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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 19 February 1933

Acts 20 v 21

Testifying both to the Jews and also to the
Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward
our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle here is addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus. He was at Miletus, on his way to Jerusalem, and he sent from there to Ephesus and called the elders of the church, and he recapitulates to them how he, while preaching among them for three years, had taught them, and what he had taught them, that he had really taught them two doctrines; that he had led them, in the Spirit's gracious power, to the doctrine of repentance toward God and then to the doctrine of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. It is just as if, incidentally, he dropped these two important points, not as when inspired to write to the Romans, He wrote, what we should call naturally, a considerate letter, arguing remarkably from the first chapter onward till he finished his doctrinal teaching, but the whole of that Epistle, in the arguments of it, we have here in these two great truths which he taught. As if he said - now you elders have heard me for three years, preaching, testifying, and my preaching and my testimony were just these two things, they comprised the whole, repentance toward God, then following, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And we may conclude that any person who has these two vital things has the whole of saving religion.

Repentance really is a change of mind toward God; means that He is the object of repentance, of that change of mind. This means that a person who has this repentance has before his mind Jehovah, considered as God without distinction of persons - Jehovah - the Lawgiver, against whom man has sinned. This is remarkable that in the Scripture we have innumerable passages dealing with sin. There are in the Bible more than a thousand repetitions of the word "sin", some of them absolute, many of

them relative; relative, that is to say with relation to offerings for sin, and innumerable passages speaking of sin under various terms, as an unfaithful wife; as worshipping of idols; as covetousness which is idolatry; as outraging the commandments of God by open rebellion and various terms which the scriptures are full of, are used to express that one awful thing which we call sin. It is odious to God, and true repentance has God before it. There is a passage of unspeakable beauty to my mind in the 51 Psalm "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight". We know that David had committed adultery and murder and so had sinned against two individuals. In respect of the first of the two sins, he knew well that there was no remedy for it in the law, no sacrifice commanded. Both he and Bath-sheba should have been stoned according to the law, and he said in that Psalm "Thou desirest not sacrifice else would I give it". If Thou commanded to bring a sacrifice I would have brought that, but the law had not commanded it. "Against Thee". And the reason is this, I judge, that God had commanded man not to sin; He had given him the law; he had freedom to eat of every tree in that beautiful garden but one; to eat of that he was forbidden. And so, when he sinned in the particular instance, whereof he speaks himself in the same Psalm, "My sin is ever before me", it was against God in the first instance - it was doing what Jehovah had forbidden him to do. And this is a very important point in repentance. Men may have much remorse for certain sins; they may wish earnestly that they had not done them and there may be before their minds the consequences of their sins, but there may be no confession, because no knowledge is in them of the God against whom they have committed sin. This is an important consideration for us, whether we, in any repentance that we have felt, have had God before us, against whom we have sinned, or whether we are just sorry we have done some things because consequences are sure to follow, that is punishment. Repentance toward God has respect to God. Let me just place, as enabled, this point before you. It has respect to God. I have committed what He commanded me not to commit; I have done what offends Him; His holiness I have not regarded; His justice I have not cared for; His divine majesty

I have despised in my sin. There is an eye, a heart toward God, in true repentance. We have examples of this in holy Scripture, particularly the example I have named of David - a beautiful repentance, though very sorrowful, but beautiful in the eyes of God, because the bottom of it, the ground of it, is the fear of the Lord, the holy clean fear of the Lord, which makes it a grievous thing to the repenting sinner that ever he did that which displeased the divine majesty. May the Lord give us to perceive this in our own cases, that Jehovah is the first object of repentance. Take notice of it, and examine yourselves by it. Esau sought to repent, but found no place of repentance. God was not with him. He sought it carefully, with tears, but God was not in it. All he wanted was some earthly blessing and he got it. Have you, when you reflect on your sins, God before you as the one holy and glorious God against whom you have sinned? In repentance there are points that I would bring before you. First, the matter of repentance - sin. An awful thing if we consider it in time, by the Spirit's teaching; how we were created; the beautiful form of the heart and mind, the conscience, the will and the affections; not one thing in the man against God; everything straight and all his heart was Godward. If we rightly consider this, we shall have some apprehension of the terrible fall that Adam had, and that we had in him when he disobeyed God. He lost the image of God in which he was created; he lost the good state of holiness in which he was created; he lost the will to do good; he lost his right to the garden of Eden; he was ejected from it; he lost all power against sin, for sin had become his master. He was the subject of Satan, not any longer the willing, affectionate, simple-hearted servant of Jehovah, his creator. What a fall! Did you ever enter into it? What an earth was this, without a thorn, without a briar, without a pricking thorn; touch whatever you meet in the vegetable world, not a thorn in it; not a briar. Reflect on all that is disagreeable in the world, on this great fact, sin has procured it, and all the pains of these frail bodies, and the diseases to which we are liable, and the death which is inevitable, we owe all to sin. Man in some form must eat his bread by the sweat of his brow; the reason, the cause, is sin. O

