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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 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"

This chapter is a powerful word respecting the simple language that should be used by ministers. When the Apostle said in the previous chapter that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea and things which are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence, he did not exclude himself. He could, as a scholar and a well read man, as knowing the heathen poets even of his day and before his day, have entered into a different strain, and used what the world esteems eloquence. He could have stood among them with all the logic of his mind and indulged in arguments which would have been of a kind to carry conviction of the truth which he was enunciating, but he preferred not to do so. "I came" he said "to you my brethren, not with excellency of speech or of wisdom"; neither in my private communications nor in my public teaching did I assume that style. I declared unto you in thy own language the testimony of God. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He knew the worth of his own soul, and he knew the beauty, the glory of the Lord Jesus crucified. And so he would appear, and did appear among these Corinthians, who were largely the fruit of his labours, as a plain man, using great plainness of speech. The veil was taken from his heart; he could read Moses, because Moses had come to him and he understood Moses. And he could read Christ for Christ had been revealed to him. He could read the cross and what it means, because the cross in its power was in him, and the only remedy for sin he knew, and the only righteousness for justification he was acquainted with. And he had been carried up

to the third heaven and had seen things he was unable, and which were unlawful for him, to write or utter, and he heard things which he could not repeat. But when among sinful men, he said, now I am going to use great plainness of speech to tell you what lost souls you are. That is the business of a minister, to tell people what lost creatures they are in themselves; to tell them that if they die as they were born, if they die in the flesh and not in Christ, hell must be their everlasting portion. I have got to say that to you always. An enemy of God in life and death can never have the society of God in heaven; an unrighteous person can never live with a just God; a polluted sinner can never stand before infinite purity. O sinner, dead in sin, your state is perilous and terrible beyond all expression. A plain man must tell you that plainly. "The wages of sin is death", and God will pay you your wages if you stand before Him in your nakedness, and in your sins. "The wages of sin is death". If you fight against God till you die, and die in that condition, you will find God fighting against you through eternity. This is proved, not by human argument evident and evidenced; not by what the hardened conscience and the blinded mind of man could say; but by the word of God. We are fallen sinners, wretched enemies to God and goodness. The remedy is here; Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Sent by His Father; brought by His own love; sealed by His Spirit; voluntarily dying, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven and there interceding. This is the divine remedy and Paul was not going to debase it by presenting it in that way that the human mind would approve. He states it nakedly, distinctly, as if he should say "Now you are all on the way to hell and there is only one bar which, if God is pleased to put between you and hell, can save you from sinking there and that is the Person and the work, the death and the resurrection, the blood and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus." And the Apostle, knowing so well the remedy, was resolved not to know anything among these Corinthians, who were at that time, unhappily, a very divided church - highly gifted but they were divided into sections - Paul's section, Apollos's and Peter's and some were so exalted as to claim that Christ was theirs. Now he says - I will know nothing among you, but preaching the remedy for all your present conditions and states of mind. "I was with

you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling." It were a good thing for ministers today to be able to say this. They may be physically strong, but O to be able to say - Now I am in the pulpit in weakness, sensible of my insufficiency; in fear lest I should say wrong things; in much trembling lest the Lord should not be with me and use me. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom. I did not come to argue you into christianity; I did not come to you and am not writing to you to persuade you, by arguments of a natural kind, into believing; but my preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Says one - I do not understand these things. Now Paul might have said this; two parallel lines can never meet, and that would have conveyed a natural conviction of Christ to their natural mind, but it would not have revealed the mystery of Christ, and so he said I am not to write to you in words that man's wisdom teacheth, but in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, in demonstration and in power. And the end of this was - "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God". What a great thing it is to have a well grounded faith! If you can say that you believe in Jesus Christ because He has been revealed to you by His Spirit, and if you have seen the eternal Son of God in your own nature; have seen the voluntary death of the Lord Jesus; seen that He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and seen that His righteousness is sufficient to justify you, your faith stands in the power of God. Do not confuse this with a kind of protestantism that is militant and may make you strong in yourself. This faith most deeply humbles the person in whom it lives; endears the Saviour to him; separates him from the world; unites him to the Saviour of sinners and gives him to hang about the cross all his days. Have you got this faith? Do you possess this faith? If you have acquired sufficient notion from the scriptures concerning Jesus Christ as to enable you to say - I do believe in Him, and go no further than that, you have poor ground to stand on, very poor. You believe what is right but you do not rightly believe it. O it is great to believe rightly in the Lord Jesus.

