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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday evening 11 August 1929

1 JOHN 1 v 9

"If we confess our sins He is faithful and  
just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us  
from all unrighteousness"

Ever since the fall of Adam sin has dominated the world. It has dominated nations, communities, families, individual persons. It has made man selfish, brutish. It has darkened the understanding so that no man knows the way to God. It has perverted the will so that every man rebels against God. It has warped the affections so that all idols are acceptable, while God is despised and rejected. No person in this congregation is excepted from that statement. God has given terrible instances of His holy, necessary anger against sin. Sodom and Gomorrah utterly, suddenly, destroyed; the predecessors of Israel in the land of Canaan driven out and exterminated because of their sins; Israel frequently sent into captivity because of sin, and the climax of that nation in its sin was this, despising, rejecting, and crucifying Christ, the awful result of which was the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of that entire nation. It is a fearful thing to be a sinner, and, if it is possible to be anything worse than a sinner, ignorance of that state is worse than the state itself. I wish we all hated sin; I wish it were an abominable thing to us; I wish we were fleeing from it. Some are, thanks be to God. But God determined to show His goodness and His wisdom and His power in having a people for Himself. Not because they were better than others, but because, in His sovereign love and grace, He determined to have them to be His own, saying, "This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise". Nothing separates one man from the world, making him different from the world and different from himself as a sinner dead, but the sovereign grace of God. And the people of God have conviction of sin of a spiritual nature; they are convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost; He shows them sin, as God sees it, an awful sight, but leading to blessedness. And this people, formed for the praise of God, know sorrowfully,

painfully, and to their shame, what it is to have sin in their members. They are saved from saying they have not sinned. They are saved from saying they have no sin, and they are brought into this text: "If we confess our sins".

Confession of sin is not a legal thing. It may be, and generally is, attended with legality, a legal fear, but itself is not legal; it is gracious. It comes from a sincere heart by the grace of the Spirit, and I conceive that it may be said that confession of sin has in it four things, which I will name to you, and I hope, and believe, that some of you will be able to follow me as both out of the Scripture and out of your own experience. First, if we confess our original sin. What is that? It is the sin of our head and father Adam, and concerning this point it is written: "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, for all have sinned". That will catch you all, whether you believe it or not; it will include each one in this congregation. "By one man sin entered into the world". The imputation of sin to Adam's children must be righteous because God imputes it. Do you believe it? Were your eyes ever taken for a moment from your actual sins to that one sin that has ruined, depraved, and perverted your nature, so as to constitute you a sinner? Did you ever follow David in his confession - I was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. It is a wholesome, though a painful, thing to be convinced of this. It tells us that we started in a wrong way, that from our birth we went astray speaking lies; that there is no man that doeth good from his birth. His nature is wrong; sin defaced the image of God in which Adam was created. We came from God's hand pure and upright. Holy Scripture informs us of this; its statement is absolute. O sinner, no excuses will stand; confession will. If we confess our sins, this sin, original sin.

In the next place, if we confess our actual transgressions, and what a field is here. Every thought, every imagination of the thought of the human heart is evil and only evil and that, not occasionally, but continually. As a stream, a mighty stream, ever flowing, knowing no interruption, no drought affecting this stream. This is the transgression of the law. Sin is the transgression of the law. God, by Scripture, informs us that He notices the thought of sin, and Christ says the thought of foolishness is sin, and when a foolish

thought begets an idle word, that is sin. And when one looks, unlawfully at any object in the world, that is sin. When one rebels against God in His providence, wishing things were other than they are, that is sin. When envy moves a person, sin moves him; when jealousy moves him, when pride makes him strut about, sin makes him strut about. O, who could finish the terrible catalogue of sins emanating from a sinful heart. Nay, who can fathom a sinful heart? "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it". Is it the painful engagement of some of you to be looking at this heart? Is it your painful experience to be feeling the things that emanate from it, the eruptions of your thoughts and your wishes and your imaginations? O, it is terrible to be a sinner, and to have sin coming out of your heart. If you confess this. What shame have we from time to time; what bitter tears has indwelling, moving, sin occasioned. What shame has it caused us. How, as it were, our ears have tingled at the enumeration made to us by the Scriptures and by the Spirit, of our sins, and we have had to creep before God, ashamed. Not daring, publican-like, to lift up our eyes to heaven, we have had to smite on our breast and say: "God be merciful to me a sinner". If we confess it. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall have mercy, but whoso covereth his sin shall not prosper".

