

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 29 February 1920

1 Peter 5 v 8 and 9

"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary
the devil as a roaring lion walketh about
seeking whom he may devour; whom resist
steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same
afflictions are accomplished on your
brethren that are in the world"

The Apostle opens this chapter with an exhortation to
Ministers to take care of the flock. "The elders which are among
you I exhort, who am also an elder"; a fellow-elder. Ministers
need exhorting, surely they do, else exhortations would not be
found in the Scriptures. They need exhorting with respect to the
charge that is given to them. "Feed the flock of God". The
Apostle Paul exhorted elders, the elders of the Church at
Ephesus, saying "Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased
with His own blood".

What a fearful thing it is for men to assume the office of
the ministry uncalled and to foul the pure waters of the gospel
with their unholy feet and to tread down the sweet, green
pastures of God's truth. The Scriptures only condemn such
Pastors, such false shepherds. Peter was a witness of the
sufferings of Christ, a personal eye witness of the sufferings of
Christ, with the other apostles. He testifies of these
sufferings in the Church; sufferings which bring healing to
wounded souls; death which brings life to dead souls;
sufferings of trouble which bring peace to burdened consciences.
Of these sufferings Peter was a witness, and a partaker of the
glory that shall be revealed. Already partaker, for the Spirit
of glory and of God rested upon him as it does upon every
suffering saint; every child of God who suffers temptation; who
suffers because he is a sinner; suffers because he struggles
against sin and because, when he would do good, he finds to his

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grief and shame, evil is present with him. On every such soul the Spirit of glory and of God resteth. The Spirit of glory is the Holy Ghost who brings the glory of Christ. "He shall testify of Me". "He shall glorify Me for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you." And it is with these sufferings of Christ, His death, burial and resurrection, that the elders are to feed the Church.

"Feed the flock of God". Preach Jesus Christ. Tell them that though they are sinners, He is good; though they are weak, He is strong; though they are empty, He is full, infinitely full of mercy and of goodness. Feed them with the truth. Set the truth before them, and this shall be, under God, leading them into green pastures and beside still waters. What a mercy it will be if we are, from time to time, favoured to have the gospel with us in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance!

"Taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly". "He that desireth the office of a Bishop desireth a good thing". There is a willingness imparted in the place of intense unwillingness in some. "Taking the oversight". Take upon you the care of the Church. It is a care felt only, and therefore understood only, by those who feel it, on whom it is laid. "Taking the oversight" which means that there is an authority in the ministry. "Rebuke" says Paul - "Rebuke" (ah this is to a young minister) "with all authority; let no man despise thy youth". "Taking the oversight" means not only that the minister receives and takes on him the office of a minister, but that he is to look after the people's interests. This he will most effectually do as he is led to labour in prayer before God and in word and doctrine among the people. Willingly, not by constraint, not forced into it against his wish, although naturally he may shrink from it. Willingly, saying in response to God's Word - "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" - "Here am I, send me." A solemn thing for the Lord so to speak, and a wonderful thing for Him to give grace to a poor, sinful creature to say - "Here am I, send me."

"Not for filthy lucre" - not for his own personal advantage - "but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage". True authority in the ministry is one thing. An assumption, which is as lordship, which is outside the gospel, which knows only human power, this, the Apostle speaks against. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage", over their consciences. "We are not lords" says Paul. "We are not lords over your faith, but helpers of it". And they are so to walk that they shall be examples - "Being ensamples to the flock". And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear to His under shepherds and to His church and shall take them all to be with Himself, then they "shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away".

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." Here the Apostle speaks to the Church generally. An elder and younger here appear to be as to years. The junior must respect the senior. You younger ones submit yourselves unto the elder. There is not very much of the raising up of the hoary head today. If you find it anywhere in the world, you will find it in the Church of God, because the Lord's people have respect to His word. May we here answer to it. "Likewise ye younger," younger Christians, to whom the Lord has been gracious, "submit yourselves unto the elder." Then to show that there is a oneness in the Church, he says "Yea all of you be subject one to another and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble." If there is any sin more obnoxious, more dreadful, more unbecoming in a child of God or anybody (but here it is a child of God) than another, it is the sin of pride. "Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? And if thou didst receive it wherefore doth thou boast?" Humility is called a garment. "Be clothed with humility". Wear it, dear friends, God give us grace to wear it. The Apostle was clothed with it when writing to Timothy. He said - "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Again, writing to the Ephesians, he says, "I am less than the least of all saints". May the Lord give us grace to imitate that. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand

of God" that hand that is on you in affliction, that is on you in grace and gracious operations. That hand that you see in providence, disposing of men and their things. Setting up one, putting down another. Filling the cup, the cup of the wine of astonishment, and giving it to His children to drink, but reserving the dregs thereof to the wicked. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you" - lift you up - "in due time". The dust is the first place, then the throne of glory. The dust is the first place, my friends. Out of the dust God lifts His children. Off the dunghill He takes them and "makes them inherit the throne of glory"; makes them "sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus". Be not afraid then of the dust. Be not afraid of sinking too low. One writes in our hymn book