But though Paul's preaching was so plain, so simple, he would not have it that it was the preaching of ignorance. He did

not preach ignorance, nor did he preach ignorantly. He says we speak wisdom; we speak wisdom, the very wisdom of God, and the wisdom of God we speak among them that are perfect. The word "perfect" here means among them that are matured; who have their senses exercised. We speak this wisdom among true christians, whose souls are affected by the operation of the Spirit of God and brought into some acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, some experimental knowledge of Him; "yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory". A mystery always means something that is covered; may be uncovered, but it is something that is covered and that nobody can enter into but those who are truly initiated, instructed. This is what Paul means. We speak God's wisdom, but it is in a mystery. All the infinite wisdom of God, all the precious love of God, all the gracious purposes of God concerning the church, the removal of sin from her, the bringing in of an everlasting righteousness for her, the removal of all her disabilities, unrighteousnesses and pollution; all, all wrapped up, hidden, in Jesus Christ. Well, who can open this mystery to me, to you? Who can make us acquainted with it? You may read the scriptures, and I wish you may always be reading them; you may hear the best preaching in the world, but you can never thereby alone, simply, enter into this mystery. "God" says Paul "hath revealed it unto us." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (I Corinthians II v 9) As Isaiah has it, and this is a quotation you know from Isaiah (64.4.) "For him that waiteth for Him". How then can one come to know this mystery if the eye has not seen it, if the ear has not heard it, if the heart has not conceived it? By revelation. The answer is by revelation; that is to say, in gospel language, by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of promise, taking of that which is Christ's and showing it to sinners. And this is illustrated beautifully by the dealing of Christ with His disciples, the question He put to them and the answer He got. "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" They reported to Him the various guesses and conjectures that were being made concerning Him. But said He to them then "Whom say ye

that I am?" Leave these and come to yourselves. "Whom do you say that I am?" O that you, my brethren; O that I, a poor minister; might be able from the heart, now to say "We believe that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God" and say it as Peter said it, as Christ told him - "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you, but My Father which is in heaven." Mind where you get your knowledge from. If you profess Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, examine this; how did you get that information? Whence came the light into your understanding? Whence came the conviction into your conscience?

"Which none of the princes of this world knew for had they known it" - had they seen God in that blessed Man walking among them and doing good, God being with Him; had they seen that omnipotence that raised the dead at the voice of the Lord Jesus; that love that brought Him from the throne to the earth and to the cross - "they would not have crucified Him. They would have done what the man did whose eyes Jesus had opened, fallen down and worshipped Him. They would have done what the disciples did, left all and followed Him. They would have done what the Syrophenecian woman did; said, "Lord help me; and what a poor man did who said, "Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." And the jailer, and Lydia and Saul of Tarsus; they would have done what they all did, had they known Him. Have you done so? Have you gone to Him with a heart full of sin, a conscience burdened with guilt? Is this your daily errand to the throne of grace; "Lord help me, save me, guide me, deliver me, keep me, make me right, keep me right." Have you done this? When men know the Lord Jesus, they love Him, and they go to Him; they cannot keep away from Him because they are drawn to Him; His beauties attract them; His atonement attracts them; His suitability attracts them; Himself attracts them. His Father draws them, and so they go to Him. Crucify Him? No! they never crucify Him. Though they bless Him for being crucified, they never crucify Him. It is written "Eye hath not seen". The keenest intellect cannot pierce this great mystery; the mind of man cannot comprehend how the eternal God should love the worst of men, and how He should lay up in store for all those chosen ones the great goodness of His nature, the communicable goodness, His love and

His mercy and His pardons, all, all, to be communicated. "Eye hath not seen" these things, nor yet His providence that works so kindly for them. "Nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." I suppose some of us are saying even now, we wish the Lord would show them to us. Do you ask? Everyone who sincerely wishes it asks for it. Go on asking; you will never be put away. The law will repel you but the gospel will not. Jesus will attract and help you.

