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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 22 May 1927

2 PETER 3 verses 17 and 18

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

This second Epistle is a very solemn one; it repeats things that are known. It exhorts the saints in respect of their graces. It prophesies of evil that is to come by the creeping into the Church of ungodly men, and of their bringing in damnable heresies, exposing the simple-hearted people of God to grave danger. One danger they are not in, that is of the danger of hell. No sheep in Christ's hand will ever be plucked out of that hand. No redeemed sinner will ever be in hell. No new-born soul can ever die spiritually. But between a child of God and heaven, between the Church militant and the triumphant state which awaits her are innumerable enemies and dangers, deaths, temptations and with the saints much weakness, ignorance, foolishness, corruption, so as that to them the way is very dangerous. The snares are innumerable and many of them hidden away from the view of the poor pilgrim. And thus are needed - God saw the need of them - the exhortations, both of this Epistle and throughout the Word of God, and it will be our wisdom and mercy if we are enabled to take heed to our steps, to take heed unto the condition of our souls, from time to time.

The Apostle here, in the first place, addresses the people of God as knowing the things which relate to them and these things may be divided into two, two classes. First, the things which they know experimentally. They know, for instance, the Son of God. "We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life". But we know

Him only in part. Faith never gets a perfect view of the Lord Jesus. That perfect view of Him is reserved for heaven. It cannot be had here. We know in part; we are but children in knowledge and many of the things concerning Christ are hard to be uttered seeing we are dull of hearing. But to know His Person by faith, to know His fountain of infinite merit, to know His righteousness as that which alone can justify, to know His grace by which sin is subdued and does not, cannot, shall not, have dominion, to know His intercession in heaven, whereby He is able to save us as we come unto God by Him, to know Him thus in these things is indeed an infinite mercy. Knowledge may be little, and if it is so the effect is but little. You will always find that the effect is according to the measure of knowledge that we have. We shall always find it so. If we have a singularly clear view of Him by faith the effect will be equal to it in the humbling of our souls in their prostration before the Lord in adoration, admiration and worship; in trust, in confidence, in humility and in separation from the world. You will always find that just as you are favoured with some knowledge of Christ so you will find that the effect of it is quite proportionate. And this, if we were enabled to make a rule of, would help us at times and make us very fearful lest, knowing Him but little, we should find it very easy - alas, for some of us it has been so in a painfully marked degree - very easy to turn our backs on Him. The more we know of Him the more we shall be bound to Him, the more we shall be like Him. The deeper our knowledge of the infinite sea of His merit, the stronger will be our desire to bathe therein while we live. The clearer our vision of faith of Him as now He is in heaven, a Priest crowned and on His throne, the more will our desires be fervent in seeking to be with Him; even by faith to walk with Him. But it is a great thing to know even a very little concerning this blessed Lord Jesus Christ. May we not fall to thinking we are very poor because we do not possess millions. We may be rich, rich in faith, even though our knowledge of Him who is the true Object of faith is not remarkable, profound and powerful as we would wish. It becomes often a very penetrating and powerful question, what we know of Him, to know whom, with the Father who sent Him, is life eternal. May we never forget that all that is vital in the soul, all that is effectual to sanctification, all that makes separation from the world a necessity and really a pleasure, all comes from the Lord Jesus. If that be rooted in us as a divine

truth it will have a good effect upon us. But if we are left to think that this piece of religion and that notion of God and of Christ and that acquired knowledge of Him that we may have can do us good and save us from any evil, we are labouring under a very grave misconception. May the Lord save us from it if we are under it. You know this then. Seeing ye know this. In his first Epistle the Apostle tells the people about their election and how that they are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ whom, not seeing, they love. He tells them that they are predestinated to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away and that, believing in the Son of God, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Now if we have some such experience of that it may be said to us, ye know these things. You are not a stranger to these heavenly truths. O, sinner, you are not a stranger to that great God who raised Jesus from the dead, set Him at His right-hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power. You have seen Him there. Ye know these things.

