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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Shovers Green Anniversary
on Monday 6 June 1938

PHILIPPIANS 4 verses 6 and 7

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known unto God. And the
peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"

This word, this Epistle, is addressed to persons in whom God has wrought a good work. All the Epistles are addressed to certain characters; they are not indiscriminate. Many people take the Epistles, and especially the preceptive part, to themselves, and regard not that solemn, discriminating thing, that they are written, they are addressed, to characters. That observation will very probably divide this small congregation into two parts. What a wonderful thing for any here in whom it is true, that God hath begun a good work, because saving religion begins by God dealing with the soul; it does not begin on the earth, from the earth; it is not a consequence of any natural education, or acquisition, or activity. It is something which comes down from heaven into the soul. God begins it sovereignly, discriminatingly. According to appearances, it often seems that He begins it in the unlikeliest. Paul was amazed that God showed him mercy, that He revealed His Son in him, as one who was born out of due time. And every person, the subject of that good work, is a miracle of divine grace.

These Philippians were the subjects of that work, and the Apostle had an especial affection for them, it would seem. He writes in an affectionate way to them, and gives them one of the reasons why he thus writes, namely that he was persuaded that He, God, who had begun that good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. That was an encouragement to the Philippians, and it was one of the reasons why the heart of the Apostle went out to them; brotherly love was there; a wonderful thing to feel that. No reprobate, no nominal professor, knows what that means - the love of

the brethren; loving one another in the Lord and for His sake, according to that Scripture: "If we love Him that begat, we love him also that is begotten of Him." Not for any human excellencies, not for anything of a natural kind whatsoever, but for the image of Christ and the manifestation of the work of grace in the brother. That is the cause of love, and it is perhaps one of the truest touchstones by which you may gauge religion. The religion of Jesus Christ is eminently a religion of love, but not that kind of love that the generality of professors boast of possessing - universal charity. A very discriminating thing is love; nothing more discriminating. It is exclusive, and it is inclusive. The Apostle says in one place: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity", and in another place: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha". It is exclusive, inclusive; very discriminating. And everyone embraced in this divine love, this love of the brethren, everyone in whom is this good work, will wonder that he should be the subject and the object of that work of love, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. And it is embracive of all stages of experience, from the new birth onward. There are many stages of Christian experience spoken of in the Scripture as "children", "young men", and "fathers", which does not refer to natural age but to spiritual experience. The Apostle speaks to these Philippians in such a way as to encourage them to unity, a unity based upon, and flowing out of, the knowledge of the truth as the truth is in Jesus. There is no other unity, nothing that will stand by way of union, however much effort may be taken, and in some instances, properly. No union is permanent but that which is based on truth.

Then in the second chapter the Apostle sets forth the example of Christ in humility and condescension. "He made Himself of no reputation" You may depend upon it, my friends, disunion is very largely caused by pride and self. True humility is born of the knowledge of self and the light of God, and it flows in the soul and flourishes there in proportion as the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation is known. The more the goodness and glory of God in Christ Jesus strike your eye and touch your heart, the more humility will clothe you. And in the third chapter he goes on to set forth his own desire to know more of this foundation of unity, this source of blessedness, Jesus Christ. Every person in whom is begun the good

work of grace will find more or less constantly and increasingly a desire after the Lord Jesus, the knowledge of Him. Love is a hungry thing, and the love of God in the soul pants after Christ, the bread of life. A bondaging feeling of hunger, a deep, painful sense of thirst, is often felt by a child of God. He pants after the Lord; Paul did. And for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord, he gladly renounced everything else, suffered the loss of all else - not grudgingly, but willingly and gladly - reckoning all else but dung and dross in comparison with Christ. Where there is the good work of grace commenced in the soul, there will be, as it were, one thing before that soul, one idea in that mind, one aim, after which the soul presses from time to time, and that is, to know Christ, to be united to the Lord Jesus, to have an intimate walk with Him, to receive constantly out of His inexhaustible fulness of grace, truth and mercy. Mary chose that good part because the Lord had begun in her that good work. When the Lord has chosen a person in Christ Jesus, the time comes in that person's experience when the Spirit is given, and the Spirit being given, "changes the heart, renews the will, and turns the feet to Zion's hill". There are some here, I doubt not, in whose heart is this will and this choice. "Ye have not chosen Me", said the Lord Jesus, "but I have chosen you", and yet He brings all His people to choose Him and to choose His ways, so that it is not mere religion they want, but they want Christ - Christ in them the hope of glory - and would fain walk with Him and with His people in peace and equity.

