

SB
515

1365 gr.
La 1812

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 3 November 1926

2 CORINTHIANS 5 v 20

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as
though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in
Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"

I shewed, as enabled, on Lord's Day evening last, the ground of this exhortation, that it was the great Reconciler who besought these rebels, these irregular Christians at Corinth, members of the Church there, to walk orderly and not to walk in rebellion against their God and Saviour. It is a wonderful thing to see in Holy Scripture by faith the ground of all exhortations. You will never find one exhortation or precept or statute or holy commandment addressed to the church without a good foundation or reason and generally you will find it to be this, that God addresses them, as His Own people, as the Father of His heavenly family, to whom it belongs to give rules for the government of His house. These Corinthian Christians, as I mentioned on Lord's Day evening, though greatly blessed, having the testimony of Christ in them and confirmed in them and enriched in all utterance, and with many remarkable gifts, became very irregular in their worship, became defiled by lying, a gross sin; rebellious by disregarding Apostolic authority, and by deforming the beautiful worship of God. These sins, the Holy Ghost, by Paul, pointed out to them and in this verse and its context we have this amazing thing, that God raises up men, makes ministers of them, and sends them to be ambassadors for Himself. For Himself He will have them speak. It appertains to an ambassador to maintain the honour of the King in whose Name he is sent; that is his first business. He will have credentials and present them and his great business, his one object above all others, is to maintain the honour, the dignity, the majesty, of the King in whose Name he is sent, by whom he is sent. He represents the King, represents the dignity and majesty of the King, and the greatness of the kingdom. A very solemn consideration this to one who realises his own insufficiency and lack of everything necessary for so high an office as that of an ambassador. You who

hear cannot understand it; you are not able to enter into it; what exercises a minister must have, if he is, to speak as the Apostle does in another place in this epistle, a steward of God, a steward of the mysteries of God, and, as such, it is required in him that he be found faithful. In another place he is a minister of the mysteries of Christ; is to speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom. And here he is an ambassador who is to stand up in the Name of the great King, the Most High God. He has authority, he has right to do it, even though some shall say, as of Paul, his speech is contemptible, still he has authority to stand up and say I speak to you, not in my own name, but in the Name of the Most High God. This makes hearing very solemn. One may come and say, I want the man to trace out my path. You may be in a very bad path and if the man does what you want him to do, trace out your path, you may take from that a very improper comfort. You may abuse that; you may say, well if what he says is true and if he is going to heaven, as I believe he is, then I am going to heaven, and that may be a very bad use that you may make of a sermon. Rather may the Lord grant that you may again and again come with the feeling, may the Lord help the minister to lift up the standard, and if the standard is above my own attainments mercifully bring me to it. If I do not know the King as He is represented, may the Holy Ghost teach me. If I have not the marks of a citizen, may He give me them. If I am not in the family to my own experience, and do not know the ways of the house and the mercies of the family and the provision and the table and the riches, then may the Lord open them to me. And if that be your aim in coming, if that be your spirit from time to time, then you wont want to be flattered, you wont want to have a wrong bottom on which to put your feet, a wrong object on which to gaze, but desire to have Himself, the blessed God, made known to you; and if you are wrong, to have the wrong pointed out to you, and the evil pardoned and your soul put right. I remember that on Lord's Day, I spoke to you about the good it might be to you if you could at any time take up the Word of God and read through these two epistles and watch narrowly and observe as closely as you could do it, how God speaks to these people, pointing out to them their wrongs, tells them of their sins, their irregularities, and you might find, in reading, as I trust I have found in doing so, conviction, conviction that you could not run away from, arrows you could not pull out of your conscience, views that you could not and would not wish to get rid of,

