separated by the power of His Word and made believers, now take heed, beware, look closely to this; shows them the necessity of close, personal examination. And how necessary this is, for a name to live without life, which is possible according to the Scriptures, is an awful position to stand in, for God can discern where there is only a name and no life when men cannot so discern. He knows how many here stand in a profession and have no spiritual life and He knows how many there are who, fearing and trembling and lying, it may be, in sorrow and helplessness, yet are looking to Him, as in the words of your hymn - O Lord, lift me higher

In the text there is an exhortation and the reason of it. The exhortation is "Let us hold fast our profession". We must notice first of all then, the profession, and then the holding of it fast. Profession; first of all inward profession for that is the first place where profession is made. Man believeth with his heart and with his lips professes what he believes. The work of God, the saving work of God the Holy Ghost is a work carried on unseen by men in the hearts of individuals. He separates men to himself, takes them in hand, makes them by His instruction soft, makes their heart soft by the fear of His Name, writes His law in their hearts and minds, causes them to believe in Him, a great God; brings them to fall before Him and submit to Him sooner or later; causes them to do that fearful thing of which just now we read - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is; it is a fearful thing and yet who, that has been under the instruction of the Holy Ghost, has not, at times, been glad to be enabled to do so? We must either fall into hell or fall into the hands of the living God. Said David - after sinning against God, in what might be called a natural piece of prudence, when he numbered Israel and God charged him with that, his sin - I am in a great strait; I have done foolishly; I have sinned; put away mine iniquity. He said, when three different kinds of punishment were brought before him by the prophet, I am in a great strait; let me fall into the hands of God for it is better to fall into the hands of God than to fall into the hands of man. Now this inward profession, this inward experience, which men are given by the Holy Ghost sets God up in them, sets up His claims, sets up His Word, sets up His will, and His glory, and makes that person submissive to what God reveals of Himself, and this is the spring of all true profession. What God reveals to a man, that he believes, that he has some spiritual knowledge of - faith being the evidence of things not seen - and that he is enabled to profess. And there are some things concerning God which are the matter of our faith, and the first thing one might say is what I have named, that He is holy. We believe it; we, from our hearts believe it, with all that it means to us. That though it means to us, by reflection from His holiness, a shameful sense and discovery of our utter depravity and ruin and blackness, still we believe this, He is a holy God, He is a great God. We believe in His power, that He, by the word of His power, can consign a world to destruction and can, by a word, create a world; that He made all

things and upholds all things by the word of His power; that He commands the universe. We believe in an Almighty God. That is no vain, though it may be vainly expressed, profession of the Church - "I believe in the Lord God Almighty". This makes a person who believes it, makes him feel that he is, very small, very little, very poor and very weak. No resistance to this Almighty God; no effectual resistance to Him. And we believe in His sovereignty, His absolute sovereignty; that He has a will and that none can resist it; that He will do according to the counsel of His will in heaven and in earth to eternity. It is a tremendous thing to believe in the sovereignty of God, for a sinner to believe in the sovereignty of God. And we believe in the love of God, that God is love, and why do we believe that? Because - as all other parts of our belief if true - because that love is revealed. He has revealed His love, and that sovereign, for all the perfections of God are harmonious; there can be no discord or disorder in God. We may be disordered in our minds in respect of our apprehensions of Him, but there is no disorder in Him. He has revealed His love and that love of His, which is one of His perfections, and is His nature, - God is love - is known only by His own revelation of it. This revelation of God's love is in the Person who is in the text, the Son of God. He is the measure of God's love to men, as by the Father He was set forth, given and sent to express that love to them. Do we believe in this? And do we believe that a sovereign, almighty, eternal, holy, sin-hating, sin-punishing God, is a God of love and that He can and He does love sinful men? It is revealed in the gospel. And lying in this revelation is also a revelation of His wisdom, for all nature, human nature and angelic nature, is entirely non-plussed in this, as to how it is possible for this God, this holy, pure, sin-hating God, to love a sinful and polluted worm. The wisdom of God is in this, that He devised the plan of revealing His love and of expressing His love in those who were by nature vessels of wrath and deserving not His love, but His curse; that God did, by His own wisdom and power, reveal this way whereby He can, consistently with His Own perfections, love sinful men. And this was by setting up, as in type He set up under the old dispensation, a Priesthood. He set up a Priesthood; a type was in the Levitical Priesthood. All that which existed by the Word of God in Israel of old repeated in type what is in this text, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest". And the Person whom He would send and constitute a

