

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 13 May 1928

Text: I Corinthians ²~~1~~ v 15

"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things
yet he himself is judged of no man"

The Apostle in this chapter declares that the wisdom of God is in a mystery and is expressed in a mystery. No humanly constructed divination can ever properly express divine truths; that displeases wise men; that displeases my reason; faith approves it. A mystery will always be something hidden from men until they are initiated, till it is explained by Him who alone is able to explain it. The astigmatism that is upon fallen reason renders it incapable of comprehending divine things. Foolishness, is Jesus Christ crucified to men; Greeks think it foolishness; the Jews stumble at it, that Almighty God should sigh human breath; that the sins of some men should be so imputed to Him, the incarnate God, as that it should be proper and just for God to punish Him; that He should die a voluntary death and by that death put an end to sin and destroy the works of the devil; that that Person who really died on the cross and was truly buried, did rise again, that he saw no corruption; that after He had shown Himself alive, by many infallible proofs to His disciples and to above 500 brethren at one time, should be received into heaven; that He is there now, the God Man; that He went into heaven in the interests of His people, to take possession of it, not for Himself alone, but for all of them; that He intercedes for them, sends His good Spirit to them. You cannot put these things in such a way as to make them comprehensible to human reason. They are stated here, abundantly revealed in this infallible book, but human reason is incapable in its present state of receiving or comprehending them. Says the Spirit of God by Paul, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto Him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." So, to be capable of receiving or discerning,

believing and receiving them, you must be born again. You must have a new heart such as God has promised. You must be under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, and one who is born again and is under the teaching of the Spirit is a spiritual person and I tried this morning to define to you out of the scriptures a spiritual person and of this person it is here said that he judgeth all things, that he discerneth, seeth, enters into, perceives the beauty, and the blessedness and the glory and feels the power of spiritual things. "All things" here is limited to what the Apostle has expressed in this chapter "all spiritual things" The mystery of God in this chapter set out, a spiritual man discerns; and while it is so, he stands alone in spite of the world's judgment; he cannot be judged by the world. Put together a believer and an unbeliever, put them in a room, let them talk, argue, set out their different positions, and it will always remain thus, that they are on different grounds; that they are just the opposite each to the other with respect to the grand fundamental. One is born again and therefore he sees the kingdom of God according to Christ's word; the other is not, but he is blinded. You will never get them together; you will never get them to see the same things in the same light. The light is dividing, separating world and church. They never are to be one. "My kingdom is not of this world". The kingdom of God is in righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Ghost, and he that serveth Christ in these things is accepted of God and approved of men who are with him in life and judgment.

What are the things discerned? I have said they are in this chapter, and the all things must be limited to what the Apostle here expresses, and of course what is here expressed is expressed in the whole of the Bible. The first intimation of this mystery was given by God in Eden after the fall. "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head" and from that first intimation until the Lord Jesus Christ was born, until God the Son became incarnate, the mystery was being expressed as the scripture was being written. And from that birth to the death of Christ, and from the death of Christ and His resurrection, down to the completion of the canon of scripture, the same mystery is expressed. Discerning it is itself almost trying to see the unseeable; is

to perceive a life, a reality, a substance, a beauty, a glory in the mystery of God which the world, the natural man, cannot see.

If the Lord will help me I shall confine my remarks to several particulars and not run all over the Bible. The spiritual man discerns the Eternal Son of God in human nature, One Person. That may be, because it is written distinctly in Holy Scripture, more or less received notionally. But the mystery of it as the Apostle here says "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery", the mystery of it, only a spiritual man can discern. He discerns the mystery of it in its origin. Whence came the Lord Jesus? Why did He become the Lord Jesus? The answer is "God so loved the world". "In this was manifested the love of God toward us that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law". The source of the mystery is in God; in God when, in eternity no external effect was seen; when Holy Scripture began to be written, then it was declared more or less distinctly; but it took effect only when, on that auspicious day, the Son of God came from the bosom of His Father, to take into union with His Divine Person, human nature begotten in the womb of the virgin by the Holy Ghost. And if you see this by faith, you are a spiritual person; you discern this mystery of God; and why? Because it pleased God that sin and the devil should not have all men; that He would destroy the works of the devil; that He would have a church without spot or wrinkle or blemish, or any such thing; that He would and did make this wondrous Person, Jesus Christ, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Now discerning this is heaven on earth to all to whom is given the discerning spirit. It is preceded in experience by a discernment of sin; sin in every man; sin in conviction; feeling sin as a law in the members; sin as guilt on the conscience; sin as a pollution in the mind; sin as a blindness of the understanding; sin as corruption in the affections; sin as a power to move and drive, to deceive and allure and destroy man; sin felt by a particular person who is convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit. This bitter, filthy, awful, powerful thing is death. "The soul that sinneth it shall die."