God keep us from turning our faces away from sin; keep us from committing sin wilfully, but keep us from turning from sin, as a subject so disagreeable. Dear friends, if you come to repentance you have God before you in this matter, the matter of sin, the awful fact of sin, the depravity of nature, the heart's deceitfulness, the unfathomable deceitfulness of it. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it" Your heart? Yes. Mine? Yes. This is the matter - Born in sin, shapen in iniquity. Actual sin begins when we begin to know right from wrong, as we speak.

The second thing in repentance is a heart-felt acknowledgment of it made to Jehovah. Well, it is a very wonderful thing to be a repenting sinner, to have your face turned away from yourself, from your vile nature, all the while feeling self and nature to be wrong, and turned by an invincible, sweet power, to approach Almighty God, and say "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight". You will find sometimes that the omniscience of God will be before your mind. He sees me. "Thou God seest me". In the wickedness that I have committed, in the sinfulness, the depravity of my nature "Thou seest me". This reaches the thought. God's word in the law reaches the thought; it reaches the affections; it reaches the will, and a repenting sinner says - Lord I am wrong; my will is a perverse will; my thoughts are wrong thoughts; I know I do not love the Scriptures, that I have not loved them; I know I have broken the law times without number; I know Thou hast seen it all, and I now make humble confession of it unto Thee.

Repentance. Your whole mind is changed, changed according to the Scripture - "I will take away the heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh." It is that new heart, that right spirit that the man has, by which he repents toward God. I say again, it is a beautiful spirit. Some of you may spend many an hour in the twenty- four hours, humbly acknowledging, secretly weeping over, your sins before God. You can look all men in the face and say - I am afraid of no man bringing a charge of sin

against me done against him, and yet you say - Lord I have done nothing but sin against Thee. It is a pure spirit you have sometimes. It may be this spirit moving you without any fear of consequences, without any dread of damnation. You may often have that dread, but sometimes you may not have it, and yet be humbly confessing, with repentance toward God, the sin that you have committed. The Apostle Paul has a beautiful word about this in the Corinthians respecting the man who had sinned grievously, unusually, and who was put away from church fellowship. The Apostle finding that he was repentant, commands the Corinthian church to restore him. He said "I am glad that he has sorrowed after a godly sort." Not natural sorrow, but he has sorrowed after a godly sort, that is, toward God; face toward God; heart toward God; mind toward God. All this and nobody may know it. You may have a religion without any person knowing it in this part of it, at least for a time. You will turn away from evil and you will find in your very heart that this is the thing - you have sinned against God. It is a great thing to believe in God; a great thing to believe that He hates sin, that He must necessarily punish sin, and to find also that, while dreading His majesty, while reading, it may be in Daniel, that ninth chapter, and saying - O this is my case, this is my state, find yourself pleading for mercy.