They never think they're laid too low
If Jesus on them pity show

Ah, this beautiful spirit, God esteems! He looketh upon men and seeth some who say - We have sinned and done that which is evil and it profited us not. Then He is gracious; He humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth.

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you". All your anxiety, care for your soul, care about your walk, care how you will get through; how this providence will issue and how that will turn out; what God will do with you; cast all this care on Him, and every care that comes to you in the dealings of God with you. Say not perpetually, and with over-carefulness - "What shall we eat", "What shall we drink" or "Wherewithal shall we be clothed". For, He said, "the Gentiles seek after these things". "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you". What a mercy it is to believe that God cares for you! What a sweet faith that is that lays hold of this truth. God cares for the sparrows - "Ye are of more value than many sparrows".

Then he exhorts us in the text to "be sober, be vigilant" and

he gives a reason. "Because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour". "Be sober" Intoxication of the mind is an evil thing; care, surfeiting, drunkenness. And against this condition, which brings so much trouble, so many fears, and such dishonour to God, the Apostle here by the Spirit exhorts. We have an adversary, alert, ceaselessly plotting, aiming at our destruction. He is hungry, hungry for dust. "Dust shall be the serpent's meat". The serpent is the same as here with "the lion", hungry, and he seeks to devour people. He walketh about and roars in his hunger, seeking this sinner and that sinner; this timid child of God; this poor feeble believer; this soul that can scarcely maintain its hold, that is saying, frequently, 'There is a lion in the street; I shall be destroyed'. Says the Apostle "Be vigilant", watch this adversary. In this sobriety and vigilance, I understand more than merely and always looking at the adversary. I rather take it to include a regard to the defences to see if they are right, to see what weak places there are. For the eye not to be always and exclusively fixed on this adversary, but be rather, from time to time, looking upon that that will be a defence against him when he comes. Taking this large and wide view of the case, let us first of all see what it is to be sober with respect to our defences. There is a place of munitions, there is a defence, there is a watch tower, to which God's people are led from time to time. "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe".

In the first place, be sober with respect to your faith in God. Weak faith means a great deal of shaking, and faith is weak when its proper object is out of sight. Temptation, for the man has two objects. The devil, in tempting, has two objects. First, he tempts with respect to God. He accuses God to men. Then in the second place he accuses men to God. He accused God to Eve, for there was a deep accusation couched in his word, his question to her - "Hath God said?" It was an accusation in the form of an insinuation, cruel, invidious, insinuation. "Hath God said?" That found a lodging in her mind and she became weak accordingly, and fell. When it pleases God to help us by faith

to steadfastly eye the Saviour, that is a great strength. We can see then that the place of our munitions is strength. The Rock of Ages, above the waves, above the storms, the difficulties, the weaknesses, the readiness to give way and to shake. Above all things is this blessed place of our munitions. Well, brethren, may the Lord give us to be sober with respect to Himself.

First, with respect to His love, which changes not. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". Now the old enemy will seek to weaken this and destroy your hope and confidence in this unchangeable love of God. Trouble comes and some sin prevails and distracts and distresses. Doubt lodges in the heart. The more the sin is looked at and the more the trouble is regarded, the weaker the soul is in this particular. It is as if the enemy will come and accuse God in your conscience and say "Hath He said?" Hath He said it to you; has He loved you; has He shown any sign or token of His love to you? Is this an evidence of His love, this trouble that has come? Is this a sign of His love that He has allowed sin in some form to prevail and darken your soul and blacken and defile your conscience? Now at such a time as this it is a mercy to be enabled to view this unchangeable love of God. "Whom once He loves He never leaves". "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". "Since in love I took thee in, My promise I'll fulfil". "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee". Judge not My heart by My hand; judge not My salvation of your soul by My dealings with you in providence. Judge not what I have purposed by some things that I am doing. Judge not that I have left you to ruin eternally because I have left you in the hand of affliction for a time." "Be sober". Insobriety leads to weakness and staggering and reeling to and fro; leads away from the throne of grace and away from that solid standing which the gospel has afforded to the saints in all ages, and has afforded even to you, who may now be staggering.