And when this is perceived; when the law is made death to a person; when the character of God seen in the law repels the sinner, and tells him he must not come, by that law, to a holy God; that he may not stand before a just God, as he is under the law; when, to that mourning, penitent, praying sinner, is opened and revealed in some measure of light by the Spirit of Christ, the mystery of God, that which is foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling-block to the Jew becomes life, becomes peace, to the sinner. He sees what his tongue can never express adequately; he sees God in Christ. As it is written "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; for He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." It is singular, but it is true, that the whole soul, understanding, conscience, affections and will are powerfully influenced by this manifestation of God in Christ to the sinner. As rain soaks to the roots of things when it falls, so does the manifestation of God percolate, reach the roots of the being of the sinner and makes him understand by faith how that he, though vile, can be one of God's dear children. What a little child this perception makes of a person; what true grief for sin it fills him with; what warm affection it awakens in his heart to the Lord Jesus; what fervent prayer rises from his spirit that he may be found in Him not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; what casting of himself with all his undying interests on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. He that is spiritual, though he will often be accounting himself to be the most carnal person that ever lived, he that is spiritual judgeth of this, discerns this; he discerns the mystery of God in the Person of the Lord Jesus and in the work of the Lord Jesus. He discerns the efficacy of the blood of Christ. If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, under the old dispensation, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God. God has been pleased to make a mysterious connection between conscience and the atonement. Conscience, that singular,

powerful faculty in man, when enlightened by the Spirit, ever speaks against sin and has some perception of the justice of God. Now how can a person with sin in his nature and in his practice with such a conscience, have peace? Some of you will understand the question. Well how can you, with such sin as you have in your nature and such sin in your life and such a conscience as now is awakened and is always speaking for God and against sin, ever feel peace? There is nothing that you can bring out of reason, out of all the acquired knowledge that a man may be capable of getting that can inform him in this great matter. And until his conscience is satisfied, you cannot make this man happy. I would bless God for conscience, and for the misery that conscience creates in a person when it is an enlightened conscience; and for the testimony for God that such a conscience bears; for the witness that this conscience bears against the sinner and for God. O but to lie down with your sin; to lie down with guilt on your conscience; to lie down with a feeling that eternity is coming, that you are being hurried to it and that if you die as you are then the presence of God is impossible to you. This is unhappiness inexpressible as to its fulness, its piercings. Now God has done this; He has filled a fountain for sin and uncleanness; He has filled a fountain. Then He brings a sinner, this sinner, this conscience to that fountain, sprinkles it; as the Apostle said in the word I have just quoted - "How much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works", a load of dead works, a load too heavy for you to carry, but of which you cannot rid yourself. And that blood sprinkled removes it all. Before the sprinkling comes, many a time the afflicted sinner has said "That blood is sufficient, I believe, if it might be applied to me". This gives many an errand, squeezes out many a prayer "Pardon mine iniquity, wash me thoroughly from my sin, cleanse me from mine iniquity." This is one great point in christian experience, that with guilt on the conscience, though the sinner prays, though he is taught to pray, though he is enabled to argue and plead with God, he does not get near, as he wishes, as he desires. He cannot get near with guilt between him and God. You can never get pleasantly, comfortably near, never feel that He is a friend. I know what I say. I know

it is true. I have known it for many years, again and again, you cannot get near, and to be distant from the object of your love, of your faith, of your hope, is very, very painful. So when this blood is applied, then the soul perceives the glory of this mystery. Behold a change indeed, justice is now for me. 'Tis a change that that attribute that repelled you, condemned you, terrified you, made the thought of God awful to you, that that same attribute should stand on your side, should be pleased with your escape from the wrath to come, should bear witness, so to speak, to the goodness of your state. This is a beautiful thing, but it is a mystery. I do not wonder, as a man reasoning, I do not wonder that men tell us justification is impossible in the pristine and blessed sense of that word. It is not reasonable to us, that when a person has done an evil he can be as if he had never done it; it is not possible to man. Very significant is the word - "With men it is impossible." Oh "but with God all things are possible." Convinced sinner, you try this before God. Plead that precious blood; plead the Person and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. Go with condemnation in your conscience; go with sin in your members and with that honest spirit given to you, confess the whole. Lay it all before Him and fall down flat at His footstool and you will find one day that what is impossible with men is a fact in your experience, justification. "Justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." God is "the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." "Therefore we conclude" says the Spirit by Paul, "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Romans III 28) If you were to meet a justified person on walking down Queen's Road, and knew him to be such, you could say "Here is a miracle. Here is a miracle, a miracle of grace, a miracle accomplished by the mystery of God, a miracle of eternal love and choice of a man, a miracle of the efficacy of the death of the Lord Jesus, of His precious blood."

