

Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
by Mr J.K. Popham on Sunday Evening
28th October 1934

Text: 1 John 4 verse 8

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

The religion of God according to the scripture is in itself, its root and its fruit, and in its blessed end a religion of love. Whatever means, troubles, afflictions, persecutions and temptations may be in the path, love is at the bottom, and in the middle, and in all the exercises, and in the issue of it. This truth every child of God, sooner or later comes to acknowledge. There is no child of God here, or in the whole world who will not before he dies, in some measure say, this God is love.

You must say it if you are honest tonight, some of you. And you would not deny it if you speak the truth regarding your own experience. Perhaps you would say, my soul you have had trouble, but you must add, you have had mercy, helps, blessings, reliefs, and comforts. O speak well of your God, but what a solemn statement is the first part of the text. "He that loveth not knoweth not God," just think of it, have you no love, no love for the truth, as the truth is in Jesus. No love for a saint whom you know or if you have felt love, and something in that saint which has not pleased you, has love gone? He that loveth not the gospel of the grace of God, knows nothing about God. What is the gospel? The best news that God Himself could speak from heaven to the earth. The best news, the sweetest song ever sang by an angel, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." (Luke 2 verses 12 & 13).

That was when Christ was born, all the love of God was in that infant. Even the fullness of the Godhead bodily was in that infant, and all the purposes of God to a vile wretch, were in that infant, and all the dealings of God in providence was settled there. The tribulations, the difficulties, the afflictions, the persecutions, the temptations, the weaknesses, and the fears all met, and all have a remedy in that infant. Good news, it has made some of us glad has it not? Oh how glad has my heart been made by the gospel, but I am a sinner says one, well if you were not you would not want the gospel. You could not want it, could not desire it.

Sinners can say, and none but they,
How precious is the Saviour ! (Gadsby's 806 verse 2)

People do not like to hear of sin today, therefore they do not want the Saviour. You will never separate the two, while you live, sin and salvation, ruin and salvation, guilt and justification, pollution and sanctification, wickedness and grace. They unite in the experience of every child of God, more or less distinctly. Have you no love ? Do you kneel down sometimes and confess to a cold heart ? Do you sometimes feel you can say,

O love divine, how sweet thou art !
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee ? (Gadsby's 249 verse 1)

Oh that word willing has shone in my heart, my willing heart, who made it willing ? The Holy Ghost, when shall I find my willing heart all taken up by Thee. Do you love the truth ? or have you no love for the truth ? What is truth ? "I am the way, the truth, and the life:" (John 14 verse 6). That is Christ, and when you have seen Him, all the truth of God is there. The Father is there, the Holy Ghost is there, for the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, and the Spirit of God fills the Son with His immeasurable gifts. Have you loved this God and the truth? What is it ? It is the whole revelation of God.

Well my friends, a little love is a great thing, an ounce of love, if I may so put it, is better than a ton of notion. Notion is never fixed, love is always fixed, and fixed on one object. I wish I had more love, a little is very pleasant to faith, and it goes out to the Lord's people."Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him.(1 John 5 verse 1). Oh you will run to the Lord's people sometimes, you will bless God for David, for the history of his life and his experience. Sometimes you will turn to Abraham, and again and again to various characters set out in the word of God, and say, I love this godly people, I bless God that He ever recorded their lives in the Bible. Also you have friends about you perhaps in your family and in the Church of God, and sometimes you, in your pride and self righteousness say, Oh but he is so inconsistent in this and in that, but love says a good deal more in yourself, then there will be a revival. You will say I love that saint of God, "For charity (love) shall cover the multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4 verse 8). In that scene, think of it, he that loveth not, think of a heart of stone or an iceberg, a heart of blindness, and deadness, a heart of wickedness. There is no love there, but the poor child of God says, Lord I am like a stone, I am like an iceberg, and I am full of evil, and nothing else

Oh yes, "What will ye see in the Shulamite ? As it were the company of two armies." (Song of Solomon 6 verse 13). And you say sometimes,

I love the Lord with mind and heart,
His people and His ways;
Envy, and pride, and lust depart,
And all His works I praise; (Gadsby's 251 verse 2)

