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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden, at Galeed Chapel
Brighton, on Wednesday evening, 5 September,
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"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."

JAMES 1, verse 25.

This Epistle has been very improperly called a legal Epistle, because James is in his scope seeking largely to inculcate and show the fruits of faith. The great Luther, with all his fear of God and knowledge of himself, for a time found himself unable to receive this Epistle into the canon of Scripture, but he was delivered from that snare and I believe that every child of God, as light is given to him, will receive this solemn part of God's holy Word and see by the light of the Holy Spirit, how that it is not at all contrary to the Epistle to the Galatians by Paul and that to the Romans by the same Apostle. In the Romans, the Apostle's scope, especially in the first part of that Epistle, is to show the ground of justification, and so was the same scope in the Epistle to the Galatians his aim. There is nothing contrary in the scripture. Men and our own carnal reason cannot understand, but fight against the Holy Scripture being whole, united, harmonious, each part answering the one to the other, but when light is given, it is seen to be a beautiful word, in beautiful proportion, nothing unnecessary, not a word unnecessary, and in this chapter the Apostle is, as in all the Scripture the prophets, and the evangelists and the apostles of the Lord are seeking to show and devolve all up to God. Here the apostle draws everything from God, shows that we have nothing but that which comes from Him. "Every good and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning," He had before shown what we were, how we are led astray by our own lusts being tempted, and then, at the end of this being led astray, is committing sin, and that the end of sin is death, so that we have nothing to boast of, we have nothing but death really. We are only capable of doing that which merits death by nature. Then so far from teaching that men can beget themselves by their works, become the children of God by what they do, having said that every perfect gift cometh down from heaven, he instances the greatest of all gifts that can come down to a sinner. "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures."

Regeneration is singly the effect of the divine will. John speaks of this in his first chapter where he says, concerning all who receive Christ, (and in that receiving of Him, have the privilege of becoming the children of God,) that they were "born, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" And from this new birth, the Apostle teaches, that all spiritual works, all good works, and all spiritual life and works of life, grow. "Wherefore" says he, to those who had been begotten, by the will of God and by the word of truth "My beloved brethren let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath!" A recognition that we are nothing but sin and death and can do nothing but sin, apart from God's life, is calculated to humble a man, to make him, in this spiritual sense, slow to speak, swift to hear, anxious to be taught, that is, meek and teachable and slow to wrath "for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God!" "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls!"

It is as if he would take a poor soul, who was just begotten, and in darkness, a rash creature naturally, but begotten again of the word of truth, of the will of God, who was in confusion and trouble, not knowing which way to turn, not knowing how to get under the Spirit's influence, not knowing how to get to heaven, how to escape the wrath to come - now it is as though he should calm that poor creature's mind by inculcating this meek and quiet spirit. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls". This is a strengthening word to poor sinners who are set out for heaven, but hardly dare think they will ever get there, who know that the city of destruction cannot be their place, who have fled from it, and now fain would lay hold upon the hope that is in the gospel, but find no strength, no light, and no direction, but are just bewildered. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul" Preconceived notions of truth, an idea of doctrine, a trying to form your own way, and do the Holy Spirit's work, and get to certain stages of experience by dint of your own efforts - this is legal, this will simply confuse and bind you and greatly impoverish your souls if you are born again. But the Holy Spirit meekens, He teaches, He brings the soul down, He makes his comeliness to consume away, He makes him realise that he really needs a teacher who is infallible and divine. A quickened child of God made tender in the fear of God through the terrors of the law, through a sight of his sins and of the wages due to his sins, of the Holy majesty of God and His almighty

power and His judgements upon the earth - this poor sinner cannot receive anything. He wants to have the demonstration of things in his soul. Now the Holy Spirit says here "Here is a direction for you - receive the word, receive it with meekness". That is, do not receive it as the critics do, to receive what you think you ought to receive and reject the rest. Do not take a thing which you think fits your case and leave something which makes you feel you are wrong, which cuts you and condemns you. Receive it with meekness, fall under it, "which is able to save your souls".