The Apostle for three years had been taking these two grand main subjects and preaching them, urging them on the attention of the church at Ephesus. And I judge that they were not tired of hearing of even the first subject - sin. One sign of the evil day in which we are living is that professors of religion, as well as worldlings of course, are impatient of the mention of sin. As long as the Lord gives me strength to come here and speak to you, I hope He will give me gracious boldness to take this subject and press it on your attention. If I do not, that would be my sin; it would not alter the case at all. You are sinners; I am a sinner; sin is in us; sin is in the warp and the woof of our nature; it is to be destroyed, but at the present, and while we live, it will be in the warp and woof of our nature. God save you from averting your face from this

awful subject. Ignorance of it, indisposition to consider it, will make no better of it; you are no better for hating the name of it; you are no better for disliking to hear about it. There it is, you are wrong. Man is wrong, his face is in the wrong direction; it is wild, and more than that, it is hellward, and the man who dies without repentance will find no place of repentance in eternity. That is the first subject. Paul says - I preached it; you know I have done; you know my walk among you, and how I testified among you these two things, repentance toward God and secondly faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

This takes in the entire gospel, every part and branch of the glorious gospel of Christ. The Apostle, during his ministry in the church at Ephesus, preached - I can only hint at things - he, the great master-builder in the gospel preached this - Faith - the gift of God, as if he said to them - O you Greeks, you Jews, unless you have the great, free gift and work of faith in you, Jesus Christ will be nothing to you. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is faith, first of all, to the gift of God in sending Him. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Take the case of about three thousand on the day of Pentecost. See how God wrought in them by the preaching of Peter; their emotion, their trouble, manifested by their earnest, anguished cry "What shall we do?" What are we to do? We are lost, we are sinners, we have broken God's law. What shall we do? O, the remedy is at hand and Peter preached it and their faith laid hold of it, and the doctrine of the Apostles became life in them. We have the case of the jailor, powerfully converted by God, and in his distress, suddenly brought about by the operation of the Spirit, he cried "Men and brethren what shall I do to be saved?" What is to become of me? O, say the Apostles Paul and Silas - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved". There is Lydia, the seller of purple. More gentle was the operation, but not less obvious, not less real. She attended to the things that were spoken by the Apostle. Attending to them was hearing them; paying attention to the doctrine that told her that she was ruined, that told her

that Christ was a Saviour and so she said "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there" There is the publican who, evidently repenting, goes into the temple to pray and says - "God be merciful to me a sinner". Had he no hint of a Saviour? Did he go without any knowledge, any feeling toward the Saviour? No; faith toward the gift of God. "God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us a all", sent Him in love, told Him what to preach, what works to perform, and sent Him to preach the gospel. I must go into these cities and preach the gospel for thereunto am I sent, He said. And the gospel is good news. It needed God Himself, in the second Person in the Godhead, to come from heaven to earth to tell men this gospel, what it is, what it can do, who sent it, who constitutes it, who shall apply it. The Trinity is concerned in this.

Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is the very gift of God, the very immediate and only begotten Son of God incarnate. Ah you will believe in the incarnation if you have faith. You will believe Jesus was born of the virgin Mary if you have faith. Then you will believe that the Holy Ghost was given to Him without measure, and you will follow Him in His way, His work, His life, His humiliation, His death. He humbled Himself, made Himself of no reputation. Ah, they tell us today that that means He emptied Himself of the Godhead and became a poor man, with limited intelligence and knowledge, and with Jewish prejudice whereby He spoke according to the Jews in their prejudice. You wont believe that if you have faith - the gift of God. You will believe He was Almighty God, holding the world up, when He was a poor man. Faith toward Him. And what will that do for you? It will take you up to Him. What will you go to Him for? For prayer; Lord teach us how to pray. You will want Him to teach you how to pray. What for? Why, for the forgiveness of your sins, the healing of your souls maladies, the removal of your guilt; the gift to you of righteousness for justification; the washing away by His precious blood of all your sins, and the gift to you of His good Spirit, that He may be your teacher, and glorify Christ in you. This is faith that turns your face away

from all creatures unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed faith, blessed believer. He that believeth shall be saved. A believer is a praying person. A believer is a praying person because he prays to the Lord and asks blessings in His Name.

A poor, besotted Jew took a tree that would not rot. With part of it he roasted his meat; with part of it he made his god; with part of it he warmed himself. Now true faith turns from vanities. If you have faith you will know it by this, among other things, that you will turn from all creatures unto the living God - Jesus Christ.