The Apostle also expresses in the third chapter the great hope of the gospel, that which is to be attained and that which he sought, namely, "the resurrection of the dead". My friends, the hope of the gospel is a vast thing. When God begins a good work in the soul, the issue of that good work will be eternal glory, and faith wrought in the soul by the truth of God, the teaching of the Spirit, causes that soul sometimes to look out, as Paul here: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead". He wanted to be freed from the clog of mortality, and, what is more, delivered from the inbeing and inworking and defilement of sin. That is the prospect of all who are regenerated by the Holy Ghost, born again, and without that regeneration our religion is useless as to salvation.

Then he expresses himself in the final words of the third chapter by way of a lively anticipation of that day: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself". As if he should say, your souls that have such great aspirations after the enjoyment of God, shall inhabit glorified bodies; you shall lose the clog of mortality, and you shall one day be with and like the Lord, see Him without the veil between. But he does not conclude on that high key; he comes down to practice. In the opening verse of the fourth chapter he has before his mind, and speaks to, some who were evidently walking in disunion. He says: "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord - a gracious, fatherly, loving admonition of two who evidently were not walking in spiritual harmony. Something had broken the peace between these two; there was some offence probably, and he descends to these practical things from the flight of faith which he had indulged in the previous chapter. We are not always on the mountain-top; perhaps very seldom there. We fain would be there more often, but we have to come down; yet the influence of any mountain-top experience will be felt, will be known, in our profession, in our practical lives. People who boast of great experiences in religion and walk loosely, deny their own profession by that loose walk. When the disciples had been with Jesus and walked with Him, that fact was manifested, not merely by their declaring the fact, but by their walk and spirit. Notice was taken of them that they had been with Jesus and walked with, and learned of, Him.

And this will give, and does give, to people naturally resenting admonition and reproof, a willing submission to admonition and reproof. The Church of God is a united whole, all members of that one body, of which Christ is the Head, and each has a mutual interest in the others, and there is to be a knitting together, one with the other, in love, when there is a healthy state of the members. Now this can never be if pride rules, if self-will rules. But when the grace of God prevails then humility will clothe, and there will be a considering, not one's own things, but the things of others, and esteeming others better than ourselves.

"And I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women

which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers whose names are in the book of life." You may think it strange that the Apostle should come down to what may seem, on the surface, commonplaces, after having risen to, and entered into, the profound truths of which he spoke earlier. But my friends, the knowledge of the truth does not prevent, but rather furthers, mutual interest. Paul's interest was engaged concerning this people because their names were in the book of life, and they were labouring in a common cause, the cause of the gospel, the cause of Christ. One common salvation was theirs, one common Lord, whose glory they each sought, and so there was this blessed bond of union and there is, where this bond of union obtains, a candour, a transparency. Love, perfect love, casts out fear. Fear hath torment, but when the love of Christ is in the heart, tormenting dread of God is gone. When the redeeming love of Christ is felt, and the conscience cleared, there is liberty. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty". This will give a humble freedom among the people of God. A shyness, a lack of candour, is one sad mark of an evil state, a state of declension and soul disease. When there is health in the body, there is harmony between the joints and the members, and when the Lord gives health to the Church there is this harmony, this freedom, this candour. "Help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life."