"But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves". Receive not the notion of truth, and hold it in unrighteousness. Now many receive the doctrine of Christ into their judgment, whose lives and spirit and motives are never changed, thereby. "For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." The word of God heard, shows a man what manner of man he is. It is the light of God's word, that discovers to a man how contrary he is from what he ought to be, that discovers to him, that he is contrary to the law, contrary to God, and to holiness. Many people have some enlightenment in this. They have a slight awakening, they see themselves in some degree to be sinners, they have some terrors of hell in their consciences, but they go away and forget what manner of men they were. Says the Apostle here "He that heareth, and is not a doer, is like a man that beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

Then he comes to show who are the true subjects of grace and what their position and what their course is. "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, that man shall be blessed in his deed." To hear the word of God is not to look into the perfect law of liberty. Men may hear the doctrines of the gospel, and never look into that law. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty." To look into the perfect law of liberty, first of all a man must have given to him spiritual sight. We have no sight naturally of this law. It is hidden from the wise and prudent. The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that see not, lest they should see the gospel and be converted and saved. O what an enemy is the god of this world to the human race, and of God whose glory is in the gospel. But the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's Son, the Spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the Spirit of conviction, the Spirit who comes to uncover things, comes to a poor sinner and takes the veil

from his heart, gives him an eye, quickening him, gives him divine life, and a capacity to see, and by His instruction, brings him to look into the perfect law of liberty.

First, he is brought to look into this law of liberty with an anxious and earnest desire for it. Liberty is foreign to us naturally. What we call liberty naturally, is the most terrible bondage, that can ever hold any person. But when a person is regenerated, there is set before him a liberty, there is a possibility of a freedom that attracts him, a liberty to find acceptance with God, a liberty to stand before God, a liberty to come to God. O what a liberty there is unfolded by the Holy Spirit, and shining into the soul sometimes, whereby the soul longs for that liberty. I believe every new born child of God, knows what it is, to desire this. He rebels, and kicks like a wild bull, for this liberty, but is not able to find it. Sometimes he feels "O that it might be his." Liberty with God, liberty from the terrors of the law, liberty from the fear of death, liberty from the fear of the wrath to come, liberty from the torments that are in his conscience. And how is it possible for a man to think he can have this liberty without divine revelation.

There are rules to this liberty. God has prescribed them. Liberty is not given to the human nature promiscuously, anyhow, disregarding God's character. With respect to men it is said "God is no respecter of persons" but there is a law governing this liberty. Every person who comes to know what the liberty is, will know the law of it, and O, it is to find this out, that a poor sinner seeks after, and how does he seek it? Why, he can hardly understand what he means and yet he knows when he says "O God be merciful to me a sinner." "O pardon my iniquity for it is great." "Remember not against me former iniquities." "O hide me." "O save me." "O cleanse me." This is seeking after the law. He does not find it easily. There is another law he knows most about, a rigorous law, a holy law, though it is not perfect in the way in which the law of liberty is perfect. The holy law of God, that says to a sinner, that he ought not to be a sinner, and that because he is a sinner, and has sinned, therefore the holy God must curse him, that is a good and holy law, but it is not perfect, because it does not do any good to a sinner, it does not make a man perfect. "The law made nothing perfect". It cannot alter a man's state, it can only tell him what his state is, and therefore in that particular, though essentially, as coming from God, it is perfect, in respect of its operations and in regard to the law of liberty, it is imperfect.

This law of liberty is perfect and it is in one word, the law of love. Ah it is the bond of perfectness, love. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty", the love of God, the love of God manifested in the person of the Redeemer. That is the rule whereby men can obtain liberty. And this love has several great principles in it in its actings, and one great principle is this - substitution. Yes, the love of God has that principle in it, in its workings. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life;" O that is the rule, that is the principle. If ever this rule, this law touches you, O what a beginning of liberty it will be in your soul - love. "Herein is love!" My friends, think of it for a moment. Here is a terrible God, the Creator of us all, upholder of all things, who has hung the world on nothing, and who has said, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"; who has said that He cannot look upon sin, nor clear the guilty. Here is a great, a holy God, whose law is so holy that it cannot pass by the least infringement of it, and yet that blessed God has made a way for His love that in an act of divine wisdom and power, in an act of His holy will, He has substituted for a number of men, sinners, His own dear Son; substituted Him in their place. This is one rule, one principle in this law of liberty; not liberty to a bound soul, but the substitute of Christ. If this principle is made out to you, if this part of the law is brought to your understanding, when you fain would look into this law, O what a blessed thing it will be that you will see. And mark this, people look into this law of liberty when quickened by divine grace, long before they know the sweetness of liberty. Yes, they look into it with intensesness. "Can there be hope for me? May I be spared that which I deserve and which I cannot bear to think of even, eternal banishment from God?" They look into it with anxious eyes at times. Sometimes their eyes are kept wakeful at night looking into this matter, whether they can find anything here that will give them hope, and O this does give them hope.

