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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
by Mr J.K. Popham on Sunday Morning
14th September 1930

Text 2 Peter 3 verse 18

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.

These two Epistles have one wondrous purpose, namely to set forth God in His gracious acts to the Church. And in solemn warning respecting the Lord's day, and the rising, even in the Churches, of scoffers and teachers of heresies of unbelievers of the promise of God. Unbelievers looking on circumstances, and saying, things are as they used to be, and where is the promise of God's coming to judge the world? And another thing in these Epistles, is the insistence of godliness in practice, "Be ye holy; for I am holy".(1 Peter 1 verse 16).

"What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." (2 Peter 3 verse 11). There is in this a beautiful unity in these two Epistles, the first begins with election, personal election, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." (verse 2). A truth most solemn, beginning in the declaration of it, in the third chapter of Genesis, where God put a difference between, the seed of the woman, and the serpent. God's determination thus expressed, divides between men, calling some sons, and some reprobates. If we receive this doctrine rightly, it will effect our hearts, and move us diligently to seek, as the Apostle Peter exhorts in this Epistle, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter 1 verse 10). Such an exhortation would be impossible if there were no such doctrine as election. Do you give diligence with respect to this? or do you take it for granted that you are the people of God? If the latter, it is a very serious and solemn thing for you to do, If the former, you have great encouragement in the scriptures.

It is written, "He that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matthew 7 verse 8). God never said to a seeking sinner, seek ye Me in vain, He never will. In this chapter we are told, that scoffers shall rise, and these scoffers appear to have been professors of religion. They were not saying, there is no God, they were not denying His existence, but cavelling at the promise. They were saying that the promise is not fulfilled, and where is it? "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Peter 3 verse 4).

And these scoffers may be a great discouragement to the Lord's people. They may come to a weak child of God and say your religion is a vain thing, there is no such promise, or if there is, it is not fulfilled, therefore what are you to say to God about His faithfulness. Some of us may be very weak in faith, and very exposed therefore to the insinuations of a crafty scoffer. Who may not appear to be a scoffer, but just a religious person, who may even assume, a kind of care for the honour of God. We do need to be careful and prayerful, we need to live on our knees, as it were seeking God's face, favour, blessing and power to hold us up. He tells us in this chapter, that the things which are, which we see, shall all pass away, the earth and all the works therein shall be burned up. What a prospect for some, what a dismal prospect for you, who do not know God. But for the saint it is different, his prospect is different, it is good, we say we are looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11 verse 10). In saying this, we declare ourselves to be, "strangers and pilgrims on the earth".(verse 13). The Psalmist felt that, he said, "I am a stranger in the earth:" (Psalm 119 verse 19. I have no possessions here, although he had a kingdom, I am a stranger in a strange land, it is not my home, I am merely passing through it. "Hide not Thy commandments from me".(verse 19) Teach me, be my God, and by faith may I make Thee my habitation. And when one can say that, he can say a great deal, because the man who makes God his habitation is secure.

He is secure from pestilences, plagues, arrows, death flying about, and moving in the darkness. These shall not touch this man, so when we look by our profession, "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," (2 Peter 3 verse 13), we are encouraged to wait upon God. But says the Apostle, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." (2 Peter 3 verse 11). Should you live as the world does, should you live as people who are in the world? What manner of persons ought we to be here, ought we to follow the fashions of the day? Ought we men to walk according to the customs of the world, should we women walk after the customs of the world, should we dress as they do, and should we dishonour God as they do? What manner of persons ought ye to be? Carried away by ambition, ruled by covetousness, hurried into foolish things? No, says God, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1 verse 16). and, "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord. for ever." (Psalm 93 verse 5), and Holy and reverend is His name." (Psalm 111 verse 9). And therefore the people who fear Him should walk in that spirit. We are told to, "Abstain from all appearance if evil." (2 Thessalonians 5 verse 22).