Priest in this, His Priesthood, is before us, the Son of God; His Own Son. Here is wisdom, here is condescension, here is an expression, a manifestation of causeless, divine love, that God would and did take this great initiative in respect of poor, sinful, hateful men, that He would constitute His dear Son a Priest and send Him to be a Priest for ever. A Priest is one who offers and deals with God, offers an offering and deals with God respecting men. He is One between God and men, making peace for men with God. This was set forth under the old dispensation as Paul at large in this epistle declares, but Aaron and his sons pointed to the Person of whom he speaks in the text, the great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God. They were men and were not suffered to continue by reason of death and all their offerings and ceremonies were ineffectual spiritually. They did not accomplish anything, though God doubtless did, through the grace of faith, accomplish spiritually, in many hearts, what was typified by them, but those priests and their offerings themselves were ineffectual. Now, as a contrast, this great High Priest, being what He is, the Son of God, being a Priest after the order of Melchisedec - a different order from the priests of the old dispensation - being in His very Person God's Son, and having somewhat to offer, this Person did effectually what was typically done under the old dispensation. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest".

Now we have believed in this Priest; He has become in some hearts here, by the manifestation of the Spirit, real. We have believed that God sent Him, that He came and the manner of His coming. This is a matter of revelation and of faith, that God did send His Son, made of a woman, made under the law; He made Him Man. He in His wisdom and by His power constituted the Person of Emmanuel, so that the Apostle in this Epistle here and there speaks of Him by contrast to those men under the Levitical Priesthood. He calls Him "this Man". "This Man", whom is this? God, God the Son. Now my friends, in experience in respect of the exhortation - Let us hold fast our profession - it implies this and you will know the implication; you will be involved in it as really a professor at times - it implies great difficulty; it is difficult to hold a profession. An easy profession is not a true one; the Scripture does not know an easy way to heaven. You may hold a profession easily but it wont be a living experience. You may have a faith that never gets tested, but it is

valueless. But if you have received the truth of God respecting His holiness and His sin-hating character, and if you have received, in any degree, the Person of the Lord Jesus as the great High Priest, then you will find at times a necessity and a difficulty in holding fast. Therefore says the Apostle exhorting himself, with the Hebrews, "Let us hold fast our profession", that is what we have believed.

Let us look a little at the difficulties. First of all they arise inwardly; they arise inwardly because of the penetrating, vital power of God's Word dissecting our hearts and our lives, our thoughts and our intentions. We are searched as David in the 139 Psalm prayed: "Search me O God and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." So in some measure, more or less, God deals with His people, deals with their consciences, brings before them their motives, shows them their intentions, and reveals to them pollution where they little suspected it; shows them their nature and this, as the Scripture from time to time, becomes living, quick in you, will make it difficult for you to hold fast to your profession inwardly, for letting go a profession is really, first of all, internal. The apostasy begins there and how many of us here may have feared lest we should apostatise, let go, fall away, for when the Holy Spirit makes a man feel what he is, causes him to see over and over and over again that not only has he broken the law in one point, and therefore is guilty of all, but that here and there he breaks it continually in his heart, that love is not in all his actions as a motive, love to God and fear of His Name, and therefore those actions and those thoughts are evil, it is a real thing; it brings guilt on the conscience. If you measure your state by merely what you think you appear before your fellow men and always and only measure your state so, then your condition before God is exceedingly serious. We do regard what men think of us and we regard our reputation, but before God principally we are led, are we not, to regard what we are in secret, in our thoughts and in our hearts; in our aims, in our motives, and you may find, some day, your conscience loaded with the guilt of some vile motive that you did not detect but that God has revealed to you in some act that may, in itself, have been a good act, and you will have guilt. You will feel that you cannot rest; you will feel that, how is

it possible for such a man with these things multiplied, with these things growing to such an extent as that they are like mountains, how is it possible for such a person to hold fast to his faith, to his profession, for we profess to hope in the mercy of God, we profess to believe or to hope that we are His people, to hope that we shall enter into the joy of the Lord, to hope that He will fulfil all the promises of His covenant toward us, and they are very great and when realised they are precious. I say, how can you hope that God will do this for you when you see what you are? And it may be that a child of God is left to walk in that spiritual wickedness in which David walked; in prayerlessness, in trusting to himself, trusting it may be to his own strength to hold fast to his own resources. David was looking at the people, the thousands of Israel, and for upward of nine months one would judge he had little spiritual prayer, little real secret exercise of soul, but just waiting on the people to look to see how many he had. A prayerless condition is a serious one, and who that fears God has not at times been convinced by the Holy Ghost that in all the multitude of his prayers - it may be for a period when he has even multiplied prayers and words in prayer - there has been no spiritual exercise and life before God; they have been dead, formal. You have obtained to yourself quietude of conscience by a duty done, but have not been exercised solemnly before God in respect of that for which you pray and that which you really need. You see yourself in that condition and feel it and then you will begin to conclude that God will have no more to do with you. How can you hold fast? How can you think that you are like Israel who wrestled with God and prevailed? And then too you may be tempted to feel, to fear, that you have never prayed, that you never were truly spiritual, quickened and exercised before God by the Holy Ghost. Says Paul "Let us hold fast our profession". Now how can a person hold fast this, his inward profession? How is it possible? Is it that a man should say I will not give in? Is it that he shall assure himself that all is right? Is it that he will say I refuse to give way to my doubts? No, that is not holding fast to profession. Holding fast is for a person to have given to him anew a believing in, a manifestation of, a testimony of, this Person upon whom the exhortation is grounded. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest" Now you will find in experience this is so. Every time you are brought to a true confidence of faith, every time you are restored to a steadfastness in believing, it will be, it