And secondly, you know what it is to receive the Word of God, the gospel. Ye have received it as the Thessalonians received it, not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance, and in much affliction. It is great to put your hand on the Scripture and on some passages and say, these came into our souls with a power. We felt a life, a light, a gracious influence that we knew, we knew all came from God, so that we know the Scripture is given by inspiration of God; that holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Ye know what it is to have a prospect, bright and blessed, beautiful prospect set before thee in the gospel in the Person of the Lord Jesus. It is a prospect; O, it is a wonderful prospect. Take it as it is expressed in Christ's own Word to His disciples. "Where I am there shall also My servant be". Here we are afflicted, mortal, subject to many changes, and sorrows, pains and difficulties. We know not what awaits us, even tomorrow. No, we know not what an hour may bring forth; change and decay stamped on everything. But there is a prospect beyond this poor state. "Where I am". I am in the midst of My Father's throne. I sit upon the throne having overcome and to you who overcome will I grant to sit with Me in My throne even as I also overcame and am sat down with My Father in His

throne. And this relates, not to the soul only, but also to the body, for it is written that Christ shall change our vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. And John, speaking of the same thing, said - "We know not what we shall be but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is". This, O, my dear friends in the Lord, this is the prospect and it is known by faith. We see in part; then we shall see Him as He is. We know in part; then shall we know even as we are known. Here we get a sip; there drink endless pleasures in. Here, a passing view, a vision of faith; there an endless immediate sight of that blessed One in whom all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells. Here a touch; there everlasting with Him who leads His people to living fountains of waters. Here we are sick. Soul sickness is a disease we carry with us here. Here we are incapable of bearing very much. I think we could bear very little of the glory of the cross in this, our frail condition, but there it will be bearable in all its fulness. Yea, it will fill all His people with eternal bliss. And it may be truly said we know these things if we are born again and taught by the Holy Spirit. Seeing ye know these things.

That is the first, if I may use the word again, the first class or kind of knowledge that the saints have. That is to say, it is a very feeble word concerning that great matter of the knowledge of the saints. It is an experimental knowledge which they possess. And the second kind is this, that trouble is foretold, dangers are spoken of, and the Apostle, by inspiration, said he would endeavour that after his decease the people should have these things before them. "Knowing that shortly I must put off this, my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shewed me", but I will endeavour after my decease you shall not be in ignorance of the dangers that confront you, that are to come to you. It was the same with Paul. Bidding the Ephesian elders farewell, he told them to take heed to the Church of God over which the Lord had made them overseers and to feed them, watch over them, for, said he, I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter. Yea, of your own selves, he said, evil men shall arise. These things may be said to be only in prophecy at the time that they were written, given as a warning, but they have been very terribly fulfilled in the church of God in the past in all the persecutions

that the Papists inflicted on the poor saints, when she made herself drunk with their blood. But there are still dangers. Every Church of Christ and the whole Church of Christ will find it to be so. There are dangers. Ungodly men, men putting on the garb of religion, teachers of religion, teaching infidelity in denying the Lord that bought them, as it is said. They were, by the efficacy of an external religion, separate from the world in a sense, but they brought in damnable heresies and doctrines of devils in denying, as the Socinians did and do, in denying the eternal Deity of Christ; in denying, as many do, His precious birth of the virgin Mary. In denying the effect of His blessed atonement and saying justification is an impossibility. In denying the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, as many do today. What dangers there are. Some may say, but these are too gross for us to be entangled and hurt by. We do not know what is too evil for us to receive if we be left. What is there too gross and wicked for us to do if we be left? Error is very subtle; its influence very insidious, and it is a great mercy that God has warned His people as He has in this Epistle and other places of the evils that are to come to the people of God. Though we have not experienced them we may be said to know them if we have paid any attention to the Scriptures which foretell them. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before"; before they happen to you. Seeing you know they are to come; that I, the servant of the Lord, inspired, foretell them, beware. You will never be able to plead ignorance of the evils that are to come if you pay attention to the Word of the living God. Beware; take heed. Christ says, "Take heed what ye hear" Also "Take heed how ye hear". Not only be careful about the doctrine you listen to, but also be careful of the spirit in which you listen to it. These things are set before us by that one Word of Christ "Take heed how ye hear. Take heed what ye hear". "Beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked", lest some error should steal in upon your spirits. Great and grave error of doctrine may not assail your ears, but a subtle spirit of error may come and steal in upon your souls and that will lead you painfully, as you will find, lead you away from your stedfastness.