Then again there is this in the law of liberty - the abounding of grace over sin. Gospel liberty has that rule in it. We put the rule upside down. We say naturally through our ignorance of God's holiness, through our dark understanding and natural legality, that the rule ought to be "We must wipe off some of our sins and then perhaps there will be hope for us!" But the rule of this law, one principle in it is grace, free grace, being greater and super-abounding over sin. "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound!" and that greatly strengthens and holds the eye of a poor sinner as he

is looking for this liberty.

Another principle is, and it is included in the point of substitution, that blessed provision of another's righteousness whereby a person may be looked upon by God and received by Him. We must go to heaven, if we do get there, clothed in a raiment not our own, just as in the parable where the person was found without a wedding garment. He was speechless when he was asked why he was there without one and then was cast out, which goes to show to us that every person that gets to heaven, must get and will only get there, as he is clothed with a wedding garment not his own. The Apostle Paul looked into this law of liberty and saw this principle, and O how it made his heart go out in this ardent desire. He said that he counted everything but dung and dross that he might win Christ and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness but Christ's righteousness. It will always work that way to a soul that is really convinced of sin, that is really set on getting to heaven, that really wants God. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty" This liberty is the gift of life in Christ, a free gift, and every poor sinner that is born again and possessed this life is looking for it, is longing for it, is working for it. "We pray to be new born and know not what we mean, we think it something very great, something that is undiscovered yet." Life in Christ. (Hart's Hymn 20. v 2.)

"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty." And this law, when it is applied, makes the person perfect. It is a perfect law in that respect, perfect in the efficacy of its application. The love of God shed abroad in the heart through Jesus Christ; for it is in Christ, as the Apostle Paul teaches us in the 8th Romans. This love shed abroad in the heart makes the poor sinner find that every objection is broken down. The law itself is perfect, in that the Person in whom this love is, by His precious work, His substitutionary work, His life, His vicarious death, perfected for ever those for whom He was substituted.

But perfection of the law is also in the application of it. You will never feel in your soul for five minutes, the redeeming love of Christ, and not at the same time feel a gracious and humble boldness, and a good hope, and an expectancy of standing before God accepted. O the love of God in Christ perfects a man in his soul. He sees, that is to say, by that love manifesting his union to Christ, that he stands complete in the Person and merits of Christ. It makes him say, in the sweetest liberty of it for the

time being, and exulting in the liberty, and in the Person who is revealed to him, and the love that is manifested to him, "I stand upon His merits". For the time he feels he does. You may sometimes say that, in respect of a negative thing. I stand upon His merit, that is, you have no other stand. But, at this juncture, in this experience, the poor sinner, now feeling the blessing of the Lord in his soul, says with a gracious humble confidence, all terror gone and a good hope of getting well through and seeing the face of God with joy "I stand upon His merits".

There is liberty, and you see this runs contrariwise from legal works. It is quite contrary to our natural ideas. God will not have our natural ideas in His religion. He knows what holiness is and that we have none to bring him. He knows what righteousness is and that what we call righteousness is filthy rags. But He does not let a poor sinner die and despair because He shows him what he is and that he cannot provide anything, but in this and by this law of liberty shows him that the provision is His own. A gift this law is; contrary to natural laws, a gift. A strange law, you may say. Yes, it is such a law that no natural unregenerate person will submit to. You will find in the Romans the Apostle Paul writes concerning the Jews, that they went about to establish their own righteousness, being ignorant of the righteousness of God and not submitting themselves therefore to His righteousness. But the children of God are brought to submit to His righteousness. Yes, to lay themselves at the feet of Christ before His cross and say, "If ever my poor soul be saved, 'tis Christ must be the way". And when it is manifested to him that he has an interest in Christ, when the Lord Jesus draws near to him and gives him some intimation that he belongs to him, then he feels the sufficiency of this blessed Person and His work, and has some degree of this liberty. O but an experience of this kind, blessed as it is, is not continued without any change. I know there are people that talk about having a confidence that is never shaken. I know there are people that say they were forgiven 30 or 50 years ago, and have never doubted since, but I cannot find a character like that in the Scripture. What should we do with the Psalms? How could we enter into some of the exercises in the Psalms, if we were always where we often would be, in a holy and blessed confidence and a full assurance? But there are many increasing teachings which the Lord the Spirit brings, that make a poor sinner sometimes so tremble, so fear, that he is likely to be driven off from his anchor ground. He never can be, once he is on Christ, but O the shaking he gets. Fresh sights of the majesty of God, of His terrible