of sins as done by you, and of Him against whom they have been done. If a ministry is to edify there must be a foundation on which to build. Now here then we have the exhortation or beseeching of God through the ambassador of the people in whom there were wrongs, to be reconciled to Him. We beseech you. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" and there were two points I named, only two, on Lord's Day evening. First, be reconciled to God's way laid down in the Scriptures for His people with regard to prayer. Nature says, I do not want to pray. It says it in a professor, a child of God. An independent spirit, a preference for some book rather than the closet; a preference for your own wisdom rather than seeking wisdom from above. Everything in nature bends itself against prayer. Grace says to those in whom it is and who need it to be again and again conveyed to them, "Pray without ceasing". "Be careful for nothing" - which is natural to us all; that is be not over careful or swallowed up of care, drunken, surfeited with it; be not careful thus - "but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God" and mind this - I said it to you and I repeat it - do not try to make anything a substitute for secret prayer. If you do, leanness will come, and if you feel rebellious against this life of dependence, still God says be reconciled to it. Better be with Him, against yourself, than with yourself and against God.

And the second point I named was love. Walk in love to Him and to His ways, to His Word, to His people. 'Tis a wide thing and one could only just hint at it and can only now just name it.

The first point I would name to you this evening is this, be reconciled to God's way of living, namely by faith. Faith in Him is a great gift. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast". "Now the just shall live by faith". That is God's way. Reason, corrupted reason is another way, the way of the world. Pride is another way, self reliance. Love of ease is another way, different from enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Therefore we need this exhortation - when the whole bent of our fallen nature is against believing - to be reconciled to God in this way in which He will have His people walk. "We walk by faith, not by sight". Unbelief is natural to us in our fallen state. Unbelief is disbelief

of divine revelation, of divine manifestations of the divine word of Jesus Christ, of who He is and what He has done and is doing. Unbelief is a most dreadful foe of man, the most wicked enemy of God perpetually opposing Him, though it looks the best thing, and sometimes it looks the most humble spirit, because it says you are not fit as you are. Sometimes it rises in fearful rebellion; sometimes it goes forth in a way of direct opposition; it neither wants God or will seek Him. This spirit is natural to fallen man. Unbelief is in all men; an atheist and a believer. It is the same in both of them but with a very great difference; the atheist, like Pharaoh, says "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" The poor doubting believer says, "What profit is there if I should pray unto Him?" (Job 21.15) That is the same today. It may reign in this chapel in some of you even though you do not know it. It reigns in the world; it reigns in the market, in the factory, in the home; it reigns everywhere where grace is not. It is God's foe; it was breathed as a foul air, as a deadly poison, into the pure mind of Eve and she, being deceived, received it, and she put it to Adam when she pointed out to him the desirableness of the forbidden fruit and he, with his eyes open, for he was not deceived, took it. Both of them came under the power of unbelief. This awful spirit is the most barrenising, confusing, hardening, driving spirit to be under. It will take the form of rebellion, of lust, of pride. It is like that dreadful thing that can assume various shapes and speak in various voices and tones. It assumes an imperiousness in, as it were, commanding a poor child of God to go this way against God. In the child of God this awful spirit is broken as to its dominion. Sometimes it has God for its object and says, He is harsh. Sometimes it has self for its object and says, you are not fit for God. Sometimes it runs away, as it were, from holiness as revealed and sometimes it starts up as a pharisee. Always, it hates God, but does not mind how it works, or by what means it can gain advantage against a child of God. It will take up family care, and say you will never bear these things that come upon you. Sometimes it will take a little poverty, and say this is more than God's fulness, for it is very bold and impudent when it speaks. Sometimes it looks at the cross and says I wont take it up. Mind that. O be careful about saying you wont do what God says you are to do, for He will make you do and then you will be sorry that ever you rebelled against Him. Well, I need not occupy any longer time in speaking of this awful spirit. I have suffered so much from it; I have