Be sober with respect to God in the covenant. The covenant of grace has in it inestimable, unchangeable blessings;

inalienable blessings, and it is sealed with the blood of Christ. It is called by the Spirit a testament, and perhaps this is one of the reasons why it is called a testament, that every testament has to be signed. The testator signs his testament or his Will and Jesus Christ signed and sealed the covenant, the testament, with His own blood. Now my beloved friends, when we can eye this covenant, when the revelation that God has given of it is set before faith, and put, as it were, into the very hand of faith to look at, it gives very gracious stability. What harm can reach that soul that is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord God; that soul that has an interest in the testament that is sealed with blood, the blood of Jesus Christ? Here is stability, here is standing, here is strength; nowhere else. And the enemy loses power, his roaring loses its terror, when this is viewed, for it is seen that the covenant not only has inalienable blessings, but also it has the rod, and this will prevent that fear and quaking and giving way that so often some of us have been subject to. Says the Lord in the covenant - "If His children forsake My law and walk not in My statutes, then will I visit their transgressions with a rod and their iniquities with stripes." So if you find, dear friends, the rod upon you, may you be sober, and acknowledge the hand that has laid it on and the sin that has brought it. But, at the same time, may you eye the unalterable settlements and arrangements of God in the new covenant, whereby He has said - "I will never leave thee. Thou art graven on the palms of My hands. Thy walls, from the remembrance of thee, are continually before Me". Be sober in this matter, in eyeing God.

Look at His promise and be sober with respect to it. Oh but it is contradicted! Who says so? Providence. But is providence an interpreter always of the promise of God? Has God anywhere said that His providence shall be a full interpreter of any promise of His? Why, if so, what a case would Abraham have been in for many years! The promise was made to him and yet he had to wait more than 20 years for its fulfilment. The providence of God and the promise of God sometimes seem to clash and the one appears to contradict the other. But the son came, and when God's time comes to fulfil a word to you in providence, no

natural impossibility shall ever hinder. Therefore with respect to the promise, look at this - "All the promises of God in Christ are yea and amen unto the glory of God by us".

Be sober with respect to the power of God. What can He not do? Oh but this mighty thing that has come; this uncontrollable circumstance that controls me, hurries me here and there, and I am afraid! Ah, but the Lord sitteth upon the flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Can a whole nation in the wilderness be sustained for a whole month if God should gather all the sustaining animals and birds to feed them? Moses asked that question for, at that moment, he was not sober. His eye was on the multitude of people to be fed and on the apparent insufficiency of creation to supply food for them. But then God drew his eye from all that and said - "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" What cannot the Lord do? He commands deliverance for Jacob.

Ah be sober with respect to the omniscience, the wisdom of God, the omnipresence of God. He surrounds His children. "The Lord is round about His people as the mountains are round about Jerusalem." A wall of fire round about her is God. A wall of fire round about every individual believer is God, God in Christ. Therefore whatever ways the enemy may seek to come in, whatever temptations he may use, there is this great protection. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem so the Lord is round about them that fear Him."

Now brethren, "walk about Jerusalem, count the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks" and be sober with respect to the devil who can never enter. By the way that he comes to tempt, by the same shall he return. That great God who knows his rage will "put a hook into his nose". As it is said in the Scriptures - "he shall not shoot an arrow into the city". Be sober, look at your defences, my friends. When you look at your weakness may your eyes be turned to your strength. When you look at what readiness there is in you to fall, may you look by faith to Him who is "able to keep you from falling and to present you

faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy".

I said sobriety will be engaged at times in looking at weak places. It is not a wrong thing to find out the weak spots; it is a good thing. Have we no weak spots? Yes; therefore be sober with respect to this great thing that is weakness, namely indwelling sin. He is not a sober man who turns his eyes from this subject. He is not a sober, believing man, whose eyes, so to speak, refuse to look at this. Every child of God, taught of the Spirit, does regard what he is in himself. Sin is a subtle thing. It is called "a body of death". It is called "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts". Every wise man of God looks at this and if he does not he gets a fall by it. Then he knows it to his grief and shame. But regard it now; look at it; O how vulnerable we are here! What access the devil has to us! Our very bodily senses seem to be avenues for the enemy by which he may come into the citadel and assault us in our tenderest places. Therefore may we be sober with regard to sin in its deceitfulness, and it lies in the very heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Every man of God realises something of this, the terrible deceitfulness of his heart, working ceaselessly and often silently. Working so as even to deaden the sense of its presence. When permitted it will take advantage of God's goodness as Hart expresses it

The heart uplifts with God's own gifts
And makes e'en grace a snare

That will make a child of God believe that he needs the warning against turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. Sin in its subtlety is terrible.