Thirdly, notice the power of sin. It is stronger than wishes to break it, stronger than resolutions to overcome it. If holy Apostle Paul confessed that there dwelt in him no good thing, that, when he would do good evil was present with him and how to perform that which was good he found not, that is, could not do it; if such a confession came from his heart and his lips, what must we say; what do we say. The power of indwelling sin; it blocks the way of obedience sometimes. It turns the thoughts away from God, it scatters the mind, and the wishes, as chaff before the wind. It brooks no delay, no contradiction. It is just ever moving, ever working, and overcoming. There is a power in sin. It has made us all transgress; step over the boundary given by God. The boundary is a good law and we step over it perpetually, and that means transgression. Where is the man who honestly, and as in the sight of God, could plead innocent, innocent, innocent? Not one can be found. "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not". I say it perverts us, it forces us, does violence to

every gracious wish at times. O, this indwelling sin. I know it painfully to my shame. If we confess this.

In the fourth place, if we confess the demerit of sin, that is to say, that sin, being contrary to the nature of God, being rebellion against His revealed will and commandments, being a breach of His holy law, its demerit is infinite. If we had what our sin merits, we should all, without exception, in time have that that is written in the Romans: "The wages of sin is death". The wages of sin which God will pay unfailingly, which God will pay, is death. Death there means eternal separation from Him; casting out of all, dying impenitent in their sins, from His presence into hell. That is what is intended in the word, "The wages of sin is death". Now dear friends, this whole congregation made up of sinners, how many of us go into this way of confession of sin? Confession to the Jew was stretching out his hand; confession to the Christian is saying the same thing. Confession in the Old Testament was this: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me", and confession in the New Testament is saying just what Paul said: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing". "The good that I would I do not and the evil that I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am."

Now let us then, for a minute or two, just look at this. And, first of all, it is not remorse; it is not remorse. Remorse will make you very sad. It will bring very painful reflections on your folly; it will make you blame yourself for some things that you come into, or things that have come upon you, but this may be unattended with any confession to God. I suppose you could not meet a person anywhere who is altogether unacquainted with remorse, a natural feeling, a grievous feeling, that you ought not to have done such and such things because, not that they were sin in your sight, or bitter to your feeling, but because they brought trouble. But it is a humble, sincere acknowledgement before God in secret that your nature is defiled, that your heart is exceedingly wicked, that your conduct in God's sight has been only sinful, and that you do deserve hell, and the most moral man in the world, whom God might call by grace, would heartily unite in this. How could he? one says. He would be led to see his nature, he would be convinced of the sins of his heart. He would see that his best actions had behind them, as a spring and a

power, a wrong motive. He would learn what is written in the Scripture, God weighs the actions of men. "By me actions are weighed", and he might see that he never gave away a £5 note with a proper motive, namely, to glorify God. He might see that his refraining from certain sins was only that he might not bring certain consequences. Motive weighs with God and motive is regarded by all who are taught by the Holy Spirit. So one says