Beware, in the first place, lest anything should come against that faith that has fastened in the Person and grace of the Lord Jesus. Everything that in any degree, no matter how small, affects

you as against a gracious hope and humble confidence and a sincere cleaving to the Lord Jesus is to be indeed shunned. It may not seem to some that they need to be so exhorted, but the Holy Ghost has seen fit to put this before us. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" You saw Christ crucified in your midst. You received the gospel; you received it in power. Christ got your hearts, had your attention, and your affections. You followed Him. O foolish Galatians, what has come to you that you should have received already another gospel? "I marvel that ye are so soon moved". And if they left their first love, were moved so soon, what of some who have grown old, and it may be, sleepy? What danger we are in lest something should come and turn our hearts and attention away from Him who, while He will never give us up, and never let us sink into perdition, will take care that we shall know that He is jealous and does resent all indifference to Him. You will see His jealous resentment as it is related to us in the Song of Solomon. He went to His dear Church, He knocked at her door. "Open to Me" He said. And she - in bed, comfortable, with her coat off and her feet washed, clean as she might think herself to be in her walk but indifferent to her state of affection - she answered, I cannot. I am in bed; I am in a comfortable condition; I am a respectable person; my profession is respectable; I cannot. Do any of you know what that means in the spirit? If you do, you may not today have it in your experience, but the day will come when you will know that He is jealous and that He resents such unkind treatment, for, when by a secret influence, you rise from your bed of indolence to open the door, you will find that He is gone. Beware, lest the evil of sin in any form, error breathed by Satan, and false teachers should come in upon your spirits and lead you away from your stedfastness; lest you should fall from your own stedfastness. Not fall out of Christ, not fall out of the Covenant, not lose an interest in His precious death, but fall from that stedfastness that you had in your soul when you said to Him

Yes, Thou art precious to my soul
My transport and my trust
Jewels to Thee are gaudy toys
And gold is sordid dust

What a change. Some Scriptures express this condition very

distinctly, as in Jeremiah it is asked by the Lord - "Is Israel a home born slave? Why then is he spoiled?" Was he born for this state? Dear friends, were you born of God, were you blessed with faith for this, this turning away, listening to the error of the wicked? Was this that for which the Lord brought you into the gospel? No. He shows how these things come near to His affectionate heart. He says - "What have I done unto thee, O Israel? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me." How near do our backslidings come to Him. Yea, He asks a question again. What have I done unto Israel. Wherefore do My people say, we are lords, we will come no more unto Thee. Have I been a wilderness to you, a land of darkness? Did I give you the light of life that you should walk in the darkness of error again? So His people are spoken to, and all these Scriptures give point and edge to this word. Beware beloved; beware children of God; beware, those of you who have rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory, who have bathed in the love of God, have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Beware, lest that blessed state into which you have been brought should be tarnished and apparently contradicted by the backsliding which the enemy aims at and to which you naturally bend.

"Fall from your own stedfastness". A question here may be asked. What is this stedfastness? Stedfastness of faith, faith that fixed in Jesus Christ, that looked to Him alone, that hung about Him, hankered after more knowledge of Him. Faith that went to Him so constantly for the time as that the world, its allurements, and your own positions exposing you to various temptations, had no effect. You were stedfast in believing, eyeing the Saviour constantly. He was the chiefest among ten thousand to you, the altogether lovely. None like Him; no Person but the Person of Christ to talk with you then. No Name but the Name of Christ was sweet to you then. No Priest but the High Priest of your profession did you then go to. No God, but the God Man, did you worship then. And if you fall from this stedfastness of faith it means that Christ has become less, not really in Himself, but in your esteem, less. Less beautiful, glorious, desirable. Visits to Him less frequent; hanging about Him not so earnest; sincere feeling to Him not so keen as it used to be; the appetite not so sharp as it was. Can any of you lift your faces up to God and say we never did leave our first love? We never fell from our stedfastness? I expect not. We have need to take heed lest, having these blessed

things before us and in our experience, we should fall from that stedfastness.