suffered so much from its murmuring, its lack of observation, its determination to do this and not to do that, that I would always, if I could, have my foot on it, and I will warn you against it. It may look so good sometimes that you wont suspect it to be unbelief. Now this word then may be said to you when you are walking in unbelief - Be reconciled to God. He has marked one path for his children to walk in, yea He has cast up one path and way, cast up a new and living way to God; this is believing. Believe in the Lord said a prophet to Jehoshaphat and you shall prosper. Believe His prophet and you shall be established. 'Tis a great Object for faith; God is its proper Object; God in Christ revealed in Holy Scripture and revealed to a sinner's faith is the Object and that faith will say to the man in whom it is and is working - Your poverty; what is that? What is your weakness? Nay, what are your sins to Him? What are your failings to His faithfulness? What is your guilt to the righteousness of Christ, and what your defilement to His cleansing blood? And what are your difficulties to His wisdom and all your inability to His power? and what is the enemy's strength to the strength of your Captain, the Captain of your salvation who shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. O what an Object faith has, what an Object. If we could only live looking at Him; if we could only live, as the Apostle Paul says in the Hebrews - "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself"; consider Him who was bruised, wounded and chastised for your sin; consider Him who, in the fulness of His love and the plenitude of His prayer in heaven, says, depend on Me, Come to Me, lean on Me, live on Me, hang about Me; "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" - what different people we should be. Now do you fret against this? Faith eyes a promise; faith believes that a promise made by God pledges God to the person to whom He has made it. Just think of this. O believer, what a God you have. Now unbelief goes just the other way and says, what a plight you are in; who can bring you out of it? What is this hunger? you will die of hunger. This thirst, it will consume you; these difficulties, they will overcome you. Unbelief is just like the ten false, wicked spies; it always brings up a false report of the kingdom and, of the land; it says we shall never get there. And faith says, Caleb and Joshua-like, let us go up; we are able, for the Lord is with us; that is what faith says. Now when you find unbelief struggling, and it will often be with you; it will never leave you, as to its nature and will often be with you in

its working; when you find that, God give you power to remember this, that He has ordained one way of living only, only one way, and that is on Himself by faith. Whenever faith is, under the anointing of the Spirit, strengthened again and again for this and for that, then what Paul says about it is found to be true: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and when you get that you will see this - there is a great God to live on; there is a fountain to draw from; there is omnipotence to lean on; there is wisdom to follow; there is faithfulness to depend upon and to lead you to expect fulfilment of promises made over to you. There is a good God to bear with you, infinite compassions to help you again and again and a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and this faith, O may the Lord give you and give to me in greater measure. We may well say "Lord increase our faith", make us faithful unto death. Lord, deliver us from that vile spirit of unbelief that always leads astray, that brings us into utter confusion, that barrenises us, that leads us the way that is against God's way. Be reconciled to this my friends. You will find that every step of faith has some comfort in it sooner or later, as every step of unbelief has confusion in it. You will find every motion of faith exalts the Lord and brings you to Him and the opposite is what unbelief does. You will find that faith takes God at His word and says sometimes to Him, Do as Thou hast said; Jacob had these two spirits in him. I shall one day fall, he said. I shall come to my grave by all these things which are against me. But when he came into trouble he said, Lord, Thou didst say return to thy land and I will be with thee. Now here is Esau; he is coming with 400 men and I am afraid of him. I deserve his anger, I deserve his sword; I am afraid of him; deliver me from Esau, my brother; Thou didst say. And this is faith's work - Thou didst say I will be with thee. If you have got a hold of God that is what your faith will do sometimes - Thou didst say. Faith has a backward look in this respect. At a time like this it goes back and fetches up, as it were, the old promise and says, Lord, did this come from Thee? Didst Thou say this to me? Do as Thou didst say; do as Thou hast said. You find something that God gave to you. Can you find it in your heart, does it come up into your memory, do you remember how He drew you here and spoke to you there and taught you to walk, and took the yoke of your jaw and laid meat to you? Do you find these things? Now, says the Apostle, do not walk in rebellion, do not walk in confusion, but