My best is stained and dyed with sin  
My all is nothing worth

Now there are two categories which every Christian has with respect to confession. First is the category of his unregenerate days, when he was without God and without hope, and without concern about his soul; when he rebelled, when he sinned as with a cart-rope, when he did evil as he could with both hands. O, what a black category. Some of us have had to read that again and again, and look at it and confess before God that we were born with a bad nature, a perverted will, a darkened understanding, and that we were dead in trespasses and sins. But the second category is worse, more painful; the sins done since God called us by His grace, since He made known His love; since He sprinkled the conscience with His blood; since He taught us to walk in His fear; since He took the yoke off our jaws and laid meat to us and said "Eat O friends and drink; yea, drink abundantly O beloved." Do you think that any sin the church committed in her unregeneracy could, for turpitude, guilt, malignity, blackness, ingratitude, match the sin which she committed when she was the bride of Christ? When He went to her in the night and knocked on her door and said, Open to Me, My sister, and she said, I am in bed, I am comfortable, I do not want to be disturbed. Have you any sin in your unregeneracy that can match your ingratitude and backsliding and base treatment of your heavenly Father, your Everlasting Father, your Prince of Peace, who undertook to save you and die to save you? It is sins since God called us that we have to confess most. These bring the deepest shame, these reflect the keenest pain, these cause the most exquisite pain and grief to all who are convinced of them. My sins since God met with me give me more grief and shame than all I did before, and I have no doubt I speak the language of every child of God here as to his heart. Kept, we hope, from outward sins which

would have caused reproach to Christ, but O, what we have done since. Now this is the confession. It is going before God with no excuse as a man, according to the Psalmist's word, as a man in whose mouth are no reproofs. As one who cannot say, Lord I would not have done it, but that circumstance impelled me. He has simply to say, I sinned; I have sinned. "If we confess our sins". Now some may say, this is a very sombre kind of preaching. Well, dear friends, to have all the sombreness that we shall ever feel, in this life, is a mercy. To have reflections and pain and punishment endless in eternity, that will be the worst. O, to see your sin, and to feel your sin, and to confess your sin here, that is a blessing; grievous and shameful and dark though it is, that is a blessing.

Now let us turn to the other side of this wonderful text. "If we confess our sins He" - the God to whom we confess them; "He", who is light and has given light to us, that has given us the truth, for truth is light and sin is darkness; "He", a gracious God - "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We must firstly try to find out how a holy God can exercise justice and faithfulness in forgiving a sinner, because it is very remarkable - the statement is very remarkable - that God, (that God, against whom we have sinned, whose anger we deserve) should be just and righteous in the act of forgiveness, and His character is maintained in forgiving sin. And the whole of it lies here, in the death of Christ, that death by which He made an end of sin; that death by which He paid the debt the people owed. That is the ground and the cause of this singular, this beautiful, this great statement, that God is just, faithful and just to forgive sins. And this becomes a plea, this becomes a plea. The man who has no excuse is given a plea. The sinner who smites on his breast, condemning himself, and justifying God, is given a plea; a plea is put into his mouth, into his heart, into his faith. He is given a reason why God should forgive Him; He is given a reason why he should be cleansed, and that reason is entirely outside himself, entirely outside himself; residing in God alone. O sinner, if you get this, it will give you an understanding in that Scripture: "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace"; a strange word to a sinner, and not to be understood apart from the death of Christ, the Priesthood of Christ. Let us come to this great God against whom we have sinned so constantly, and let us,

not only come - but the manner of coming - come boldly. Lift your face up; lift up your conscience; go with your faith and ask on the ground of faithfulness, of justice divine, and ask for forgiveness. What a gospel is the glorious gospel of Christ. What a Priesthood is the Priesthood of Christ. The blood of the sacrifice was to be sprinkled, first of all, upon the altar, the horns of the altar. That is to say, it had, first of all, reference to God, a reference to His character. It had reference to the satisfaction which He demanded and which that blood gave. That was the first thing in the sprinkling of blood, which is a mercy; yea, it is heaven. Dear friends, it is heaven, a blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, an offering made unto God, giving satisfaction, beyond all imagination of men, to the infinite God; that every perfection of Deity should be pleased and satisfied. There, on Christ's cross, met righteousness and peace, mercy and truth. These met there and there accepted the sacrifice, there manifested their pleasure in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. You will never get, as far as the Bible is concerned, any other reason why God is just in forgiving sin, and why He is faithful. The faithfulness of God here respects His covenant with His Son. The Father promised Him the Spirit. He would not leave His soul in hell neither did He allow His flesh to see corruption. But when the death of Christ had accomplished that which it was intended to accomplish, then the Father made His Son glad with His countenance. O, if we got a sight of that we should rejoice. If we got a sight of the Lord Jesus when He had finished the work His Father gave Him to do and, before He gave up the ghost, being made glad with a smile of approbation, a smile of contentment, a smile of satisfaction infinite, flowing from His Father into His soul, now no longer under a curse, no longer pained, no longer deserted, I say if we got a sight of that it would make us glad. And the faithfulness of God is here. Now dear friends, look at this then, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