But I want to speak a littler as enabled, about this great God of love, I expressed His being, a great word, He is Love. Well but one says, what strange ways He has of showing it. Yes, love in God is justice, love in God is holiness, love in God is wisdom, love in God is omniscience and omnipotence. We cannot conceive of Him, when we speak of God we speak, as it were ignorantly. He is so wonderful, He inhabits eternity, holiness is His dwelling place, glory is His dwelling place, and with all that, everything is comprised in this word, love. That Being, that wondrous Being, whom some of us have seen. I remember the first sight I had of God, I was then a youth, it made me stand and say, where this God is I shall never be, for I saw two attributes in Him, Justice and Holiness. And He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5 verse 8). And I said, I shall never be where He is, but now I believe I shall be. Oh but it is great, and if I might say this to you, beg of God that your religion, if you have a religion that will save you, may consist more in the knowledge of Himself than in anything else. Peter says by inspiration, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3 verse 18). If I had more knowledge I should have been a different minister, and a more gracious man. I live to prove I am very ignorant of God. Do not think you know as much of God as you may know of the Bible, the two may be very different, the measure is very different. If you know a little of God thank Him, bless Him for it. You may know a great deal of the Bible you may read a book through in a morning and evening, and when you have closed the book, you may ask yourself, what have I learned, what do I know, has this spoken anything to me ? Has this book brought anything of God to me ? If you say no, then you will be sad. If you can say I had a little conviction, a little conviction of my ignorance, a little conviction of the greatness of what I read, and did not understand. Be thankful, that will keep you from pride of naked knowledge. God is love although His dealings do not say it sometimes,

Could we see how all is right, Where were room for credence ?
But by faith, and not by sight, Christians yield obedience.

(Gadsby's 315 verse 5)

Taker for instance Jacob, not naturally a good character, a supplanter a deceiver, yet says God, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (Romans 9 verse 13). Look at Jacob's life, he goes from his home a guilty young man, he had deceived his father, lied to his blind father. He goes from home and reaches Laban's house, then begins a life of about twenty years in which he was deceived over and over again. Oh what a life it was, yet God says, Jacob have I loved, and told him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;....And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and I will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Genesis 28 verses 13 & 15). Jacob lived to the day when the Lord said, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee." (Genesis 31 verse 3). And he goes back, but there is another affliction or trial to come.

God had said "Jacob have I loved" and Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands". (Genesis 32 verse 10). What then ? "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him." (verse 11) Ah memory and conscience began to work, his deceiving his father, injuring his brother, and now deliver me from him. Thou didst say return to thy fathers house, and so, Jacob have I loved came forth, Oh what a night he had that night, (I wish it might please God, although our circumstances are very different, to come to us in our cases and lay hold of us.) There came a man and wrestled with Jacob, ordinary it is spoken of as Jacob wrestling with the man, but it is written the man wrestled with Jacob, and that wrestling of the man gave Jacob some strength to lay hold of the man and say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me". (verse 26).

There is a peculiarity in it, a sacredness, an amazing power in a sinners soul, with holy reverence to say to Jehovah Jesus, I will not let Thee go, Lord I am a lost wretch, I will not let Thee go unless I am saved. Lord I am very poor, Thou art rich, I will not let Thee go unless Thou enrich me with grace. Lord I am guilty, Oh I have behaved wickedly, twenty years ago. Now Thou hast come, and I will not let Thee go. It is a wonderful word, I thought today if God would only give me a little of that power to lay hold of Him by His coming. And laying hold of Him, putting it in that way as the scripture does, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with Him until the breaking of the day".

(verse 24).

But the wrestling of the man, the consequence of Jacob's laying hold of Him, "And He (the Lord) said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And He said I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." (verse 26). A great word to us is it not ? I will not, and the creature must be weakened. "And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of His thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint." (verse 25). And he halted upon his thigh, he was weakened, "Yet Jacob have I loved." All these contrary providences, all the deception of Laban, all the fears of Jacob, bitter nights, consuming days, and it ended well. "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." (Genesis 49 verse 18). "He (Jacob) gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." (Genesis 49 verse 33). May the Lord grant that it may all end well with us.

