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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 14 May 1933

ACTS 20 v 31 and 32

Therefore watch and remember that by the space of
three years I ceased not to warn everyone night
and day with tears. And now brethren I commend
you to God and to the word of His grace which
is able to build you up and to give you an
inheritance among all them which are sanctified

These words were spoken by the Apostle Paul to the elders,
ministers of the church at Ephesus. He was on his way hastening to
Jerusalem if he might be there by the Passover. From Miletus he sent
to Ephesus, not a great distance, and called the elders of the church,
the elders who were made overseers, as he said to them: Take heed
therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy
Ghost hath made you overseers. So they were not deacons; they were
ministers, elders. Peter called himself an elder when addressing the
elders of the church in his second epistle. Take heed to all the
flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed
the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood, for I
know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in
among you, not sparing the flock. What seems worse follows - Also of
your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away
disciples after them. Therefore, watch.

First of all, you ministers, who are overseers, take heed unto
yourselves. That is a solemn word of the Holy Ghost to those
ministers of the church at Ephesus. There is much in the Scriptures,
particularly in the New Testament concerning ministers, pastors, for
in the blessed days of the early church of God and for long the supply
system was not known. It has no place in the Scripture. Ministers
were to take heed to themselves. The Apostle Paul writing to Timothy
respecting ministers said, take heed unto thyself and to the
doctrines and continue in them, for in so doing ye shall save both
yourself and them that hear you; a solemn injunction. In another

place the Apostle says to Timothy, a minister, study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Peter says to the elders, that is ministers, Take heed. Take the oversight of the flock willingly, not for filthy lucre. Take heed to yourselves. You hearers do not know what this means; you cannot. Hearers cannot know what the life of a pastor is. You hear him preach; you may feel he is helped; you may believe and feel that he has taken up your cases now and again. He may have spoken a word of reproof, not knowing who needed it. He may have spoken comfort to the mourners, but what he passes through, in secret, before God, you do not know. The least part - it may seem strange for me to say it - the least part is in the pulpit, yet the most important part, of course, in another sense. But the labour, if a minister is rightly exercised, the concern about the people, his sorrow if he sees any of them apparently lukewarm, if he sees a change in any of them from zeal and spirituality; you cannot understand his concern and his trouble. But what he has to do is to take heed, first of all, to himself. To the church at Sardis Christ said to the angel, Watch therefore. Watch your own state. What is my state before God is the question in respect of my ministry. What is the state of your mind? Is your heart hard? Is it worldly? Do books that are not the Bible occupy your attention more than the Bible? Is the throne of grace neglected? Is the care of the church thrown aside for a time? Watch your state. Is your mind spiritual? It is a great thing to be enabled to obey this word, watch. Watch God's dealings with your own soul, O minister. Does He speak to you? When you are seeking something to say to the people, do you get any touch, any instruction, any word? Do you get reproof, instruction from the Spirit, the opening of the mind of the Spirit. These things have a relation to you, but first of all they belong to the pastor. He is to watch also with respect to what may take place in the church. I know this, that after my departing, said the Apostle, shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock, and also, and perhaps more dangerous, of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. And this means, among other things, that the spirit of division comes and there are parties in the church. Let me say here, that I do not know that such is our state - I believe it is not at the present - that we are not parties, there are not clicks. I do not say we are all spiritually minded - I am afraid we are not; I am