You noticed, perhaps, in the words we read, (Luke 10) how that the Lord Jesus corrected the disciples, the "seventy also" who went two and two preaching in His Name, because they rejoiced in the subjection to them of the spirits, and the Lord said: Rejoice not in that, though I give you power over scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. This is to be your matter of rejoicing - that your names are written in heaven. What a high privilege is that, to have your Name in the Lamb's Book of Life, so that when the great judgment takes place, when the Assize is held and the books are brought forth, and judgment is given according to the things written in these books, there will be a judgment favourable toward all whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and only those shall gain entrance into heaven. Nothing enters into heaven that defiles or makes a lie, but only those whose names

are written in the Lamb's book of life. And this belief, that the names of Clement also, and those women who laboured with him, and others, were in the book of life, drew out the warm love and interest of the Apostle toward them, and I think it is true to say that, if we never feel anything of that love in our souls we have no evidence that we are born again.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice, Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." An apprehension of the Lord's imminent approach, an apprehension that He is not very far from every one of us, has a wholesome influence upon a believer. It is a caution upon his spirit. Carnal though we be, and sold under sin, alas, when the believer gets any token of the Lord's near approach, when he has any reminder that His eye is upon him, then that has an influence upon him. He fears the Lord - that is one mark of grace - reveres His Name, would not grieve Him. We forget Him often, and forgetfulness of the Lord is a sin that makes other sins comparatively easy. Remembering the Lord is, by grace, a purifying thing; faith which purifies the heart,

Now in the text the Apostle gives to these people, these exercised people, the Philippians, a very wonderful direction. "Be careful for nothing". It is a word that seems to mock us in these days when we are full of care, burdened with it, surrounded by it - corroding, carking care. You may say, I am full of it; I am burdened almost beyond endurance by it; I am anxious concerning a thousand things; and you say, "Be careful for nothing". The word "careful" here I believe intends, be not over anxious; live not in anxious suspense. It does not mean that careless kind of spirit which is only too sadly rife today about us; no care for God or man. It does not mean indifference to your way, or to God's way with you; it does not mean taking things for granted. It does not mean just living merely as opportunists, that whatever comes you will accept. No, that is not the carelessness enjoined here - "Be careful for nothing" - but it is a gracious, kind admonition, having in it an element of reproof, but more of encouragement and love concerning those who are apt to be corroded with care. And you know, my friends, care has a very evil influence when we do not rightly carry it. It is very significant that one of the three wrong hearers of the gospel was the character

concerning whom the good word, the seed which was sown, was choked by the cares of this world. It is an enervating influence on the soul, a corrupting, distracting, impoverishing influence in the mind - care, when it is not rightly carried - and our independent and proud and self-sufficient spirit needs to be crucified in order that we may humbly carry our cares, and not proudly. Many people carry their cares and troubles on their arm in a way for others to see, and to sympathise with them. Says the Apostle here "Be careful for nothing".

He does not stop there; he gives the only proper alternative to overmuch carefulness. "But in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". As if he should say, if you try to carry your cares, if you try to walk alone in independence, managing for yourselves in your various weights, and burdens and anxieties, it will have an evil effect upon you; it will be too much for you; it will overthrow the actings of your faith; it will eat up your spirit; it will drive away all right thought; it will prevent worship. O, how some of us know the effects of these corroding cares, and all really resultant from our independence, and self-sufficiency, and pride. We toss our head and say, we will manage, we will get through, we will carry it. And really, my friends, if you analyse your own spirit in this matter, you will find lurking there the horrible principle of pride, and you take the credit to yourself of getting through. The last thing we do is to look to the Lord, to pray to Him - at least, I speak for my unworthy self, and I suppose some of you have shamefully to acknowledge the same.