"God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." Now I think this is very encouraging for ignorant people, that is to say, people who feel their ignorance. Most encouraging because it says, now God does not want your wisdom; He wont have it. Do not go to Him as a wise person; never go to Him with anything like your own wisdom; He is sure to reject you if you do. But if you can go as a fool, ignorant, incapable of acquiring what you really need, confessing your sins; if you can so go to Him, you will find this encouraging testimony of God. "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." in your mind. You will find it will be with you; things will be revealed. One day you may say - what a sight I got of Christ; O how it drew me; how it put away despairing thoughts; how it made me feel, if I had but that Person and His blood, all would be well with me.

"For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God"; a great argument for the divinity, the personality of the Spirit. Many things that look just like incidental sayings have in them infinite importance. "What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?" Some of you may be thinking even now - well, this is foolishness; this is not worth listening to. Some of you may be saying - why cry down in this way all human wisdom and all efforts? Why? Because the scriptures do. Now nobody knows what you are thinking; your thoughts can only be known by the utterance of them; so the argument is, "Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God". "Now we" - these christian Corinthians with the Apostle, their teacher, "we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God that we might know the

things that are freely given to us of God." They come to us; they come right in sometimes, really come into the soul. You receive them, perceive them, feel them, realise the power of them, the sanctifying power of them, in your soul. "Which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" - joining, for the word has this meaning, joining or binding spiritual things with spiritual words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him." Perhaps there is a natural man here and he says - It is a tiresome thing to have to listen to this, what is there in it? I see nothing in it; I feel there is no importance in it. I do not know whether there is any truth in it. The reason is this, listen if you can, listen sinner, if you can, for a moment; the reason that it is so with you is this, that as a fallen man, which is what the word natural man means, as a fallen man you cannot see these things; they are beyond your vision; they are beyond the scope and power of your natural mind; your intellect cannot reach them. It may be strong enough to reach many things, but it is not strong enough to reach these things. Well, and where then is my sin? says this man. You must go to Adam and see him, a fallen head, and then come to yourself as born in sin and shapen in iniquity; as being under the law which is just and good in itself, but is made death to you by reason of your sins. "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."

Then says the text "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." The first enquiry to be made with respect to the text is this. What is it to be a spiritual man? We are natural men; we are born and we are natural men. What is it to be a spiritual man? First, it is to be born again. To a master in Israel, Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus said "If I have told you earthly things and you cannot understand them how then will you understand if I tell you heavenly things. Ye must be born again. Except a man be born again, he cannot see

the kingdom of God". He cannot see that there is a kingdom except he be born of the Spirit; he cannot enter into the kingdom. And this the Apostle Paul speaks of to Titus when he says "After that the kindness of God our Saviour hath appeared unto all men by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" A spiritual person then is a man who is born again, born of the Spirit. How many in this little congregation have got a hope that that mysterious act, that efficacious act of the Spirit of God, has been passed upon them? Change, a radical change, a new heart given, and the heart of stone taken away. Eyes given and light falling on them; ears opened and the sound of God entering them. Born again. If you do not start here in religion you wont end in heaven; if you start here, being born again, there is no place in hell for you, for God will see to it, poor though you may be, and feel, poor all your days, He will see to it that you will get to heaven at last.

With this good start we go on. In the next place it is to answer to what Paul in the Romans teaches. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death". That is to be a spiritual person. That is called, in the same chapter, minding the things of the Spirit; it is called being spiritually minded which is life and peace. Can you follow that? Do you mind the things of the Spirit? Which is the more important to you sometimes, your ledger or your Bible; your garden or the Word of God; your business concerns or the throne of grace? Which do you find the most attractive? They wont both reign together. One may reign one day and the other the other, but they will never reign together. One will be supreme, and if you are a spiritual person this will be supreme again and again; it will assert itself, come to the top, prove itself; it will ooze out somehow, burn its way somehow, and reach heaven in its aspirations. Are you spiritual?

Now I would like a little to dilate on this. You take some scriptural characters; they will illustrate the points. You take the Psalmist; in one Psalm, he says "As the hart panteth

after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". Can you say that sometimes? Can you say that you prefer God before your chief earthly joy? Is His absence pain? Can you be happy without God? Happy without His word in your heart, without His Spirit in your mind? Can you be happy without communications from Him? If you can, and if that be the prevailing state of your mind, then you are not a spiritual person. But if, though you are again and again caught and carried away into some wrong things, you find yourself over and over again drawn from those things and enabled to say - I have been as a beast before the Lord but now whom have I in heaven but the Lord and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Him, or in comparison of Him. then you have got reason to hope that you are a spiritual person.