Now my brethren, this grand thing may you know. You will be fit to live if you know it; you will be fit to die if you know it. And if you dont know it, better for you never to have been born. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things". He judges the mystery of God in this great thing, the Person and the work of

the Lord Jesus.

In the next place he discerns the great wonder and mystery of the indwelling and operations of the Holy Ghost. A Holy Ghost religion is the only religion that can take a sinner out of the dust, and off the dunghill, and set him with princes. the princes of God's people, and cause him to inherit the throne of glory. Union with Christ is brought about by this great. wonderful work of the Spirit; born of the Spirit, you are one with Christ. Led of the Spirit, you enter into the truth, as the truth is in Jesus. Reproved by the Spirit, and having His reproof, you abide among the wise. It is a great thing that the church of Christ has this gift of the Spirit. When Christ ascended on high, we are told that "He led captivity captive, He received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell among them." This begins to take effect on people when Jesus Christ, who had the Spirit given to Him without measure, sends that Spirit of promise into the heart of a sinner. He does send Him, and the Spirit comes and takes up His abode in the sinner's heart. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you?" Are you ignorant of this? Are you destitute of this? My friends, you can never be right with God without the gracious teaching, leading and unction of the Holy Ghost. "He", said the Lord Jesus promising Him "shall guide you into all truth." "He shall not speak of Himself" that is, by Himself and without Me and without My Father. "He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you" and thus "He shall glorify Me". Here you have the fundamentals of vital religion; necessary, absolutely. What a teacher He is. Singular indeed, and blessed, some of you know, to find a Psalm, a chapter, a promise one day illuminated with a light which is called the light of life. It fixes your heart, and understanding and conscience and affects you. It may reprove you for some sin, or comfort you under some trouble. It may open afresh, and wider than ever before, the mystery of Christ to you and you understand and feel your union with Christ. There is nothing to be compared to this; it has no parallel in the whole of creation; it stands alone, unique, wonderful, glorious. And in the 2 Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle, speaking of the operation of the

Spirit, most beautifully he says - "We all with open face" (the contrast to the veil being on the heart when Moses is read) "with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is not a cold light that you have; it is a warm, living, burning, impressive light that conveys and impresses on the heart some of the glory that is looked upon in that glass. And he that is spiritual discerns this. He will tell you perhaps with humility and with tears and praises to God, some day, how that he was distant from his God, troubled by many things, specially by sin, and there came sweetly, surprisingly to him some manifestation of the Lord Jesus. There was set before his gaze the Person of Christ and he looked on Him, not coldly, now not distantly; he looked on Him and looking brought a power, an influence, a life, a sweetness, that he could never express to you, that instantly brought the very glory he looked upon into his own soul. He discerns the mystery of God, the Holy Ghost, being a spiritual Person, and here there is given to him a power to work, power to endure affliction, to take up the cross and follow Christ. Here the man is clothed with humility; here he perceives he stands well with God, stands in Christ, stands on the merit of Christ; can sing the lines too, which are written as if Rutherford should write them "I stand upon His merit, I know no other stand". You stand here, and that merit in all its efficacy, its beauty, you have on your soul. He discerns these things.

He that is spiritual discerns the nature of a promise. the promise of God, all promises; they are all yea and amen in Christ to the glory of God by us, to whom they are given. He discerns them. You can read them of course, and you can say - I believe they are all true - but to get one of them in your soul, to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in one of them, to receive a promise into your own soul, this, this is different from any natural approval that you may feel of promises in a general way. The promises have something connected with them more or less; they have some affliction connected with them. If the Lord says to you "I will guide thee with Mine eye" you may soon be perceiving that there are difficulties in the way and you do not

know how to manage them. If He tells you that your shoes shall be iron and brass, you will be perceiving very soon that you need them. And the discerning of the promises and their connection with your life, your difficulties, will be a great help to you. If you forget a promise and new troubles come, even troubles that were hinted at by the promise, you think the troubles are against you, but Christ says "In the world ye shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace." If you have got promises do not expect to get to heaven without trouble. You will get there, nothing can hinder that, nothing prevent it, but you will find the way is just what Christ said. "In the world ye shall have tribulation". He that is spiritual discerns this, and he discerns God's wisdom in it. He discerns, at times, that it is well and wisely ordered by the Lord that he should not have, as Rutherford speaks, two heavens. He is to have heaven hereafter; here all the suffering, all the difficulty, all the temptation. The people of God will leave everything behind them of an evil kind and of trouble when they die.