The second sprinkling of the blood was on the people. First, God was pleased; then the people were sanctified, forgiven. Blood-sprinkled people are people made glad; people forgiven, no longer under a broken law to curse them, but under the glorious gospel of Christ, full of blessings. No longer banished, but made nigh. No longer strangers to the covenant of promise, but partakers of the

promise. No longer without God and without hope in the world, because they have now hope, and they have an anchorage and they cast anchor there, in heaven, wither their forerunner is for them entered, even Jesus, who delivered them from the wrath to come. Now this sprinkling of the people with the blood that was shed for them has this in it, a personal application, and this brings us to a close point. Ah, if you can understand and run with Peter in that beautiful word he has: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." A very wonderful passage, a mighty passage giving us the great ground of hope, the death of the Lord Jesus and the sprinkling of the conscience from dead works. Reflect for a moment upon this. What gave the high priest an entrance into the holiest once a year? Blood, the blood of the atonement. What rent the veil and made an open way into the holiest for the vilest of sinners? The blood of Jesus. And this, becoming an experience, makes the sinner understand by faith the greatness of God in forgiving sin. Forgiveness remits punishment; justification takes the cause of punishment away, which is sin, and here people stand cleansed from all unrighteousness, cleansed from the things that have given them shame and pain, cleansed from living in sin. The power of the blood of Christ is greater than the power of sin, and to be cleansed from sin is to have this sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. There is another passage to which I will refer just in conclusion, in the Hebrews. "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 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 to serve the living God." Conscience - God's friend in a regenerate person. Conscience - the guardian of God's honour in a regenerate person. Conscience - the friend, though the tormentor of a regenerate person. Tormentor, that is to say, whenever sin is committed. Now for this conscience to be sprinkled, purified, for the forgiveness of sin to be on that

conscience spoken, this, this, is to be cleansed. This is to be cleansed. Therefore, I would say, bring no price, for the gospel says "Buy wine and milk without money and without price". Bring no good tempers, no pleasing frames, no consistent life. Bring none of these, for all these have sin, if they are not sin itself. "For the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin". Hence the connection between this and what follows at the beginning of the next chapter. "My little children these things I write unto you that ye sin not". The gospel in itself, as promulgated and read and felt, has in it a mighty influence to keep from sin, but if a man sin, if a Christian, that is to say, sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. O then look, you who are afflicted, pained and shamed again and again because you are sinners, you who are bent double sometimes with the infirmity of sin and are not able to raise yourselves and straighten yourselves, look to this. Here is a great God saying, now confess. Only acknowledge your sin. Confess your sin. If you do this - and this is the grace of the Spirit - then I am faithful to My Son and just in respect of having received payment for you. Faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. This must be the life of the Church. This is the glory of the gospel of God. It is the glory of God to forgive sin; a name of honour and praise in the earth for Him to forgive sin, and this is the strength of every believer. This is the root and cause of all his evangelical obedience and repentance, the forgiveness of sin by the precious, infinitely precious, blood of Jesus Christ.

One says, I wish I knew that for myself. Well, the direction of the gospel is this: "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." That is not a fallible direction; it is infallible. It is not a promise that may be broken, for all the promises of God in Christ are yea and amen to the glory of God by us. May the Lord bless you and grant that as a people we may be for His praise and glory in the enjoyment of the forgiveness of our sins and the cleansing of us from all unrighteousness.

AMEN.