Take another character, the Syrophenecian woman. She had got a case. A caseless religion is a poor thing; O it is a poor thing. Pray that you may never have a caseless religion. This woman had a case, and she went to Him who alone could deal with it. Her faith went to Him and took her to Him and she applied to Him; she made application. "My daughter is grievously devilled" so is the word really, grievously devilled, as if she would say - Now Lord there is only one voice that can drive out these devils; only one power that can heal my daughter. But she was not a Jewess; a great disability was it not? She was not a Jewess and, said the Divine Jew, Jesus Christ, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs". O what harshness seemed to be in that, but her faith got hold of Him and as it were put aside that that was discouraging. She said "Truth Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table." Have you got something like that? Lord I cannot let Thee go, I want Thee. I shall die without Thee; I am lost and ruined and condemned without Thee. O my friends, have you got a case? If you have, here is a Lord to deal with it. Can you take it to Him? There is a life in religion, a motion in grace in the soul, an efficacious operation of the Spirit, and the sinner goes to Him. "Lord take the case up". Well that is a great thing; she was a spiritual person, she must have been. And the Lord commended her faith; "O woman great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Let us go back to the Psalmist; he was driven out of God's heritage, and in his desperation he said - now the best thing for me to do is to get away from the land; go out of my own country and he said - you have driven me out of God's heritage. Now what was his state of mind. O, he said, "My soul thirsteth for God as a thirsty land; how amiable are Thy tabernacles O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God." One object; one object. If you are blessed with spirituality, whatever your state may be, however distant you may feel, however driven out you may be by temptation, one great object. The needle will never rest away from its own point, and your soul will never rest away from God. "Nothing here can satisfy, not house, nor gold, nor land"; only God, only God.

Now come to that great champion of grace, the Apostle Paul, and with his case I must close. He tells us in the Philippians his own case. He puts before us the great end of all things, the perfection the saints must have and shall have; he said - I have not attained; I count not myself to have attained, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Is that what we do at all? My brethren, do you walk like that at any time? This is the point. "He that is spiritual" Only spiritual food can satisfy a spiritual person. Only communications from God can nourish a living soul; only demonstration of the Spirit can bring a person, who is spiritual, to a point of satisfaction. How many of us can really, properly hope that we are spiritual people? This would be, though a small one, a remarkable congregation, if every person in it was spiritual. O what a wonder it is to be spiritually minded! You could not satisfy a spiritual person with natural, with carnal things; you could not do it. It is impossible. There may be a momentary satisfaction but it ends in grief to a spiritual person when natural things are satisfying. But when spiritual things come, then says the man, these are what I want. When he breathes spiritual air - this is the atmosphere in which I would like to live; here I would breathe; here I would draw in health; here I would have

satisfaction; here I would come and be near to God. He that is spiritual has a new heart; a new nature; a spiritual mind; a tender conscience; living faith; real hope; warm affections attached to the Lord Jesus. He is a spiritual person and yet he mourns; he says "I am carnal, sold under sin; I am a weak christian, if a christian; I am soon drawn away from the object of my hope and love; I am carried away. Vanity carries me away; a little bit of tinsel dangled before my wandering eyes bewitches them. I am a very carnal professor. He says all that and he says it sincerely, but now he can come with the Apostle to one place; "O wretched man that I am". He says it; he is a spiritual man, and this, his carnality, troubles him, and so he sticks to the Apostle Paul and says "O wretched man that I am". He goes a few steps further with him "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Who can take this putrifying thing away from me? Who can deliver me from this foul, loathsome body of sin and death? "I thank God" There is his spirit finding rest; there his trembling faith finds rest; there his hope again buds and blossoms and yields the almonds of acceptance in his soul and there his love finds its centre. He is spiritual. We shall never be wholly spiritual, without the flesh, as long as we live, but while we are here, as the Spirit of God prevails in us, we shall follow after God and find Him to be our chief joy. May it be so.

AMEN.