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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 18 December 1935

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"

The whole of saving religion is in these two categories,
confession of sin, and forgiveness of sin, but O what implications
there are in this text, how much is implied in these two particulars
of saving religion.

First, the law, and sinners under it, under the curse of it.
"Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are
written in the book of the law to do them" Then the curse, the awful,
just, holy anger of God, which we all have merited. Then conviction
of sin - no person truly confesses sin until he is convinced of sin,
and that by the Holy Ghost.

Following in ^{the} second place, we have the forgiveness of sins;
here is Christ, the Substitute, the Mediator, who redeemed the
transgressions that were before under the law that the election of
grace might receive a divine call, a call by grace. The death of
Christ, the meritorious, the vicarious death of Christ, we have.
Then the justice of God - He is just - the very thing that poor people
under divine teaching and conviction fear is against them. The
glorious attribute of divine justice is discovered to be in
forgiveness. And faithful - the faithfulness of God to His word;
that looks against a person under conviction. But when it pleases the
Holy Ghost to take, as it were, these two glorious perfections of
Deity, and put them into the gospel and show a sinner that they stand
on his side, and that forgiveness of sins is a just forgiveness - just
on the part of God - and a faithful forgiveness - faithful to the
Covenant - this is wonderful. May we be enabled a little this evening
to consider these two great points.

"If we confess our sins". In the book of Job we read of God that "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light". If we confess and forsake our sins, we are told in the book of Proverbs, we shall have mercy. "Whoso covereth his sin shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy". Confession is a necessary part of true religion. It is sometimes a very wonderful part of religion to those who have it, and we are taught in the book of Leviticus that it is always connected with sacrifice, therefore always connected with hope. When a Jew sinned in anything contrary to the law, a sin of ignorance, a sin of perverting the truth, a sin of keeping back the truth, in each, and all of these cases, sacrifice was to be offered, an offering unto God. A burnt offering, a sin offering, a meat offering, must be made to God Himself. And this was beautiful; the sinner taking the sacrifice was to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice. We have that in the hymn book

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin

When you really repent, and are led by the Holy Ghost to confess your sins, there is there the Object of hope, the Object of faith, namely the Son of God, the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the confession may be sweetly accompanied with a hope that the Lord will hear your confessions, and receive them; and very comfortable this is. When the Holy Ghost makes it out to a sinner, it is very beautiful to him. Confession and the burnt offering go together. Confession and the sin offering go together. Think of it, you who have to go, day by day - and sometimes are particularly helped to go - to confess your sins, you are not far from the burnt offering, not far from the sin offering, not far from the peace offering, and that is wonderful. The Lord has connected these two things. May we not be allowed to separate them. Confession is not despair. ".....Mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32 v 5). So it

proves to be, at times, a very wonderful, beautiful experience. Nobody knows but those who do it in the Spirit's grace, the relief it is to confess sin. Sin done under the law by the Jews was always guilt, it meant guilt, but the sinner did not always feel guilt, so the Lord said, When he shall know it, that is, when he is convinced of it, when the light darts in on his mind, and understanding, when he is led to see what he did, where he turned away, when he touched some unclean thing. As the law said, if he shall touch an unclean thing, the carcass of an unclean beast, or a dead man, he shall be unclean, and yet inadvertently a Jew might touch these things, and not feel guilty, and might do these things inadvertently without wilful sin. Yet when the Holy Ghost is pleased to bring such transgressions to the view and conscience, then the sinner is guilty. When he shall know it. Nobody is free from sin, or from sinning, but only the elect get that knowledge. When he shall know it, he shall be guilty. And then, when he knows it, and confesses it, he is to take the sacrifice and lay his hand on the head. There is grace, there is faith, and also there is hope, hope in the Lord. The confession of sin king Solomon particularly mentions. If famine is in the land, and the people are convinced of the cause of it, and pray, and confess their sins, then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place. If they were put to the worst in battle, and they remembered, were convinced of the reason why God put them to the worst, and confess their sin, then hear Thou in heaven. When they were in captivity and remembered their sin that brought them into captivity, and confess it and pray toward this house which I have built, then hear Thou in heaven and forgive. If the Holy Ghost should open these things to our hearts and understandings, I believe it would make confession of sin a very wonderful thing to us. What, does God convince me of a sin that I have forgotten, under which I was not labouring with sorrow? Does He bring it to me? Does He bring it to me so that I confess it and lay my hand on the Surety, the bleeding Saviour? There is something peculiarly beautiful in this teaching, that the Holy Ghost so convinces a child of God even after regeneration, because of course before regeneration there is no conviction. But after regeneration there may be, there often is, backsliding, departing from the Lord by an evil heart of unbelief, and worldliness, and we touch unclean things, and are not for a time convinced thereof, but when the Holy Ghost kindly, graciously brings the sin, or the sins, to our knowledge,

then, according to Scripture, we are guilty. We were guilty before, but now we know our guilt. Then take the sacrifice, lay your hand on the sacrifice, and confess your sin over the sacrifice. Is it not wonderful that God does so teach His people that they confess their sins over the Saviour, lay the hand of their faith on the blessed Lord Jesus, and there confess, and there mourn, and there have a hope of being accepted, and forgiven.