Not only from evil itself, but from the appearance of evil. Do you so walk? Do I so walk? Are we at liberty to use our tongues as we will? Does God give us liberty to walk carnally, and as men? What manner of persons ought we to be? "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." (2 Peter 3 verse 14). Having regard to the conduct of these people, He speaks thus, they are blameless, in their righteousness that is given to them. Blameless in their righteousness that is imputed to them. Now says the Apostle, be blameless in your conduct before and among men, and, "seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." (2 Peter 3 verse 17). Which is the same as the Apostle Paul says, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10 verse 12). The saint is secured, God has secured him, but he is not secure in his own sense of things, except under the shining and witness of the Spirit.

Beware lest some specious error should catch your mind, and affect your judgement, beware lest the Devil should beguile you, lest some error of doctrine should catch you, lest some false experience should deceive you. It is a great thing that God has left exhortations, they are not left for nothing, they are not contrary to the doctrines of grace. Exhortations may be given to a family, a living family, children around a table might hear their father say, you are not to do such and such things. So the family of God have and should listen to exhortations given by their heavenly Father. My brethren listen to these things, beware, are you clear? Do you say, O but we know the doctrines of grace, yes and the question may be verily asked of such that so speak, how do you know them? Have they ever affected your conscience? Have they sank into your spirits? Have they made you fear God, and tremble at His holy word? Have they caused you to seek Him diligently, if so, thank Him. "But let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall". "Lest you fall from your own steadfastness."

There is a distinction to be made here, not lest you fall out of Christ, not lest you fall away from your interest in Him, not lest you lose that eternal life which Christ has given you. But lest you fall from your own steadfastness and become weak, become backsliders, become affected by some errors. Who can understand fully the condition of the Church to day in this nation? Then we come to the text. "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". Grace, the charming sound coming from the throne of God, the sound of Salvation.

The word of divine favour, grace in God the Father, grace in God the Son, and grace in God the Holy Ghost. Grace in God the Father, the Apostle Paul speaks of this wonderfully in the Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." (Ephesians 1 verses 3 to 5). Predestinated us to be holy and without blame before Him in love. This is grace my friends, God owes it to no man, how many of us believe that? How many of us practically feel that God owes grace to no man? Men are fallen, so if He gives grace to any it is free, not of works but free grace. "And if by grace, then it is no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11 verse 6). This is the grace of God the Father, it is said again, "which was given us in Christ before the world began." (2 Timothy 1 verse 9). That is He gave to Christ, His Son, all that the Church could need for Eternal glory. Every blessing that a sinner born again can desire, that he is led to seek, he finds in Christ. It flows from Christ into his soul. O this shines in the eyes of the man, who feels he deserves hell. It shines in the eyes of a sinner, who says honestly before God, if I had what I deserve I should be in hell.

Now this overtops all the reckonings of sensible sinners, no matter how fearful, no matter what they object, no matter how depressed they may be, no matter that from time to time, they may be reckoning their sins and trying to count their transgressions, and always failing to find the number of them. It comes to this, grace in God the Father passed by all these things, these objections, and gave the wothless and worst of men to His Son, and predestinated them to be His sons and daughters. This is grace, beautiful, shining, glorifying to God, and comforting to all to whom it is given by the Eternal Spirit.

Grace in the Son Incarnate, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." (2 Corinthians 8 verse 9). He, God's Eternal Son, and therefore His equal, "Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery (to be called with God) to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2 verses 6-8). This is Christ's grace,

His royal state aside He laid,
Came down to earth, a man was made,
To make poor man the son's of God,
And pay the debt His brethren owed.

Joseph Hart's, Fast Hymn)

The emptying of Himself, as the Son of God is a mystery, He never was in His deepest humiliation, in His sorest moments when on the cross, He never was other, never was less than the very Son of God. But He took on Him, the body prepared for Him, and veiled His Eternal Person and glory, by which when the men who saw Him, knew Him not. They disputed His claim, when He said "I and My Father are One. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him." (John 10 verses 30 & 31). But He had grace and, "endured the cross, despising the shame," (Hebrews 12 verse 2), grace to bear the sin, which His Father imputed to Him, grace to receive the curse of the law into His soul. He was made a curse for us. Grace to endure the hiding of His Father's face, saying "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27 verse 46). Why hast Thou hidden Thy face from Me? Grace to bear all the shame and the ignominy, and the contradiction and persecution of men, all that the Devil could heap upon Him. This was grace; He, the Son of God eternally receiving the adoration of all angels, the elect angels. He was a poor man, O if we were allowed to see this grace. From this grace of Christ's death flows the grace of justification. "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" (Romans 3 verse 24). From His grace flows forgiveness, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin". (1 John 1 verse 7).