just walk as God taught you to walk and wait on Him. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait I say on the Lord. One of faith's works is this, to fight. "Fight the good fight of faith" A fight has always one great object in it, namely the death of the enemy. It has another object in it, either to retain what an enemy seeks to rob you of, or to get something which you feel belongs to you, that you ought to have. Now your faith, when right, and rightly exercised, will have these things before it. Here is this devil within you, this awful sin in you; here is this propensity of your nature, this darling lust, this master sin. You have struggled with it and failed; you have wrestled with it and have fallen under it; you have seen the wrong of it and done it again and again. Now God says, this is My way; not for you to fight yourself, but for Me to fight your battles for you; for you to come to Me. This is My way; this is how I will have you live. Come to Me with all that you have got to trouble you and these devils in your nature that you cannot wrestle with without getting a fall; come to Me. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; the battle is the Lord's, not yours. The Captain of your salvation, He did engage to bring you through, to fight your enemies. Therefore you are to live by faith, walk by faith, pray by faith, hang on God by faith and by faith plead His faithful word. This is good walking. Says the Apostle to Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". Says he to the Ephesians "Put on the whole armour of God", withstand the devil. Resist him, says James, and he will flee from you. Now here then we have the thing that faith has to do, to fight. More or less distinctly every child of God finds this, that those steps toward heaven which he takes, he takes in the face of opposition; that any victory he gets, he gets by the Strength of Israel, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; that all the peace he ever feels, he feels by faith, coming through the atonement and that the supplies he receives, he receives by faith, going to God with an empty hand and a pleading heart, pleading that only pleadable plea, the blood of Jesus Christ. This is intended for our instruction. Be reconciled to God, for all opposition to Him and to His ways, and all opposition in a church to what is proper - every individual member has more or less to do with this - everything of a wrong kind comes from unbelief, that strong limb of the old man, as Philpot calls it; that bitter fountain that we find in our nature bearing, as again and again it does on its

bosom, so to speak - when it sends its streams over us - nothing but death; death everywhere. O, my dear fellow believers, God's living family, we have an enemy and we shall never get rid of it but we are called upon to fight him. And if you say you cannot fight, you say what is not true, for faith is that spirit that will continually, as strengthened, fight to get to God or hold what you have got. Now it comes to this sometimes, that our unbelief is very gross. It is like a direct flying in the face of God's testimonies. If anyone were to come to you when you are in a good state and say, now let us talk about God's dealings with us, you might be able, you would be able, by the Lord's help, to say, well He said that to me; He did that for me; He brought me out of that trouble; He purged my conscience from guilt; He gave me a sense of forgiveness; He drew me to Him. He knew my backwardness, so He said, Come, eat O friend, and drink, yea drink abundantly O beloved. He brought me out of bitter bondage into sweet liberty. He brought me out of my darkness and ignorance and gave me a sweet view and gracious, saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and He has wrought many things for me. You could say such things; I could. We get into darkness; there is a cessation of the gracious operations of the Spirit. We vex Him, we rebel; He is turned to be our enemy. God covers the face of His throne with a thick cloud; He makes the clouds the dust of His feet; He is silent to us for a time, and now is the opportunity of this enemy and now may be the manifestation of our weakness and our want of steadfastness. Here, I say, our unbelief may be very gross, for you may question everything. You may say, I do not know, I am not sure, I cannot hold on, I am ready to give all up that He ever said to me, as I thought. "Fight the good fight of faith". Do not fly in the face of that good God who has done so much for you, said so many kind things to you, wrought so blessedly for you, delivered you out of so many troubles and called you to His footstool again and again, and let mercies fall upon your soul like sweet, soft, refreshing showers of rain. Unbelief, that bitter foe, that wicked spirit, that opponent to God and enemy to your own peace, that is the spirit that makes you speak thus. Now faith would say this: I will wait for the Lord that hideth Himself from the house of Jacob. Yea, and if God has given Jacob up to the spoiler, then faith will say "I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him". I will wait for the Lord and even though I fall I shall arise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Faith

will say "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". And here I would say this, this faith working in the dark, waiting for God, committing your way to God, waiting on Him for the fulfilment of the promises, of which you are enabled to put Him in mind, this faith honours Him. It is nice, it is pleasant, to walk in daylight, but if you walk in the night, and you can say now Lord, as I am enabled, I will depend on Thee, and take my steps carefully, that honours Him. You say, I do not like this way. Says Paul, as an ambassador, I speak to you in the Name of the Lord Jesus, be reconciled to His way. Is it much, that He, who has chosen our inheritance, should chose our way to it? Is it much, that He, who has given you heaven, should decide for you how you go through this world? Is it much, that He, who has provided an eternal rest for you, shall decide how much burden you shall bear and what afflictions you shall feel and what sorrow? O may we have faith enough to say:

How harsh soe'er the way
Dear Saviour still lead on,
Nor leave us till we say
"Father Thy will be done."
At most we do but taste the cup,
For Thou alone has drunk it up.

O what a wicked thing this unbelief is; what a blessed thing this faith is. I wish I could set them both before you as they should be set before people; the blackness, the vileness, the grossness of unbelief, and the sweetness and the brightness, the blessedness and the purity of faith as coming from God, as working to God, as depending, as pleading His unbreakable promise, for God cannot lie. Has He passed over to you one word? Has He ever shined on you in the face of Jesus Christ, so as to give you the knowledge of Christ in your heart? Has He done such and such things and will He disown those works? He could not dishonour Himself. Therefore I would say, dear friends in the Lord, hang about Him.

Depend on Him, thou canst not fail;
Make all thy wants and wishes known;
Fear not, His merits must prevail;

and faith says, I believe it.

Be reconciled to God in respect of the rough and thorny way. Remember what the Lord said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". Do you look for a smooth path, a life in which shall be no pressure, no threshing machine to separate the chaff from the wheat? What foolishness it is in us to do that when the whole of the Scriptures will tell us that it is to be the other way and when experience, as far as we have gone, tells us this is God's way. Says the Apostle, walk in it. Remember this first, the truth of God's Word; it can never speak anything but truth; it is truth; it is the truth and every testimony of the Bible is firm, true, unshakeable. Then if one testimony is this - "In the world ye shall have tribulation" - what folly it is in us to look for anything else. If the church were in a better state than she is, and one day will be, then she would find more anger, persecution and trouble in the world than at the present, I was going to say, is possible. The reason we have so little trouble in the world is because we are so like it, and this ought to be a very serious consideration for us. Must you go through tribulation? Says nature, I will never bear it; I wont endure it. That is foolishness because you cannot cast off what God has laid on. But faith says, I will bear it; I will bear it as the Lord helps me. Yea, the struggle of faith is to say, "Thy will be done". Must you live in a sense of emptiness? That is God's way, because it is only as we feel empty that we can look to, and value, the fulness of Christ and endeavour to draw from it. Must you be empty? Says nature, I hate this way, but faith says, it is the best way. God gave Adam a stock and Adam quickly spent it up and ruined himself and all of us. God gave grace to Christ for us and Christ keeps the stock and you, if you belong to Him, will find that the honourable life of begging is the best life for you. Begging mercy every hour, drawing from that fulness you cannot exhaust, from that holiness that will make you holy, that strength that will make you strong, and that joy that will make you glad. Walk in this way, and if you rebel against it you will find this: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft", and God resents it, and when He resents it by withholding a supply, as to your sense of it, then you will understand what it is to be hungerbitten, and for the bones which were not seen to be sticking out and you will find that God is a jealous God. I hope the

Lord will give you even to know it more than I know it, but I thank Him that I know He is a jealous God. I bless His Name for teaching me that, so that I would come to Him and pray that that imperious love of His may bring me to draw out of the fulness that is in Him