Now the alternative to this corroding care is prayer. As if the Apostle should say, the Lord is sufficient for you. All your need, every extremity into which you come, all your troubles, your burdens, your cares, your temptations, your sorrows, your difficulties in providence, your needs in this world, and your soul's interests; all is with the Lord; He can meet it all; ask Him. One would not believe, unless one knew it, how averse our fallen nature is to prayer, and yet it is the only way we can get through life. If we could not pray, if there were no place where we might go in prayer, no ear to hear the prayer of an unworthy and needy sinner, what could we do; how could

we live? And yet, knowing all that, the guilt of our prayerlessness, and the folly of it, is not small.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". God has an ear which He condescends to incline to the prayers, the requests, of His unworthy people. You may say, well, that is a truism you state. It is a great truth, a blessed truth, a truth which, if you know it experimentally, will deeply humble you, will mightily strengthen your faith, will enable you to say of difficulties, I shall surmount them; not because I have a sufficiency in myself, but because there is a fulness in Christ, a fulness of wisdom, of grace, of mercy, of power, of providential goodness, of authority over all creatures. "Make your requests known unto God".

And these requests, what are they? When inspired by the Spirit they will be requests made in subjection to the will of God, and according to the will of God. It is not easy to ascertain God's will in many things, and therefore concerning many things we have to pray in submission to the will of God. But there are some things, though they are in submission to the will of God, we cannot let the Lord go until we receive our requests. That is to say, there are some things which are indispensable, so that we must go on requesting until we obtain our requests. There are many things we should like, many things that may seem to be for the Lord's glory if we had them, which we just have to ask the Lord for in submission to His will. But when you come to the matters of salvation, when you come to the matter of guilt, when you come to the matter of assurance, and of justification, then you must go on asking, preferring this request. You will want Him to communicate to you such saving blessings as He communicates to His people; you cannot do without them.

One of these requests is for divine pardon. Every regenerate soul feels his need of that, nor can he be willing to relinquish his desire and request for it. You can never give up, if you have been started by the Spirit's teaching, in the prayer for pardon. You have the care of your soul, of the guilt that is on your conscience, of what is to happen to you since you possess so many sins and are such a

great sinner; you cannot rest until that be dealt with. You cannot carry the guilt yourself, you cannot manage this matter for yourself. No properly instructed sinner can forgive himself and speak peace to himself, but wants God to do it. The care of a guilty conscience, the care of a sin-stained soul, is the heaviest care that a man can ever carry. Do not try to carry it yourself. If you do - and many a child of God has tried to do it, tried to carry his soul care by the assistance of his religious duties until his strength is worn out, until he finds himself hunger-bitten, refugeless - you will find that you will understand what David felt. He tried to carry it alone, and he tells us what was the effect of it. "While I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring". You will roar; you will have silence, no quiet, that is to say, when you are prayerless, when you try to carry your own sin and guilt and make the best of it. But the Lord helped his infirmities, gave him the will, the courage, the determination, and the warrant to pray, and he prayed. He says "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord". He was beginning to make his requests, to carry this, his care, before the Lord. That was profitable, and he tells us what a profit it was. "And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin". My friends, has that one desire been accepted and answered in your own experience by the Lord? Have you made that request and has He attended to it? If not, and you are born again, you are not satisfied. No child of God can be satisfied till pardon is divinely sealed on his heart. You may get many an encouragement, many a little sweet hope, many a word that looks kindly at you, many a feeling that the Lord may yet bestow that blessing upon you, but till it comes you must go on requesting: "Pardon mine iniquity O Lord, for it is great".

This is one of the choicest blessings God gives to His people at their request; gives it freely; not undesired, but so sovereignly. When it comes, and your request is answered in that particular, you will feel that the answer is so abundant, so undeserved, and all-covering, that for the time you have not another request to make. Many troubles you may have, many crooks in providence, but for the time being you have not another request. You have got what you want - pardon for sin; you are satisfied. The peace of God is in your heart; it flows like a river in your soul. It is heaven on earth to get this and may I venture, without fear of being misconstrued, to say it is to

be had for the asking. I do not mean by that it is not a great thing to get it; it is one of the greatest, and perhaps, in a sense, one of the most difficult, but the Lord gives it freely.