majesty, of His awful judgments, fresh sights of that great division that is seen to be made, between all the human race, when sheep and goats will be divided, when every secret thing of all men will be discovered, when those who have a mere name to live, will find their lamps are gone out, and they have no oil to keep their lamps alight, and all these solemn things, with a sense of their own emptiness, greatly shakes them. Then perhaps other things about them - the apostacy that is begun, the aboundings of iniquity and the waxing cold of the love of the most of people, the signs of the times - these things, together with a sense of their own sleepiness, their slothfulness and guiltiness, O how these things are likely to shake them, as they think, off Christ. They begin greatly to question.

Now the continuing in this law, the continuing to look into it, is spoken of here, and it is a most necessary point to notice, how far natural powers and illumination go. But it is said "He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved", and here "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein." You cannot say you have never looked anywhere else since you first looked at Christ, can you? Since you first trusted in Him? You cannot say that you have never "squinted", as you were singing just now Berridge's word, never incurred that bondage which squinting brings. I cannot say I have not. Then what is this continuing to look into this law of liberty? It is the proof of the Holy Spirit's work in the soul, bringing it back from time to time to this only blessed law that the soul can really bear. The law of love is the only law that a sinner, as convinced of sin, can bear; redemption, the substitution of Christ, and from time to time a poor sinner is brought back to this, to look into it again and again. And he does not look into it for nothing. No. O what things he sees in this law of liberty, in the Person in whom this law is, who exercises it sometimes. He sees more than he can speak. Sometimes he believes, there is infinitely more, than he can see in this Person to whom he looks, and into whose law of liberty he looks, and how it fills his heart with desire and with prayer and with hope.

And continueth therein. The Apostle Paul says in one chapter in the Hebrews, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence, firm unto the end", and that is a scripture which seems parallel with this "And continueth therein." You wont be perfected by the flesh, if you have begun in the Spirit. The last step to heaven will be by the power of divine grace, and will come out of the death of Christ. O how far is James, from that legality that is imputed to him. He was taught by the Spirit, he was inspired infallibly, by the Spirit to write this Epistle.

Then the character of those who continue looking into the law of liberty is said to be "Being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work" A person who has life in his soul and is really after God, after life, after righteousness, after acceptance, after a shelter, after heaven, that person will work. "A doer of the work" A notion of religion will never save the soul. A walking in the light of another will never do when the Bridegroom comes. Where the Holy Spirit is, there will be a movement in the soul. A person will not always come to a service and hear the gospel preached and have some feeling, and never again until he comes again to chapel think about it. No, his religion if he has a true one, will be a living thing. He will do the work, and what is this? "He being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work" Well it is the fruits and the reflection of that which he sees in this law - love. O what it begets in the soul when a poor sinner is utterly dependent upon the mercy of God through the blood of Christ. When he finds that mercy dissolving his heart, when he feels that he is such a wretch and yet the Lord shows him mercy, has redeemed him, is in heaven and has said, "Because I live ye shall live also" and will not have any other reason why he should hope for heaven or why he should escape hell or why he should live, but just that. "Because I live who was dead and died for you" - I say this has a fruitful effect in the heart.

What are these works? Well first - I can only name one or two - this is one of the works which the soul does "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" That is the effect of life. O how a poor sinner as he looks into this law finds everything else as it were put into insignificance. The Kingdom of God in his heart is what he wants. Wants to know in his own soul that the Lord Jesus is sovereign and feel Him sovereign, and wont be satisfied unless he feels His sovereign sway in his affections. Jealousy is cruel as the grave, and the love of Christ begets jealousy in the heart. Would you have a rival? Do you suspect your heart? Do you say "Reign O'er me as King!" Do you say "Keep me fast and keep me near Thee, for Thou knowest I'm but a worm?" O what tender jealousy there arises out of an experience of this love of Christ manifested. Christ is become of no effect to them who are justified by the law, but a poor sinner who can find no justification out of Christ, and finds some degree of justification in his conscience through Christ, and rest in the work of Christ, O how grateful he feels sometimes, and how solemnly ashamed he feels that he is so disposed to turn away from this blessed Lord. Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness then, is one of these works. First. What do we seek first? Have we this mark? Are we

doers of this work? An honest doer of the work. "This man shall be blessed in his deed". He shall find from time to time the sweet kingship of Christ in his soul. O how sweet that is to have a King who is the Son of God. The King who it is that shall come and shall separate, who shall pronounce that solemn sentence "Come ye blessed of My Father". The King who is the Son of God, and the Friend of sinners. That is a blessing is it not? He shall be blessed in his deed. Perhaps while you are seeking this kingdom the King will come and touch your heart with His sweet sceptre and make you triumph in Him in faith. "A doer of the work!"