He discerns, this spiritual man, the faithfulness of God. "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ." He does not begin and leave off when half of the work is done. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". Faithful is He that has promised you this and that. Faithfulness, as I have sometimes said to you, has respect to an engagement, and if the Lord has spoken a promise to you, He has engaged Himself to you. Paul was inspired, as it were, to engage God for His people. "My God" said he "shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The fulness of God engaged to supply the needs of empty sinners; the fulness of His omnipotence engaged to support weak, frail creatures; the fulness of life engaged to revive, from time to time, these people who are often ready to perish, and the fulness of divine love engaged to dissolve stony hearts, and make happy poor sinners. Happy? The word happiness does not belong to the world, when you think of happiness such as the saints know. You may have plenty of trouble, but a little divine happiness will sweeten it. O wonderful. Nobody knows real happiness but people who know what God's love is; what Christ's blood has done; what

His righteousness is. True happiness is in God. Toplady well expresses it

Happiness, thou lovely name
Where's thy seat O tell me where
Learning, pleasure, wealth and fame
All cry out, it is not here.

Not the wisdom of the wise
Can inform me where it lies;
Not the grandeur of the great
Can the bliss I seek create

Object of my first desire,
Jesus crucified for me;
All to happiness aspire,
Only to be found in Thee.

Ah my friends if you get a little of this happiness, you will understand me when I say the word is not to be applied to worldly happiness; It is a great word, too beautiful a name. The sacred joy of a sinner, redeemed, forgiven, justified, indulged with some heavenly smile, this is happiness. You can be happy in trouble with this happiness; I know you can. And you can patiently wait in affliction with this happiness in your soul, the happiness of knowing the Lord Jesus for yourself.

One word more, the spiritual man discerns again and again the King in His beauty and the land which is very far off; that goodly land; that land of extensions as the word is. You will find it in the margin of your Bibles, the land of extensions. God cannot be extended, but the place He has provided for His people, the mansions He has gone to prepare for them, can be extended, that is, their experience of it; an everlasting joy on their heads; everlasting springs of life and love and the sweet and glorious effulgences of God, falling upon their gladdened eyes and hearts. And the Spirit of God causes some discernment, perception and some anticipation of reaching that land, and the King in His beauty; the beauty of Divinity in the Man Christ

Jesus; the beauty of humanity united to the Eternal God. I wish I could express it properly to you. I know it a little but it is too wonderful. The beauty of God incarnate; the beauty of His love, of His righteousness imputed, His blood applied, His love made known; the beauty of this King of kings. King in your hearts; king in your affections; king in providence, everything under His heavenly, almighty control. Do you look at it sometimes with longing eyes? Do you pant for it? Can you sometimes say "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so pant our souls after Thee O God?" Can anything that you can imagine in creation satisfy you? I say this, No. If you are born again, nothing. 'Tis grand to be enabled to say, as out of your own heart

There's nothing here can satisfy
Not house, nor gold nor land

And the dearest things are unsatisfying to a living soul, a spiritual man. Ah, if one could say - now millions are mine" if he had the life of God in his soul, this multiplied by millions of millions, though it is a little extravagant so to speak perhaps, could not satisfy his soul. God, God, the Trinity, Jesus the Son of God incarnate, the Holy Spirit the heavenly teacher, the Father, the end of faith in Jesus Christ; a spiritual man discerns this. And he sometimes discerns the goodness of God in providence trying him and also opening ways for him through his difficulties.

"But he himself is judged of no man". The life of God comes into a house and enters a person, one in a family. It makes a change; he is not understood; his convictions of sin are just simply scoffed at; his separation, which is of necessity, is not understood. Why he should take up a neglected Book, the Bible, and read it, they do not understand. Solemnly that comes to pass "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword". I have come to set father against son and son against father. It is very solemn to those who have such an experience. He is not to be judged. They cannot understand him; he is alone, singular. No man can judge a child of God. "What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man

which is in him." He that is spiritual is not to be judged of any man. A spiritual man can understand his exercises, but a natural man cannot.

Now my dear friends, how do you stand? That is the question. Bunyan speaks of the practic part of religion and here it is. What is this to you? Do you know what it is to see an inexpressible reality and substance in the things of God as they are revealed in this book? What it is to feel the very opposite of them, a sort of antipodes in your experience, and what it is to get, to your great surprise, and humbling, some intimation of the very things from which you have felt to be at a terrible distance. Wait on God, look to Him whom you see by faith. Seek His smile; seek His strength; seek His forgiveness, for they are always being multiplied necessarily inasmuch as His people are always sinning; for there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not. Seek these things; seek to be clear here; seek to be clear here. Do not speculate in religion; do not speculate about any scripture; pray for realities and when you get them, then, not till then, will you be able to say "Now I know". They guessed about Christ in the days of His sojourn here; some thought He was Elias and some thought He was a prophet and others, but Peter did not guess. "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." God keep us from speculations in religion; give us knowledge.

AMEN.