A fulness resides in Jesus our Head

Faith will tell you this is best, this is best. And again, what ignorance there is in us, what ignorance, and we are not to be wise in ourselves. "If any man will be wise in this world let him become a fool that he may be wise." Now, for instance, if, in any difficulty that you come into, you feel somehow I will manage to get through this, what is Christ's wisdom to you? what is His counsel to you? Nothing. But if you say, Lord, I lift up my soul to Thee; show me the way wherein I should walk, then His wisdom will be your guide. Yea, He will say, sooner or later, in some manner, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Walk in the atonement; walk in providence as I lead; walk tenderly in My holy fear. Be careful of your steps, of your spirit, of your aims, of your designs, and of the end you have in view. And as you are enabled so to walk, you will find this true: "I will guide Thee with Mine eye". Yea, He may say, "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule who has no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near to thee". You will say, do not let me be the rash horse; keep me from the stubbornness of the mule. Enable me to walk humbly and tenderly and follow Thee. If ever you go forward without the light of divine wisdom you will walk in darkness. If you can follow Christ you will walk in the light. "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness but have the light of life." Do you fret? do you rebel? Be reconciled to this way - Faith in the Scriptures. You say, I do not doubt the Scriptures. Do you believe them? Do you believe them to have come from God? Do you believe that their authority can never, never be weakened; that their power is a plenary power, so to speak? that God has put Himself, as it were, in the Word? Now this word is to be our guide and our support and our meat and our drink and its precepts are to be observed too. Its precepts - you say, I want promises. You do not want promises in a right feeling if you speak so of precepts. Mind this, dear friends, the Word of God is full of divine meaning and mercy to all His people and precepts are useful;

statutes are limitations, admonitions, tell us and warn us of dangers. Do not make your consciences your own arbiters. If you do so you will go clean contrary to God. If a man says, my conscience does not condemn me, that wont prove that he is right or that his conscience is good. A man may have such a hardened conscience as that it wont talk to him at all and God does not make it a reprover to him. But if this Book is made to speak in your consciences and guide your steps then you will go well. Beware of putting your own consciences in the place of God's authoritive Word. I beseech you my brethren to do these things, says the Apostle; be reconciled to God. He has reconciled you to Himself in the body of His flesh through death; He has done all that for you that is expressed in the Scriptures, when Christ said "It is finished". He gave His life for you, He bought you with His blood, He has gone again to heaven to prepare a place for you. Now do not set your nature up against Him, do not walk contrary to Him. If you do, He will walk contrary to you; you will find it so. I have learned a little of this so I can speak to you and as a poor minister I ought to do. I have learned this: "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward. With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure". You lift yourself up as against God; you shake your staff and say, "Why hast Thou made me thus", you will find He will resent it. A wicked man can do it and never have a bit of trouble about it in this world; a saint cannot do that. An ungodly man can blaspheme and God never let him know anything about His anger against that until His anger falls on him in a terrible and everlasting power of destruction, but a saint cannot feel and entertain for a moment any blasphemy that his nature may spit out against God and not suffer. You will never find that it is easy; if you entertain anything wrong in your minds, I tell you you will find God resent it and you will one day smart for it. So, says the Apostle, be reconciled to this good God in the way He has cast up. This believing way, this waiting way, this submissive way, this humble, humbling way; be reconciled to it. And it means, in a word, that the sceptre of Jesus Christ wielded in the conscience by the eternal Spirit revealing Him and His authority is to be the only sceptre we are to own. Own no other; His is the authority; His is the rule; His Word is to be the guide and Himself the great end.

Rebellious thou hast been (O,what a truth)
And art rebellious still

What a sad state indeed, but He says

But since in love I took thee in
My promise I'll fulfil

He will never repent, blessed be His Name; He will never repent, but He does say, now lay down your weapons; I have nothing against you except this irregularity in your heart and life. Lay down your weapons; I am your God; I am your Friend; be reconciled to Me, in My way, in My rule, in My disposals of you. This is a full word; I am not fit to handle it except in the poorest way, but God can make it useful to you. I have brought it to your notice; may the Lord give you a heart to attend to it and remember that whenever you agree with Him you will walk together. But remember the question "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" And if you say, I am going this way and you belong to the Lord, and He says you are to go that way, so long as your determination is permitted to rule, He will walk contrary to you. The Lord help us to remember what He says, and fall under it.

AMEN.