And out of this law of love there flows this work, the giving of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple. None but the children of God are capable of this. Very kind, people may be, and they are wonderfully kind naturally, many people are far more kind than some of the people of God are by nature. But I say none but a child of God is capable of doing this work, and every child of God will do it. You cannot love the Lord Jesus Christ, you cannot feel this love without loving Him, and you cannot love Him and not love His dear children. A doer of the work. He shall be blessed in this. Ah, you may find in the communion of saints a great blessing.

Then another work that is done, and that is the work of prayer. It is a work, a business, the settling of accounts, confessing sin, and purging of oneself by prayer and rolling of the burden on the Lord. This is a very profitable work. It is not a work that will merit heaven, but it is a work, when the blessing of the Lord is experienced. He shall be blessed in his doing. O how many of the people of God have known this. He shall be blessed in it. Why, what greater blessing can you have than when on your knees you are trying to pour out your prayers to the Lord for mercy, and confessing your sins, and there is opened to you, the precious atonement of Christ? And what greater blessing can you conceive than that which is opened to you, is brought and, as it were, put on your sins, whereby they are obliterated, and peace flows into your conscience? That is being blessed in working, not for working. "Happy are ye" said the Lord Jesus "who know and hear these things if ye do them" Happy is a poor sinner who is brought by the power of the Holy Ghost to confess his sins, for he shall obtain mercy, and mercy is a blessing, a most acceptable and rich blessing to a poor hell-deserving sinner, and we are not better than that. It does not matter what experience you have behind you, if you are a child of God, you are brought to that more or less constantly, that you deserve hell.

Then again, take this blessing that is brought - the presence of the Lord. Perhaps on your knees, as you are committing your way to the Lord, and that is part of the work. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass." You find, as you are confessing your weakness and inability, your fears and dismay, the Lord says to you "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" And you say "Lord, that is enough, I want no more. I do not want a stock, Thy presence is good enough for me." Is not that a blessing? He shall be blessed in his deed. One may go through various fruits of this in the life, as eschewing all appearance of evil; taking up the cross and following Christ, and a determined setting of the face against the fashions and maxims of this life. It is a fruit of grace, my friends, it comes from gospel liberty, not legality. Good works are at a great discount in these days, but may the Lord make us, according to the scripture, careful to maintain good works. The more we know of Christ the more careful we shall be to maintain good works. The more we know of Christ, the less we shall trust in anything we do, because there will be more than sufficient in Christ to trust in. These two things go together.

"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". I would just say one more work that is done by the people of God and it is contained in this chapter, a "receiving with meekness the engrafted word", the searching of the scripture. This is a command of Christ. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me". And O what a blessing some have got in this work. The Lord Jesus has manifested Himself in the scripture, shone out in some of His characters sweetly into the heart, and that is a blessing, being blessed in the deed, and it all flows from divine grace. It all comes from the principle of life that is imparted and kept alive by God, the Holy Ghost. Do we love this? Do we look into this law, or do we take a cursory glance at the gospel and think we know all about it and pass on without any experience of its power?

Spiritual pride is a terrible thing. It may be in a child of God, and a child of God may be greatly impoverished by it. But, where there is much love, much knowledge of Christ, there will be much meekness, and much humility and much teachableness. He will go to the Scripture sometimes like a little child, and to the Lord in going to the Scripture, and say "Lord open my eyes that I may see, that I may behold the truth, and find Christ and feel His love, and hear

His voice. This is being blessed, when the Lord answers those petitions. May the Lord then turn us, and keep us powerfully and diligently looking into this law of liberty. May He apply it to us continually, and take away all offences by it. "Love all defects supplies, makes great obstructions small. 'Tis prayer, 'tis praise, 'tis sacrifice. 'Tis holiness, 'tis all."