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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel Brighton by Mr J.K. Popham on
Sunday evening 13th November 1923

Text: 1 John 2. verse 1.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The text falls into two parts, very distinct they are. The first carries us back, we have had something written to us, and the influence, the natural tendency of those things is to preserve us from sinning. A very important word. It may be, probably will be, if the Lord takes of this and speaks to us by it, a reproofing word, reproofing us with respect to indifference, with regard to things written to us, with regard to their intended influence. And I am disposed to say this is neither legal nor Armenians, but that God's intention in this word is to keep His people from indifference as to what they have received, and heard and professed. The things written to these gracious people, among whom, already in other places, that is in the world, many anti-Christ's had come. These people are here spoken to with respect to Christ revealed, made manifest in God's time. And the disciples, the apostles, had seen that Person and they had looked with intentness upon Him. And because He was a real Man, they handled Him, because He would be familiar with them, as He still is spiritually. And it was a Word of Life, that which was manifested, which they had seen. "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."(1 John 1 verse 2).

In the gospel of John we read "And the Word was made flesh, (manifested) and dwelt among us," (John 1 verse 14). and we have see it. This points to a particular knowledge that God gives to his children of the word of life in Christ Jesus, and He will have them hear about it. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."(1 John 1 verse 3). The Apostles testimony is to be believed. It was no private thing, they saw the Lord Jesus. They handled Him. They saw Him after the Resurrection, when He came unexpectedly into their midst, and they thought they saw a spirit. He said, "handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." (Luke 24 verse 39). I am a real man, and the Apostle bore witness to this fact, to this truth. And it is declared with this end in view, that the saint's may have fellowship with the Apostles and with the Father, and with His son Jesus Christ. Now we have the very kernel of divine religion, some knowledge of Christ.

Some reception of Him, some fellowship with Him, and with the Father in Him. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14 verse 9.) also. "These things we write unto you, that your joy may be full." (1 John 1 verse 4). Probably we have very little conception of the joy acting on those three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost, when as it is written of them "Then they .. gladly received the word." (Acts 2 verse 41). It entered into their cases. It spoke to their consciences, it consoled them in their distress. For they were distressed "what shall we do ?" (Acts 2 verse 37) they said, and this gospel was preached to them, and they had fellowship, and how much of this the early church had in Apostolic days. I think I may say, we know very little of the joy of salvation. Mostly we are mourning, and a blessed thing it is to mourn. We are confessing, and a good thing it is to be confessing sin. An un-confessing spirit is an un-Christian spirit, but there is joy.

The Lord Jesus said "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15 verse 11). "This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1 verse 5). O dear friends, what an awful, glorious, blessed God we have to do with. No darkness in Him. "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion", (Psalm 18 verse 11) but in Him is no darkness. His nature is light. His nature is love. If we have seen that light, we have been convinced of our darkness and wickedness. If we have seen that light in the person and work of Christ, we have seen it, in such a way as, that it is bearable. The naked light of Deity is unbearable to the creature. But that very sweet light, for it is sweet, as it shines in the person of Christ, and His work on the cross is so wonderful, so attractive, so bearable that all on whom it shines walk in it. This may be a very searching consideration with us, whether we have walked in the light, we talk about. Whether the light has shined on us, in and from Christ on the cross, so as to show us our sins are removed and that we stand in Christ, perfect, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Ephesians 5 verse 27. Is not this the work of God. Is not this the religion He gives to His people. He is light, pure light, no darkness mixed with it, and it shines in the dark places of the earth, and tells them that they, walking in this light, have "fellowship .. with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1 verse 3). Let us search and try our ways in this particular. Then it comes to our profession. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness" of wickedness, in the darkness of unfruitful works, in the darkness of carnality, of worldliness, of worldly mindedness, of carnal reasoning, in the darkness of pride and vanity, "we lie, and do not the truth." (1 John 1 verse 6).

A searching this, a searching word. What is our profession ? One says with Joseph Hart.

Oh! I'm leprous, stinking, foul,
Quite throughout infected;
Have no I, if any soul,
Cause to be dejected ? (780 verse 4 Gadsby's)

But the light that makes that manifest, and moves the soul, in which it shines, to seek that purity that comes alone from God, that brings a person into a right state. He is not walking in darkness. He feels dark, but he is walking in prayer, in faith, in hope, in desire. His walking before God in these things, is in the light. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1 verse 7). "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 John 1 verses 8-10). "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not," (1 John 2 verse 1.) which means that the influence, the tendency, of the truth which has been declared in the first chapter, is always to preserve a person from sinning, not to deliver him, while he lives here from the inbeing of sin, but from he willful practice of sin. This is the tendency, the intended influence, the divinely intended influence. Have you not found it so ? Whenever God has shined on you, the desire of your soul has been this - O that I might walk, so as not to displease God, that I might walk so as to have fellowship with Him. So you have found that the true tenancy of the gospel is to save you, from living in sin. And when men say of you, if they do say it, as they said of the saints of old, that you say,