And the next fall is a fall from the stedfastness of prayer. Time was, perhaps, if not today with some of us, when prayer was our life, when we could say with the Psalmist in our own manner and measure, "I give myself unto prayer" (Psalm 109 v 4). I am prayer. The weakness of the flesh, our ignorance of God, our sense of danger, the temptations of Satan, the piercings of corruption, all were means of taking us to the Lord, driving us to His heavenly throne and producing in us fervent cries that the Lord would send fresh supplies, abundant supplies of His grace and His Spirit to save us from what we have since, perhaps, alas gone into. Beware; seeing God has said "Call upon Me", "Pray without ceasing"; since He has said bring all your troubles to me, all your weaknesses confess to Me, and seek all the supplies that are necessary from My fulness, beware lest, knowing these things, you fall from that stedfastness of calling on the Name of the Lord which once marked you. When in earnest prayer from time to time we have lived, we have prospered, and when that has been forsaken then adversity and poverty we have found and the bones which were not seen have stuck out.

Lest ye fall from your own stedfastness in waiting on, and for, God. "My soul wait thou only upon God". Great is the mercy of that, a spirit that will not leave the throne of God, a spirit that enters into the spirit that Luther felt when he uttered those remarkable words in a time of trouble. O Lord, he said, I will not detach myself from Thee. A great word, a great believer, and a good, stedfast waiter was he at that time.

But now it may be with some of us, instead of that stedfastness in waiting on God, there is a looseness, a looseness of mind, a readiness to turn away

To wait on self or something base
Instead of trusting sovereign grace

A disposition to go here and there - an arm of flesh that we can see is more attractive to a carnal mind - than to the invisible God. We have

need to beware of this. If you feel no present disposition be thankful and take heed to the word of warning lest you fall from your own stedfastness in waiting.

And again, lest you fall from the stedfastness of your love. There are moments when the people of God feel as if they could not do anything but love the Lord. So kind has He been, so good is He still, so merciful, and so much is He to them, that love seems to be the breath and spirit and life of the soul, but if these operations be at all suspended or if, coming on the flesh, there is some affliction; if you get into some prison, John-like, and the Lord for a time pays you no visits of love, or does not send you any gracious messages, you may find an offence in Him. Said John to two of his disciples, go to Jesus and ask Him if He is the One we should look for or whether we should look for another. They told the Lord Jesus their errand, and it seems from the account as if, for a moment, he took no notice of their message but went on doing good and healing the sick, and then preaching the gospel to the poor. Having done that, He turns to these two messengers and tells them to go again to John and tell him what they had seen and heard, giving no distinct answer to their question.

Go and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, and when you have told him all that, say this to him - "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." Ah, you think you could not be offended in so lovely a Person as Jesus Christ. While you are viewing Him of course you could not be. But when the sight is withdrawn and when the flesh becomes uppermost, when some affliction is pressing and squeezing and when He, leaving you in that state for a time, says nothing to you and does not look upon you, does not come near to you, then to maintain your love, then to maintain the battle, then to say, He changes not, then to believe that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day, this, this is to be not offended in Him. "Lest ye fall from your own stedfastness".

The stedfastness of expectation. My soul wait thou only upon God. From Him comes my salvation. My soul, take no notice of the storms, so as to think there is no King ruling and reigning over them. My soul, take no notice of the darkness as if the light of life could not penetrate it. Take no notice of Satan's temptations as if there were no King to trample him under foot. "Wait thou only upon God".

Can you do it? Do you do it? Or have you been driven or allured or deceived from your own stedfastness? "Lest ye fall from your own stedfastness" How does the case stand with us? How does the case stand with us as individual professors? How does it stand with us as a church and people? Beware. Seeing these dangers ahead, seeing that even now we are surrounded with them, seeing that we have many many difficulties before us, that God has forewarned us of them, and also promised His grace, sufficient grace, may we be beware lest we fall into error and are carried away and deceived by it and so have an influence from it, a painful, a polluting, a weakening influence, whereby our stedfastness will be affected and we shall seem more like people who know Him not than like people who do know Him.

AMEN.