"If we confess our sins". It is very solemn that there should be an "if" though I do not think the "if" here refers to obstinacy, but rather a divine teaching in a case of confession; "when" we confess. If one says, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not. Are we found among the confessors of sin? Yes, some of us must acknowledge that we are. O the relief it is to confess your sins sometimes, when the conscience is sore, when the mind is oppressed by a sense of sin; when you look at your imperfections, and failings, and fallings; when you realise that you have touched some unclean thing; that there have been before you the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and the lust of the flesh, and so on; I say, when these things are felt, and conscience says, You are wrong, you have walked in wrong things, and now you know it, you are guilty; confess it, lay your hand on the dear sacrifice. Blessed be God for this kind of confession, this spiritual confession, and may we be enabled to hold it fast. If you have sinned against a fellow-creature you are to acknowledge that. But who has not sinned against God? But all people do not get conviction of that. He lets some alone. If affliction is now with you because of your sins, if you are mourning on account of them, you may take it as a token for good. You may take it as a proof that God is kind to you, that He will not let you destroy yourself, but enable you occasionally to follow this gracious word by Hosea - "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips". And then one day - if not immediately on your confession - He will say to you - "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him".

"If we confess our sins". It is not a gloomy thing, as some men would say. It is not a mean thing, a demeaning of yourself. It is a sweet, gracious exercise of a living conscience realising that it has

done against God what it ought not to have done, and so it comes, and even walking about your house, or the town, or lying on your bed, your heart kneels down before Him and confesses sin, but never apart - I will keep that before you - never apart from the sacrifice, from the burnt offering; so it does not tend to death, it tends to life. It does not shut the soul up under the law, it opens the gospel. It does not say to a sinner, There is no help for you in God, because it is connected with the burnt offering when faith lays her hand on the sacrifice. That is the first part of this little, beautiful, important text.

The second part is wonderful also. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". There are many things here, very important, and most blessed. First the faithfulness of God. Immutability is one of the divine perfections, and this is involved, this faithfulness is involved in that immutability. "He cannot deny Himself". He has pledged Himself. To whom? Not to you, you say. One says, Not to me; I have never heard His word yet. He is faithful to His Son. He sent Him, He smote Him, He commanded Him to lay down His life, but He said to Him - I have given Thee for a Covenant of the people, a light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42 v 6). He sent Him "to preach good tidings unto the meek to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God". He promised to help Him and He said this to Him by Isaiah "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon Thee (that is upon Christ), and the words which I have put in Thy mouth, shall not depart out of Thy mouth" Now the Father is faithful to His Son, and that is connected with forgiveness. If you have faith to hold this it will help you even though you do not get the immediate sense of forgiveness. God is faithful to His Son, will never go back on a promise He made to a sinner. He helped Him, He heard His prayer - He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" - when, as a divine Person, an equal with His Father, He said to His Father, I will that those men whom Thou gavest Me to save shall be with Me where I am. "He is faithful" And He is just. Justice - the flaming sword placed

at the gate of the Garden of Eden to keep the way against sinners, to keep a sinner away from the Tree of Life - that justice is a divine perfection. It cannot pass by sin. It cannot let a sinner escape. It cannot let sin go unpunished. Here is our mercy, that infinite love, and wisdom, provided a Surety, and said the sinner, the principal in the offence, shall go free; I will punish the Substitute; and He did it. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" O solemn; if we got a view of justice punishing Jesus Christ; if we got a sense of interest in that punishment, it would melt us into contrition, lift us up from the dust, and the dunghill, and set us with princes. It would make us holy, and happy. He is just to His Son. Just to His promises. "They that seek shall find". "To him that knocketh it shall be opened". Just to His invitations - "The Spirit and the bride say, Come". Sinners come, sinners in the professing church, come. "Whosoever will let him come and take of the water of life freely". Justice is in all this, because the dear Son of God incarnate made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness; died a voluntary, vicarious death, was buried, and the third day rose again, and after showing Himself alive to His disciples and many others, 500 at one time, He ascended into heaven, and there He is. And His Father would not be just to the church, would not be just to a dying thief, to a penitent publican, to a poor, mourning sinner in this congregation, if He turned His ear away and said, I will have nothing to do with you. No; I believe I do not say this lightly; it is too solemn to treat lightly, but I do treat it with solemnity, and feel the awful solemnity, and blessedness of it. The Father is just to His Son, to His death, to His merit, and just to the promises of the gospel, and to the invitations of the gospel.