"Be sober". Sobriety with regard to this will be that your faith will go to God and entreat Him in the language of the Psalmist "Let not iniquity have dominion over me". "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults". A few falls, such as God permits some to make, yea, all - and I am

not speaking of outward errors - a few falls by the power of this secret, this deceitful thing, sin, will make those who have had them afraid and make them understand a little of that - "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool". But, says Jeremiah - "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord", whose heart is straight here. Says God of some "Their heart was not right with God", and many a heart has had to say his heart has not been right with God. Like a deceitful bow, he has turned back in the day of battle. But now Satan will come here and say - "You see what you are; you see how you have yielded to sin, how you have followed the devices of your own heart. Can you deem yourself a Christian? Can you think that the fear of God is in you, that you ever were born again?" Now we need to be sober here. Be sober and remember - God help us to remember - that David, the man of God, was slain for a long time as to his stability; as to all tenderness of conscience; and perhaps largely, if not entirely, as to all secret exercise of prayer. How he fell! He better had had bow and arrow aimed at him, seeking his destruction on the battle-field, than have gone up to the top of his house on that fateful evening. May the Lord keep us from the deceitfulness of sin. We little know how it works or is working sometimes to get a fall, to bring us into ruin. Be sober with respect to this and remember that God says - "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" He shall be like the desert that knows not when heat comes and has drought upon him always.

"Be sober" with respect to the assaults of sin; open, violent assaults of sin. These are very largely in the form of unbelief and rebellion and lead to a very distinct neglect of the throne of God's heavenly grace and a walking foolishly. Ah my friends, if you have had falls, if your comforts have been devoured, if your peace has been trampled under foot by the wild beasts, the hungry roaring lion, you will know then, you will know what it is to suffer loss. Says the Scripture here - the Spirit, by the Apostle Peter - "Be sober". "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you". Think it not strange that this sin that is in your members should seek to have always its own way. Remember brethren, how sin is described in

the mind. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be". Think of it, meditate upon it. It will profit us to meditate upon this fearful thing - that our mind is enmity. You may catch an enemy, you may lead him captive, but when you have got enmity itself to deal with you have something even more than an enemy. An enemy may be destroyed but enmity itself, that lives. And this is one thing about which the people of God have some painful experience. It often assails the soul; sometimes in its tenderest joys, its sweetest enjoyments and comforts. Therefore, there is a need for this; watch this dreadful thing. When you are watching it the best and most effectual way of watching it, to a calm mind, is to have the atonement presented to you; to be eyeing that wondrous atonement that removes, not only the guilt of sin, but will break its power. That will bring a child of God from being an alien to friendship with God; from being a stranger and distant, to be near to God and a child of God. Be sober with respect to this.

Be sober with respect to the end of sin. What is to be the end of it? "Who", asks Paul, in his conflict, at the hands of sin, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He looks as it were everywhere. In himself, no hope there; to friends, no hope in them. What then? - "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin". And the victory is assured. "Be sober". O but my sin is so great! "Be sober", says Peter.

Now look at the enemy. "Knowing" he says - "Knowing that your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour". He sought to devour our first parents in Eden and he did devour their uprightness and brought them into ruin. He sought to devour Job, by accusing him to God. On two occasions he sought to devour David. He has again and again been seeking advantage against the child of God. He sought to destroy Jehoshaphat almost immediately upon Jehoshaphat's having a remarkable answer to prayer and a victory, for Jehoshaphat joined

himself to the king of Israel, who did wickedly, and made ships in which they were partners. But God marked it and sent a man of God to him and said - "The Lord hath broken thy works", and the ships were all broken. What is to be the end of sin, my friends? Destruction, destruction, destruction! And what is to be the end of the devil with regard to the church? "God shall bruise Satan under your feet and that shortly". God shall do it. Therefore, when he roars; when he says - "You are a hypocrite" - when he comes against you because of this sin and that iniquity; when he says - "You have disbelieved God; you have heaped dishonour on His Name; you are the weakest of all professors; you are no professor; God is not with you; you are not near Him; says Peter, - "He is your adversary, resist him". Be sober; listen not to all his temptations, as if he spoke the truth, for he is both a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

I must not keep on longer this morning. May the Lord give us the mind, the sober mind, here enjoined. May He help us very narrowly to regard what He says, for we need, we greatly need, this sobriety. Although we have not open persecution, we have a body of sin and death and a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Therefore may we not forget this word - "Be sober, be vigilant, knowing that your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith"- knowing that you are not alone in these sufferings - "knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world".

AMEN.