Toward our Lord Jesus Christ next in His work of redemption. Redemption is buying back. Redemption by Christ is purchasing the church with His own blood, and you will want the Lord Jesus to tell you by His Spirit that He purchased you with His own blood. The testimony of man may be great and may be correct, but this is the all infallible testimony that the Holy Spirit gives when He says - the Lord Jesus gave Himself for you. Then you will follow the Apostle Paul and say that "He loved me and gave Himself for me". Some of you may be saying O if He would but say that to us. Do you ask Him? Yes, when you are repenting, then you ask Him to do for you what He alone can do. You ask Him again to give to you that great gift which He has to give, namely the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of promise. You have the Spirit of promise in Isaiah. Said God to His Son in the Covenant - My Spirit which I have put upon Thee and My word which I have put in Thy mouth, shall not depart from Thee, shall not depart out of Thy mouth nor out of the mouth of Thy seed's seed henceforth and for ever. That is what you will do - you will ask for that inestimable gift, the gift of the Holy Ghost. Ah, and you will say to Him sometimes, when you feel His operations - "Lead me into the truth" Check me when I am disposed, and alas I am always so, when I am disposed to evil things and ways. Seal me unto the day of redemption. Be in my heart the witness that I am a child of God. Witness with my spirit that I am a child of God. Defend me against myself, against my sinful nature, against my disposition, my inclination.

Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ will make you greatly desire to have His image stamped, indelibly stamped, upon your soul, and the Scripture tells you how that shall be. In the Corinthians we have this "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image, from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Then, seeing, believing that, you will be praying for it. O for a sight of Christ in the glass of the gospel, in the glass in which I see, not my own face, but His glorious Person; in the glass that reveals and discovers to me what He is, what He is doing, what He did; discovers to me His kingly authority under which I would live; His priesthood by which I would be brought before God, spotless; His prophetic office by which I would be instructed. That faith may lay hold of these mercies, you will say, is my desire.

Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. This will make Him the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely to you. O, but I have this before me, I have that before me; I have my business; I have my duties; I have my friends. Yes, and grace wont make you indifferent to them; it will regulate your heart in respect of them, put them in their right place, and then He will be above all, chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. None like Him; none to be compared with Him. You will say with the Psalmist "My heart is inditing a good matter. I speak concerning the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer", and I will say this of Him "Thou art fairer than the children of men". None to be compared with Him. This is my Friend, this is my Beloved O ye daughters of Jerusalem, the chiefest among ten thousand. You will see in Him by this faith eternal Deity. You will see in Him, by this faith, spotless humanity, and thus you will see in Him all that God can do, and all that God requires of man. Jesus meets all. And then you will commit everything to Him. Yes, and the chief thing you will commit to Him is the keeping of yourselves. Peter speaks of this - Commit yourself unto Him as unto a faithful creator. And the Apostle will be your forerunner in this, experimentally - "I know whom I have believed" A grand

thing for a sinner to say - "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". I have committed my soul to Him; I have committed my ways to Him; I have committed my needs to Him: I have committed everything concerning me for time and for eternity, to Him. Faith. Faith, that is not a guessing quality of mind, but a divine credence, divinely wrought and divinely moved into an exercise. Faith that stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God, stands there. You will finally, by precious faith, put on the whole armour of God, the armour of light, and having that light, it will show you what to avoid in the wilderness; show you whom to follow and what to covet earnestly. It will also tell you that there is a beautiful and a sufficient armour. "Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand".

Well dear friends these two, what people would call simple words, and, as words, they are simple, are the whole of vital religion. Repentance; and all the while you own the Saviour, you will be a repenting person. I love repentance. O, the solemn hours I have spent night and day, repenting toward God, without reference in my mind at the time to hell, but with reference to His character, against whom I have sinned. Yes, seek repentance, seek repentance. It is not gloomy; it is not legal; it is not earthly; it is not sordid; it is not remorse. It is a gracious, God given spirit; a hatred of sin; unfelt at the time, though much desired - a love to God's character, that makes you say I have injured that beautiful character and I am sorry. And faith in that same God incarnate, even in Jesus Christ, that tells me of the way of escape from the wrath to come, and the way for a sinner to become a saint; the way for a sinner clothed with filthy garments, to be clothed in a pure robe of righteousness.

AMEN.