From this grace comes the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the Son, and the Spirit of the promise, and we read concerning the first Church, "and great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4 verse 33). Great grace upon the preachers, the Apostles, because they powerfully testified of the resurrection of Christ, and great grace upon the believers, making them believers and confirming them as believers, and leading them on to the Son of God as believers. "Great grace was upon them", the grace of the Spirit, the grace of eternal life, the grace of justification, the grace of sanctification, and the grace of perseverance. There is the grace of the word, that is the favour of the word of God. "What advantage then hath the Jew?" (Romans 3 verse 1). "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2 verses 28,29). What advantage hath an outward Jew?

What advantage hath that nation? "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God".(Romans 3 verse 2). Chiefly, and we have in these oracles, the favour of the scriptures, the favour of an inspired Bible, an infallible Word. "We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn." (1 Peter 1 verse 19). We have this favour, and some have the favour of the essence of this being received, as the word of God in the power, light and life of the Holy Ghost.

Grow in this grace, first of all, we must be in it. The tree cannot grow, if it is not in soil, it becomes a dead stick. You must be in grace first, what is it to be in the grace of God? It is to be born again, it is to be the subject of that mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby a sinner is born again."Ye must be born again." (John 3 verse 7). It is to have some knowledge of your relation to God as a sinner, it is to justify God in all that He says against you, by the law. It is to have some knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to have seen Him by faith. It is to cleave to Him, it is to run into His name, which is a strong tower. It is to find in some degree that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin." It is to find that the Lord is precious, "Unto you therefore that believe He is precious:" (1 Peter 2 verse 7). It is to hear His gracious voice saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."(Matthew 11 verse 28). "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us." (Psalm 62 verse 8). It is to hear Him say "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13 verse 5).

This is to be in the grace of God, how such people, whom the Apostle is addressing, calling them brethren, and telling them that they have been begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. To this people, He says, but grow in grace. There is a twofold growth, naturally there is a twofold growth in a tree. First root growth and then the branches. A root growth "taking root downwards", with an increased experience of your wicked disposition, your being bent to backsliding, will under the guidance of the Spirit, lead you to strike the roots of your faith deeper and deeper into the person and work of Christ. This is real growth, not seen above the ground, a secret motion of faith under the guidance of the Spirit. A life that says in you, you cannot do without Christ. A faith that makes you say, to Him,

Lord, it is not life to live,
If Thy presence Thou deny; (Gadsby's 988 verse 5)

And that makes you say to Him, "Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee." (Psalm 63 verse 3). and also, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30 verse 5). The favour of God is better than life, faith moves in the soul, it moves after God, the root of life in you. Is there this root growth in you dear friends? A secret religion, a religion that makes a few hours of solitude welcome, a religion that will keep you awake sometimes, causing you to seek the face of God. A religion that puts more value on a visit of love, on a word of grace, even though it be a word of reproof, than all the world calls rich. Riches may come, and they may go, but this grace, the root, is there a root of growth. You do not expect a large root to a stripling just planted, the root and the stem grow to their size, but if the stem is to grow, if it is to shoot out branches, if it is to bear fruit, then the root must grow.

So in grace, when a child of grace speaks, he speaks as a child, he thinks as a child, he judges as a child. But when God causes growth, then childish things are put away. Later on grace makes men concerned about their inward condition. A Christian friend may say about you, and perhaps it even might reach your ears, that man grows. But you may say, O but I am not growing, I am more like a burnt dead stick, than a true Christian. You may say, I have been many years making a profession, but my state is very sad and solemn. For I am not like the trees of the Lord, which are full of sap, and I do not flourish in the courts of the Lord as I would. Still there is a growth, a taking root downwards, not into self, but out of self. Not into your own strength, but a growing into the strength of Christ. Not into your own wisdom, but being foolish, a growing toward the wisdom of Christ, that He may be to you "the chiefest among ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5 verse 10), and the altogether lovely.