Now what follows? Does hell follow the confessing sinner? Does hell open its mouth to receive, and swallow up a confessing sinner? Does God give a confessing sinner up to the devil? Does He lock that sinner up in black despair? No, He forgives his sin. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" Us? My dear confessing brethren, I am with you. These, our sins, will pull us in if we are confessors of our sins. The devil shall not pull us out. Despair shall not keep us out. Sin shall not shut us up in hell. A confessing sinner, a confessing church, shall know what this means - "To forgive us our sins". One says, But I have waited so long and I am afraid I shall

never get forgiveness. Is a day, is a week, are years of our time to be put against God's "now". Eternity is God's "now", and all time in which He is dealing with His people, that is "now" to Him. Peter teaches this, may the Spirit teach us this: "Beloved be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Some get forgiveness quite early in their experience; others wait long for it, but they are both equal to God. Loved of God, purchased by Christ, they are both equal to God, but they are not dealt with alike because of His sovereign goodwill. With one He deals in this manner, and another in that manner, but both of them are in this forgiveness, and we read "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared, and with Thee is plenteous redemption". "Forgive our sins".

Forgiveness is a joyful sound
To malefactors doomed to die

Perhaps some of you instantly pray

O may this bliss in me be found
May I redeeming grace enjoy

Well, wait on God. You wont wait in vain, you cannot wait in vain, if God is true. The Apostle Paul speaks of God thus - "God that cannot lie" and that is connected with a promise of life - "God that cannot lie". The Father's promise, the Son's death, the Spirit's operation are all pledged to this, the forgiveness of sins. O, blessed people who believe in God, and seek forgiveness. "They that seek shall find". "To him that knocketh it shall be opened". Do you feel hard-hearted? Thomas Hardy - I have more than once quoted this; O, it is a wonderful, good word - Thomas Hardy said in a letter to a correspondent who, I suppose, confessed his hardness, "Try what hard-hearted prayers will do", that is to say, Go with your present condition confessing sin. The day will come when the Lord will answer prayer and give you the blessing. You will get the treasure in your sack one day.

"And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". Unrighteousness belongs to us naturally by our fallen state. Unrighteousness is with

us constantly in our fallen state. We sin naturally. Solemn condition of things with us. I have felt it myself this morning, and said to myself, sin naturally; it is as natural for us to sin as it is for us to carry in our breast a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. In a painful sense, not boasted of, but in a painful sense every child of God more or less feels distinctly feels that he sins in all that he does. What is it to be cleansed? Two things are in it which I can only name. You, by the Holy Ghost, may enlarge on them. The first is this - "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin". All unrighteousnesses are removed by the blood of Christ. This, the Holy Ghost teaches in the Hebrews - "For 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?" Is not it wonderful to get a purged conscience; wonderful. I should like to be able to say on my dying bed what good Mr Thomas said to me not many hours before he died and asked me to bury him. He said my conscience is as if it had never had a sin on it. Do you think that is impossible to you? Why should it be? The blood of Christ can purge the conscience from dead works and if the conscience is so purged, you have got no sin on it, and should that be our happy lot, our sweet experience, on our dying beds, O what happiness we shall have.

And the second thing to name is this, that this cleansing from all unrighteousness is by the operation of the Spirit. He makes the soul sincere. He makes the glory of God the first thing from time to time with the conscience. You will find sometimes in your experience that you have a conscience in regard to speaking. "Set a watch upon my mouth, keep the door of my lips". You will be afraid of speaking sometimes. You may even bite your lips rather than speak. We do speak very foolishly, and the gospel is against all that kind of talking, the talk of the lips, and the tale-bearing and all that kind of thing. The Holy Ghost has written against it. And sometimes His mighty grace makes a person, a child of God, really afraid of speaking. And there is a deeper thing than that, though that comes from the deeper; the deeper is this, you may be afraid of thinking. You make a conscience of thinking. Thinking, you say, there is not

much in that. Is there not? Is there not much in this wonderful charge - "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself" There is sin there, there is guilt there. A conscience of thinking. And there is another kind of thinking that pleases God, and pleases your own soul. He speaks so kindly of them that think upon His Name. What a wonderful mercy for you to have a conscience, tender, that would make you say, I would do nothing but think of God. I would have Him in my thoughts always, if I could. I would think of the holiness of God, the righteousness of God; I would think of the death of Jesus Christ, of His Person, of His death, and of His blood, and of all things that belong to Him. Well, what a mercy, a conscience concerning that kind of thinking.

And He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness in regard to our open conduct. It was a wonderful thing for the Apostle Paul to say to the church of God - What you see in me, do, follow; for a minister to be able to say to the people, What you see in me, do; you follow. But it is a great mercy to take this in a general way, to so live in your family, in your connections in the church of God, in your business, so that men may say, We do not like his religion, but we must confess that his conduct is good. May the Lord cleanse us from all wrong things, and keep us from defiling our garments. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

AMEN.