"Jacob have I loved," that sinner in Galeed have I loved, that poor man have I loved, that seeking woman have I loved, Oh blessed be God for Divine love. When our ways are crooked, human nature begins to assert itself, "If it be so, why am I thus ?" (Genesis 25 verse 22). If God loves me why does He frown upon me ? If he loves me why am I continually crossed in business, and why are nearly all my efforts blighted ? and why cannot I attain that which I have set myself out to reach ? Jacob have I loved, God is love, you may sometimes find sweetness in this. He loves me too well to let me destroy myself, if we could carry out all our own destiny, what would become of us ? Think of the prosperity of the wicked, it is a sleeping place. That very prosperity leads into slippery places, "Thou castest them down into destruction." (Psalm 73 verse 18).

Oh says faith, let me have the cup of bitters, let me have my troubles here. Oh says faith, Lord do not let me walk in a slippery place, cause me to walk in a straight way, where there is no stumbling, and by the rivers of waters, that I may be refreshed from time to time, and so a sinner says, God is love, but I am not perfect in love. I wonder if there is one in the chapel who is, there may be, blessed be God. But this is a fact, this is a truth in experience, "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." (1 John 3 verses 20 & 21). God is greater. In both cases He is greater, and if your heart condemn you. If it says, well you have been lukewarm, you have neglected the throne of grace many a day. You have been swallowed up with the cares of this life, and you have been drunken, and surfeited with care.

You say, Lord the charges are true and I am guilty, and you say sometimes, these perplexities are likely to bring me down to ruin. I am distracted often, I know not which way to turn, and I am afraid the Lord is against me, and your heart condemns you. There is one above it, God is greater, blood is greater than guilt, righteousness is greater than filthy rags, and love is greater than all the foolish judgement of the natural mind and of unbelief. And so sometimes love overcomes everything, every objection. Look at David, some of us little understand some of his troubles, and we have not the amount of trouble he had. He came to a sad point one day, and said, "But truly as the Lord liveth, and as my soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death". (1 Samuel 20 verse 3). Some of us have felt that, one mercy for David is this, He never took that one step. And neither will you, who are anointed and who fear God. For the Lord was with Him. It did not look like that when he was an exile, driven out of the inheritance of God. As he himself said, and when the enemy said, "Flee as a bird to your mountain." (Psalm 11 verse 1).

And your case may look nothing but good to yourself, yet "Jacob have I loved." He loved that poor sinner, and saw him upon his knees, saw his tears trickling down his heart, if not down his face. He saw him mourning and listened to his cries. And God commanded deliverance. God is a God of love and knowledge, He sees what poor troubled souls cannot see. Oh you, who have His fear in your hearts, hang about Him. He is too loving to send you away empty. He is too kind to reject your prayers. "I have seen his ways," (Yes you will say He has seen me rebelling, "I have seen his ways," (what then ? He went on forwardly in his ways with more and more provocation ? listen) "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." (Isaiah 57 verse 18). This wretch ? Yes, this rebel ? yes. So his people find His love, in the dark experiences, in the desperate wickednesses, in the weakness and the fear that often they are troubled with. "I have loved him." There are one or two points I would like to name before closing. First the gift of love, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him". (1 John 4 verse 9). Now why do you get such experiences of death in yourself ? God loves you, and so He causes you to lose our life, and to hate your life. If any man hate not his life, if a man lose not his life, what ? He is lost for ever, but if one should hate his life and lose it, he saves his life. That we might live not in self-righteousness, not in self-wisdom, not in self-goodness, but that we might live as poor lost things, dead in self. That we might live through Jesus Christ, that greatest gift of God. Then when that comes into your experience you say,

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift". (Corinthians 9 verse 15). Another great word you have in this connection, "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." (2 Corinthians 5 verse 21). Why are you so guilty in your experiences ? Why do conviction of your wretchedness deepen in you, grow with your years, so that when you are old and grey-headed, you say, In my beginning I was convinced of sin, but I was not half the sinner then, that I am now ? Why this ? why that ? That God will have you to bless Him for imputed righteousness. He will have you, bless Him for grace, sweet grace, great grace, full grace, justification and sanctification. You will say, Oh no, I prize more than ever that word, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Why are we so afflicted ? Sometimes you may say, I do not know. Sometimes you may say, I know why I am, so afflicted, because I am so foolish, I am so worldly, and I go astray so constantly. I need being brought back, and I am so determined in myself to have this or to do that, I feel I as it will compel the Lord to build a wall of hewn stone about me. Why all this ? In order that you may know the word of God to be true, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Corinthians 12 verse 9). and " For sin shall not have dominion over you." (Romans 6 verse 14). God is love, and He will not let you destroy yourself.