will have to do with, Jesus Christ, God's Son. That is the only way; that is the only way of holding fast. It is not natural tenacity; it is not a person's own confidence; it is not a man saying I will not give in; but it is a poor sinner convinced and dissected by the Spirit and turned out of house and home by the light of God's Spirit in his soul, again coming to this great foundation, Jesus Christ. "To whom coming as unto a living stone disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious", and herein is the work of God the Holy Ghost in whose power alone the faith of any person who has a right faith can stand. "Let us hold fast our profession". And the holding fast goes this way. It is like a distinct and simple and solemn placing of what is discovered of yourself and of the demerit of what you are against the merit of what Jesus Christ is and has done, for in the text is not only what Christ is but what He has done and where He is. Jesus, the Son of God; that is what He is. He is the Son of God. O, a glorious truth, a truth that has in it strength and life and comfort and heaven. Jesus, the Son of God. And what He is further in His office, a great High Priest. This includes all His work as He was set up by His Father, as He became incarnate, as He did offer in things pertaining to God and was constituted a Priest for poor men; it includes all that. Seeing we have this great High Priest. Seeing that He is, that He is changeless - "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever" and more, seeing that we have this great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, that is passed into the heavens, seeing that we have Him, and that we have Him as there, that He did pass into the heavens. He was on the earth, He was in the grave, He was on the cross, He was in the garden, He was in desertion, the desertion that meant hell to Him, He was under the burden of imputed sin, He was here a poor, frail, holy Man, touched with infirmity, in His experience tempted in all points like as His people are, but He passed into the heavens, passed there by the power of God, rose from the dead and, seeing we have Him; we have Him - look at this word; He is given, given as a possession, given in that great and blessed office of His, a Priest for men, set forth by God to be this - seeing that we have so great a High Priest let us hold fast.

Then the holding fast is to walk according to this Person, even to come to Him and by Him to God, and this means the exercise of faith on Christ in approaching to the living God. Ah my friends you will

find sometimes this just the experience of your souls as was David's experience when he said, it is better to fall into the hands of God. You may often be in a great strait when you see what you have been, what you have done, and then nothing will do but this to fall into the hands of God in Christ; that is to come to Him for mercy, for pardon, for a new experience of the virtue of His work, a new experience of access to God by His blood; peace with God through His atonement. That is it, that is the only thing that can properly bring into your soul a sense of confidence and enable you to hold fast your profession inwardly.

From this comes outward holding fast. Some make an external and outward profession of the Name of God and a great mercy it is when poor, sinful men have given to them the faith and the grace and the privilege of making a confession, a profession of the Name of God. A very great privilege in this day to be found on God's side truly and only those who have the inward testimony of the Spirit and that inward believing can properly make a profession of it. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation". Now to hold fast outwardly is to have grace to derive inwardly and secretly strength from communion with God. You may hold fast a form outwardly for a time without this but sooner or later you will find this that formality will not hold you; dead formality wont hold you always, and God wont let it if you are His. He will be like a moth to you and fret you until your formalism is hateful to you and then you will be compelled to turn in secret to seek for the foundation of holding fast, even communion with Him. Hold fast. Hold fast what you have believed; the faithful word of God.

Now there are other things in this holding fast and the difficulty of it, as the times in which we live, the generality of the present day; these things make it difficult to hold fast, for it is considered out of fashion to believe in the necessity of the Holy Spirit's testimony. Men talk about the gospel, they talk about the atonement - some of them, even few comparatively, do that - but the Spirit's work, how much of that is here? How much of it is believed and known? How much religion have we, how much true profession can we make, without the Holy Ghost? Holding fast to this is a great matter. Now if you feel this, and if you perceive by the light of the

Spirit, not only in your own case, but also around you, that there is a great declension in respect of this point, you will sometimes be led in secret to plead with God to pour that good Spirit upon you so as that your religion may be a living religion, so as that you may have the unction which is from above which teacheth all things and is truth and is no lie. Hold fast to this that there is only one teacher of righteousness who can bring from heaven, from Him who sits there a High Priest, the things of God and reveal and communicate them to us. I have only said a few things about this great matter but the time is gone and I hope the Lord may forgive what has been amiss and bless the truth to our souls.

AMEN.