"Let us do evil, that good may come?" it is a slanderous thing, and their "damnation is just." says the Spirit by Paul. Romans 3 verse 8, Look then at this great matter, how are you influenced by the truth ? The truth, what effect has it on your spirit, or the tongue, on your life ? The truth is pure if you receive it in faith. It will make you long to be pure. It will keep you from uncleanness, from walking in darkness, in the unfruitful fruits of darkness. "These things write I unto you". This writing is as new living, and authoritative today as it was when the ink was scarcely dry on the parchment. What solemn thing it is to profess the truth, and not in any way be conformed to it. Truth is beautiful, the truth of God, the truth of His light, the truth of His justice and His mercy, and of His faithfulness. Beautiful, and should the light of this, His perfections beam upon us, the effect must be, that we shall have fellowship with Him.

In the measure of light that comes, this will be the measure of our conformity to Him. Paul says in the Ephesians "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." (Ephesians 4 verse 1). To the Romans he says "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed." (Romans 12 verses 1,2). The psalmist said, that "he would walk with perfect heart", in the house of God. And the truth on the heart, in the power of the Spirit, will always produce that gracious effect. God's presence is very effectual, in its influence. God's exhortations are not less effectual when they come to the heart in the power of the Holy Ghost.

May the Lord help us to look back. Back-looks may and will be two-fold in their consequences. First, very painful and very shameful. O I know what I mean, and you will know in your similar measures, what it is to have shame, and pain, and fear, we feel, viewing our unstable hearts, how we wonder, stagger and reel, only wise by fits and starts. Thou art true, but what are we, fickle, fools, and false to Thee. I know that my friends, and I need to know it more than any one else, for I am more inconsistent. Blessed be God, not in my open conduct among men, but in my spirit. And the other effect will occasionally be thankfulness to God that He ever condescended to come to you, and shine into your heart, to show you your sinfulness. To shine into your heart, to show you His mercy. O the goodness of God, how it makes the man who feels it, say "Why me O blessed God". "Who am I, O Lord God ? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto." (2 Samuel 7 verse 18).

Thankfulness sometimes, will be, is felt, when you look back, and see how the light came. Truly it was the light of life, and entered sweetly into the soul, somewhat persuading it of God's goodness. Look then my brethren at the first part of the text, and go back to "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." That you do not play with the truth, that you do not trifle with it, that you do not lightly profess it, and walk contrary to it. That ye sin not, because, if you sin, you walk contrary to what you have heard, to what you have received. How do we stand in this particular ? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. If we are convinced that we have walked contrary to God, by His walking contrary to us, we are troubled. This is a part of the work of God in the soul, to convince it, that it has not walked becomingly. O the unbecoming behaviour of children in the house of their heavenly Father It ill becomes children to seek to behave, as if they were not children.

But loose over themselves, to say "We will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereasye ought to say, If the Lord will." (James 4 verses 13 -15). "For what is your life ? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away" (James 4 verse 14). This is not behaving like obedient children, Peter says "Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts" (1 Peter 1 verse 14) of this world, "as he which hath called you is holy" (verse 15) "Because it is written Be ye holy; for I am holy". (verse 16). But lest we should sink into dismay by the conviction that we have sinned. That we have walked contrary to God, the Holy Spirit, by John says "If any man sin," If any man of God to whom the message of the first chapter has come. In whom it has been powerfully applied. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"

Well this is a good gospel. The sinners gospel. A full gospel. The fulness of God, the fulness of His love, of His grace, of His mercy, of justification, of sanctification, the fulness of immutability in promise and in oath, "That by two immutable things," (Hebrews 6 verse 18.) God affords "strong consolation" to His people. O Christian sinner, a contradiction you may say, a Christian a sinner, a child of God a sinner ? The scripture says "If any man" who has walked in the light should sin, if any man to whom God has spoken, and in whom He has wrought wonders of grace. In whom He has made known His love, and given a promise, if any such man sins, by unbelief, provoking God to say, how long will it be ere you believe me ? If any man so sin, I expect have caught sight of every child of God here. There is not one of you that would say, you have not sinned by unbelief. The greatest immorality in the world is unbelief, because it does the greatest damage to the character of God. O piercing question, how long will it be, you, to whom I have given such evidences of my mercy, in whom I have wrought such wonders, for whom I have wrought such deliverances how long will it be ? What more do you want ? O it is a piercing question. It has arrested me more than once. Look at it, Unbelief ? Well may we say with Hart

If unbelief's that sin accursed,
Abhorred by God above,
Because, of all opposers worst,
It fights against His love,
How shall a heart that doubts like mine,
Dismayed at every breath,
Pretend to live the life divine,
Or fight the fight of faith. (773 verses 1 & 2 Gadsby's)