The root growth is affected by the seasons, the frost comes, it does not kill the root but prevents growth for a time, the flow of sap ceases, but growth is not idle nor dead. And you will find when you experience a winter in your soul, it is not the death of faith, there is a moving, there is a naturalness, so to speak, in this root with respect to the soil in which it is planted. And there is a naturalness in the child of God, to cleave to Christ, in the dark and cold season of winter. And when spring comes, then there is growth and motion, and these fibres, little things that one with no knowledge of a root might think were useless, who might look and see something growing and sucking away the sap, or the life of the tree. A person might say, that is the thing, look at the source of it, but the gardener who understands the root would say, I must not cut these away, these fibres receive the nourishment from the soil.

They send sap into the branches. These send faith, leaves, buds and fruit, so when the spring comes the child of God receives this nourishment and moves a little more lively. More strength and sap come into his spirit, He will "take root downwards" (2 Kings 19 verse 30), and if I have dwelt a little long on this point, it is because there is an importance to it. You cannot grow without a root, when one plants a tree, and expects fruit, he does not stick the branches into the soil, with the root in the air. There is an order in God's ways naturally, and there is an order in grace, they take root downward. Do not judge, that you are a dead thing, if you are not bearing all the fruit that you want to bear. Are you bent towards Christ? Do your feelings, does your faith run after the Son of God? Are you saying, O if He were but mine, O if He would but bless me, if I might have His smile, if He would put straight what I have put wrong, if He would bless my soul with mercy, and with peace, and with the consolations of the gospel. Then to look to Him still, there is growth, "Grow in grace".

And this is the growth of the tree, the stem and the branches, and there is to be fruit. Fruit in the summer, when the tree is bearing leaves again. One knowing nothing of the tree, might say, that looks a dead thing, but one with an understanding of it, might look at it closely and say, O it is full of buds, full of promises, O when the spring is a little further advanced, there will be such a burst of these buds, and then there will be the flower, the blossom, then the fruit, "Grow in grace".

And this fruit is for the glory of God, when you look at the vine, and see hanging on it all those bunches of grapes, what do you do? in your judgement, if you do not speak, you say, there is a good root here, these bunches of grapes represent the virtue of the root. Have you faith? Do you love the Lord? Do you wait upon Him? Do you hope in Him? Do you cleave to Him, do you speak well of Him? Do you feel that you can submit to His holy will respecting you? Can you say sometimes, with respect to a dispensation that is painful, the will of the Lord be done? He knows what you may not judge to be good. He sees all this fruit, the fruit of His love to you, the fruit of His kindness, the fruit of the Spirit's work, all this fruit is to the glory of God.

Now my brethren, God looks at us, before there was a Devil walking in Eden, God walked there. He walked in His creation, and walked with His creature unfallen Adam. He has gardens now, He has visible Churches, what does He see in you? What does He see in me? as we are people, a professing people here. O but there are enemies. Beware says the Apostle, "lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own steadfastness" (2 Timothy 3 verse 17).

Lest ye receive wrong things, "but grow in grace". Cleave closer to the Lord Jesus, wait more diligently on Him. Hang about His cross, hanker after the flowing of His mercy into your souls, Christians, true Christians are not at a stand, to stand still. The truth does not stand still, if I may speak such a word, there is a life, there is a motion, and so with the Lord's people, they do not stand still. I know some of you may complain of yourselves. I know you may complain, as I complain of myself. I can hardly ever read that Psalm where the trees of the Lord are mentioned as being full of sap (Psalm 104 verse 16), and flourishing in the courts of the Lord, because he is righteous without trouble. It pains me at this time of life, to read such a word, and then notice my own barrenness.

Perhaps you may feel something like that, well then, let us as God gives us mercy entreat Him to cause this growth, to which we are here exhorted. To, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Then we shall sing the doxology, "To Him be glory both now and for ever, Amen".