He may keep some waiting many a long day to test their faith, whether it is genuine. Take Abraham's faith for a moment. Look at the length of time it was before the promise which he believed was fulfilled. It was said, he believed God's promise, and it was counted to him for righteousness. But when was it fulfilled? James tells us. It was fulfilled, not merely when Isaac was born, but when Isaac was grown, and Abraham took the lad, by divine direction, and offered him up to the Lord. "Then" says James, "the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness". The trial of faith may very much lie in the delays of the Lord - in His inscrutable wisdom and prudence - to answer your requests. It is the test of faith. If you can lie down without getting the answer, it looks bad for you, but if you receive fresh energy in this particular matter and say "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me", you will soon get the blessing. The same night Jacob got the blessing and it is said "He blessed him there". I know sadly what it is to feel lethargy, and wearied in waiting for the Lord, but may the Lord never let us say, as king Jehoram said: "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" There is a spirit in us that will say that, but there is also a spirit that will not consent to that, but says, "I wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning"; I will not let Him go. And the blessing comes.

"But in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God". If you have lodged in heaven that request for pardon, then watch for answers. He will not grow weary, blessed be His Name; so infinitely condescending to His people He is. It is not a vain repetition for one who has sin on his conscience and the grace of God in his heart, to go on continually praying for this blessing. Vain repetitions are meaningless, wordy repetitions, without a heart, but the prayer for pardon drawn out, pressed out, of a guilty heart, a troubled conscience, the Lord will regard, and this is the only way to pardon. If you try to make the best of it by carrying this burden, it will not go well with you. You must come down and fall before the Lord with

your burden, and cast it on Him by faith, and pray Him to communicate that rich blessing - blood bought pardon.

"In every thing" One thing will be this - the matter of temptation. We have to pray and take the care of temptation to the Lord. Temptation is a dreadful thing; it is a suffering to a child of God; not so, to one who is not a child of God. Christ suffered, being tempted; His people suffer temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted; it is a sin to fall under it. And, as you feel the burden of your carnal mind, that which is averse to the truth of God, that upon which the devil takes hold in his temptations, then you will be full of care as to whether you will fall, as to whether that mighty devil will overcome you and throw you down, so that you will never rise more. Cast this care upon the Lord, make your request known to Him. And in this request there are two requests you will make; one is for more grace, and the other is for succour from the temptations of the devil. Grace, in undiminishable fulness, dwells in Christ; we have no stock of grace to resist the devil and overcome him. But if we are tempted we shall prove this, that he will overcome us unless we are able to flee to the Lord for that grace whereby we may successfully resist him. John said of the Lord Jesus "Of His grace have all we received, and grace for grace", and we prove our need of it. Is that one request of yours? Do you pray to the Lord to give you more grace? O, how little grace, if any, some of us have! nor can we make it and cultivate it. Grace is a very different thing from what some people think; it is not natural piety or virtue cultivated on the stock of nature; it is something given from heaven. And if you are troubled on account of your lack of it, the way is to pray to God to bestow much grace upon you. It will bring trouble if He does; the more grace we have, the more the old man will be crucified, but there is the choice made sometimes in the believer's heart. You would live godly and tenderly and so as to be for the glory of God; you would never listen to the devil, or walk in those ways that dishonour the Lord's Name, but for grace to do this you must request the Lord; ask Him to bestow it.

"Be careful for nothing". Live in no anxious suspense, but pray and supplicate, which means, keep on praying. "With thanksgiving"; forget not thanksgiving. O, what we have to thank the Lord for in

providence and in grace! Every breath we draw without pain, every moment we are out of hell, every crumb of mercy we feel; that we have our rational faculties, and for a hope of heaven, for providential supplies, for His blessed Word; you can find plenty of causes, if you are enabled to consider, for thanksgiving. We are full of murmurings often, murmur and repine with blessings in our hands. We shall find the Lord does not approve of that, but He does approve of the humble, trembling, thanksgivings of those who come to Him in their troubles, telling Him they deserve no blessing, thanking Him for what He has done and asking Him to do more, even to bless their souls and save them to the end.

This may seem a very commonplace word - my speaking of it is - but the truth, the direction of this word, is of infinite significance. May the Lord make it a direction to us. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

AMEN.