He will not let you be always wandering away from Him. He is jealous of you and of your love, and so He fetches you back by trouble, and by your unfaithfulness. The Lord says, "Be thou faithful unto death," (Revelation 2 verse 10) and you say Lord, I am faithless and let everything slip from me. I am a leaky vessel and do not answer to the words in the Hebrews, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Hebrews 2 verse 1). You say, Lord I have been always letting them slip, and hear you have to learn the difference between a good memory and a believing hold of the truth. You may have a memory that will retain the chapters, and the psalms, of the scriptures which you read, and yet have no believing hold of the truth. Things slip away, and you may say sometimes with Medley,

My memory bad, but what is sad,
Can folly still retain; (Gadsby's 378 verse 8)

"Jacob have I loved," God loves that poor sinner, and if He allowed him to go his own way, he would walk in the strength of his memory, and think he knew the truth because he read the truth, and would consider himself able to stand in the truth.

And he would be ready to say whoever falls I shall stand. So God has let out as running water the things he thought he knew, and brings him to realise he is a poor faithless creature. An unbelieving sinner. What for ? that he might find strength to believe, and love to love God. Then the man says, I little knew what Joseph Hart meant, when he said,

Lord, give us faith, and let that faith
Work all thy will by love. (Gadsby's 774 verse 13)

His dealings may seem contradictory, but the issue of these dealings give confirmation. Oh happy people who are tried, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord." (Deuteronomy 33 verse 29). This is because God is Love, a sea of love, and sometimes faith in you says, I can cast myself into the eternal ocean of the love of God, sink or swim. Ah says one, I have never been like that, remember this, the water that reached to the ankles, was the same water which the good man could swim in. The water that reached to the ankles was the same water and came from the same river. If you put your feet into it the ankles were strengthened by it, if you go a little deeper you are still strengthened, till at last it became " a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over." (Ezekiel 47 verse 5).

An unjust person swimming in the righteousness of Christ, and all to show and prove to the sinner, the truth of that text, "God is love." Yea and in this chapter it is written, and some know it to be true, "We love Him, because He first loved us." (1 John 4 verse 19). Do we love Him ? It is a great thing if we do, One says,

Tis a point I long to know,
(Oft it causes anxious thought),
Do I love the Lord, or no ?
Am I His, or am I not ? (Gadsby's 283 verse 1)

Do not be persuaded by any man, God keeps us from that. If we have the witness of men, it may be a deception. If we have the witness of God, then we know it is right. The witness of God is true. We love Him because He first loved us. There is also the loathsome infant lying in the open field, and love went out to that infant, love covered it, and divine comeliness made it beautiful. The love of God said live, and some providences, may have in them, just this word live. Love was inscribed on all the sorrows of the cross. So dear friends these feeble remarks may help you to believe that whatever troubles come to the people of God, will be used as ordained because of the love of God to them.

The troubles were sent because of God's love to His people. He kept their feet in the stocks because He loved them, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12 verses 6 & 7). Oh they are a truly happy people who are loved of God. Well would you change the world at its best for Christ at His worst? No, Faith says no, I said Christ at His worst, but this is only in appearance, and in our feelings. There must be little or nothing but trouble connected with a child of God, or with a profession of His name, but then, when the issue comes you will say, I bless Him for His goodness. Like a godly old woman from Leicester said, 'bless God for every twig of the rod He has used'. And that is what you will do in time, if you do it not tonight. You will bless Him, that He flogged you, chastened you, put your feet in the stocks. You will bless Him for all His dealings with you.

Oh may the Lord show us His love in times of trouble, and show us His love in delivering us out of trouble. And also show us His love by speaking to us, and shedding His love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

Amen.