And what if this sin is on your conscience ? What if now, some of you are, in your hearts saying "Lord we have committed this sin times without number. We are the subjects of it. It is a mighty influence in us, it overcomes us. It keeps us from our knees, it keeps our lips silent, it keep our souls, almost as dead. This dreadful unbelief. Well says the Lord "we have an advocate". He does not say, what many professors would say to you, if they heard your complaint, "O you should not be so despondent, you should not be so constantly engaged in that introspection" The Lord does not say that, He says "We have an advocate". Unbelief felt, will make you dumb, many and many a day. You will be ashamed, even at times to think of calling on God. So vile unbelief, impinging on some affliction, will affect you, and turn your mind and heart away from God. "We have an advocate". If you were to speak after the pride of fallen nature, you would at least begin to make some excuses. This emboldened him, that held him back, the other circumstance, I could not avoid being influenced by. But an honest heart does not work that way. "We have an advocate" One who takes bad cases in hand. Were you ever glad of that ? One who, taking up a case, never leaves it, brings the poor dumb creature well through. An advocate made fully acquainted with the case He is to plead. "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."(Psalm 103 verse 14). He does not excuse sin, but He puts it away. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ?how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as Zeboim ? (Hosea 11 verse 8) "for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember thee still." (Jeremiah 31 verse 20)

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous". Well this righteous advocate took up such cases, as in a natural court, would be declared to be hopeless, with no excuse at all. Yes He takes them up, He pleads for sinners, He presents His own infinite merit and goodness. He brings a sinner well through, not denying he is a sinner, but presenting the infinite merit of His precious, His vicarious death. Now this gospel is to be preached, and it should be, and no doubt is. The chief concern of a minister is not to preach, but to preach this everlasting gospel. The person of the Lord Jesus qualified to stand in the court, and take up cases given into His hand. It says to sinners now, put your cases into the hands of this wondrous Person. Go into court with shame, with ropes about your necks, go and confess, without any excuses, of that you have done amiss. Of which you are conscious, and just put the whole, without a single word of excuse, into these wondrous hands. The gospel is, a great gospel and embraces great cases, great sinners.

Sinners are high in His esteem
And sinners highly value Him. (89 verse 5 Gadsby's)

For He takes them up. An Advocate must be a person fully qualified to stand and plead a case. In a court of justice, it is not anybody that can go into court, and take up a case. The Advocate must be qualified by his having passed examinations, fully qualified, to advocate a case. Our Lord Jesus is infinitely qualified. "I have put my spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgement" (Isaiah 42 verse 1) "judgement unto victory." (Matthew 12 verse 20). He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, when He sees, the poor fallen creature on the ground. When He hears the painful cry - "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18 verse 13). When He hears a sinner mournfully saying "O how I have misbehaved myself, How unbelieving I have been, How hard hearted, how unthankful I have been." He sees a case of this kind, and kindly says "Come to me with it, that is "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11 verse 28). This is the Advocate. An Advocate must have something to plead. Among men the advocate takes up matters of excuse or of extenuation, or he may deny the accusation. He may be greatly mistaken, but he has got case. O our Advocate, He has no excuses, no denials of the sins committed by His clients, His sinful sureties, but He takes their cases up, and what He pleads is what He Himself is, and what He himself has done. When He speaks for them, He speaks the truth of His own righteousness, the truth of His own infinite merit. He has a change of raiment, and says "Take away the filthy garments." (Zechariah 3 verse 4).

O the sinner is surprised when he finds, as Hart expresses it,

Here's an amazing change indeed !
Justice is now for me. (151 verse 8 Gadsby's)

And the case is concluded, when justification by Christ's righteousness is brought forward, and pronounced in the sinners heart and conscience, and there is nothing allowed against him. Now this is needed by people who have sinned, after they have received the gospel. The Galatians needed it , and they were exhorted to "Stand fast" (Galatians 5 verse 1), and spoken kindly to in the Epistle addressed to them, and here we have it in the text. There is a guilty person, more guilty since his regeneration, and God's love to him, than when he was unregenerate and walked according to the course of this world. I have no doubt some of you understand me in this particular.

I have found it so, that what I have done since the Lord had mercy upon me, is more bitter, painful, shameful, weakening, penetrating my heart, than all that I ever did before. My brethren, we should value this Advocate with the Father. He deals with the Father, when you could not. He speaks a word for you when you are dumb. He says to the Father. I have bought him with my blood. Now this second part of the text is a wonderful part. It bids us look within, it tells us to look without. It bids us to remember our sinning, and tells us that we are not to go to court alone, but to have an Advocate with us. It says if you stand alone, woe be to you, but if you go with the Advocate, and put your case in His hands, then the issue must be good. For the Advocate "shall not fail nor be discouraged." (Isaiah 42 verse 4). May the Lord turn our hearts to this. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" And this makes men say of Him "He is altogether lovely"(Song of Solomon 5 verse 16). There is none like Him, none to be compared with Him.

Now I must leave off, I did not expect early this morning to be here today, because I developed a cold, very rapidly last evening, But I have been able to come. and speak, much more than I expected to. And if God should cause one single word to fall upon any heart, and do it good, the praise shall be His.

Amen.