afraid of some of you; I stand in doubt of some of you, and what you will say to me when the Lord appears to you in some way, I do not know. But happily, mercifully, I do not think we have any parties in the church. Those of you who are not members cannot know, must not know, what those of us in the church do know, but we do know this, that God has more than once most remarkably appeared for us, and put down evil. I go back now to fifty years and onward. The Lord has appeared very remarkably for us, but, notwithstanding all that, this is a word. Men shall arise of your own selves speaking perverse things, erroneous things, whispering about something not quite right in the doctrine, whispering something about fellow members, gossiping, indifferent to the character of a fellow member, or fellow members, and saying perverse things, contrary, unholy things, which have a hardening effect, which divert the mind from better things, which close the eye to the blessedness of real membership of a church. I cannot enter into that now, the awful solemnity of membership. It should not be an easy thing to be a member. It ought not to be an easy thing to be a member of a church, whether you have much exercise in secret about that point, the Lord knows. There are many many points in respect of membership, which I cannot bring before you now, but I am to watch, if sent to preach. If made a minister, a pastor to you, I have this word - Watch. "Study to show thyself approved of God". That is the first thing; it does not matter who approves if God disapproves. What will be the known approval of God. First in the minister's own conscience. If he gets a smile from God then he is satisfied for the time being. If he receives some gracious testimony in his own heart, then he is happy. A second thing in this approval unto God will be the testimony of the Spirit in the hearts of the people by the preaching. Consciences will be affected; affections will be warmed; the understanding will be enlightened; the will will be bent sweetly to lie straight with the will of God; tenderness of conscience, tenderness with respect to your own walk; tenderness with respect to your brethren; consideration of the poor; humility of mind; esteeming others to be better than yourselves; these things will accompany the approval of God in the minister. And he is "rightly to divide the word of truth"; not to mix and mingle and jumble all things together, but to separate that which is separable; to teach doctrine. Doctrine should never be dry and never will be dry when rightly preached. "Doctrine" - as I have often quoted to you -

"Doctrine", says Luther, "is heaven". "Doctrine is heaven". O do not think lightly of doctrine. I am afraid that today it is little thought of, speaking generally. Do not think lightly of doctrine, of the doctrine of God; that is the first. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me". That is a solemn word. Do not think lightly of the Trinity. If you do it will manifest this painful fact, that you are not taught of God. Think not lightly of each Person in the Trinity. Do not think that the Trinity is nameless until the Covenant comes. Each person has his own essential eternal name, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A pastor is to teach those; He is to teach that Christ is the head, that He was eternally set up by the Father, and the Covenant made in the Trinity that the persons of the election of grace should be His. "Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me". Do not think lightly of the doctrine of the atonement, the vicarious death of Jesus, a free, blessed, vicarious death, whereby He purchased the church, as it is said in this chapter, Feed the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood. Now a minister is to watch doctrine. Wolves come to devour the sheep; perverse men arise to destroy as far as they can, by word, the doctrines of God. Now dear friends this is a word, I know unusual for me, a line of things that I have not much brought before you, perhaps not sufficiently. I am to watch. You say, do you? You do not know. A look, a word from one or another, will set me watching and praying. God knows how true that is. Ah, many an hour in many a night have such and such things and such and such people in this chapel caused me exercise. May the Lord look upon you. My time among you is not for long. May He look upon you and keep you in the truth, keep you in the fear of God. And now a word about the next verse.

"And now brethren I commend you to God and to the word of His grace" - and some interpret the word of his grace to mean the Word, the Eternal Word, the Son of God - "which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance". Grace simply considered is not able to do this, but grace in Christ in all its eternal fulness is able, that is he is "able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified". First brethren, one of the sweetest words in the Scripture about the Lord's people. They are not to exercise lordship one over another - for ye are brethren. They are

to be concerned about each other for they belong to one family; the family of God in heaven and in earth, a blessed family. Brethren, God cares for you; you are His children. Ye are the children of the living God, His dear children. "As dear children;" says Paul to the Ephesians, "Walk as dear children". What a mercy to be brethren; one family. That includes Adam, Abel, all the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; the prophets and all the children of the Most High. The 7000 who had not, when Elijah thought himself to be alone, bowed the knee to Baal. All those in the church, the godly at Ephesus, in Galatia, in Corinth, and all the churches of God since then until now - brethren. O what a family God has. And think of this, that some here now belong to this family, this divinely blessed family; children of the Most High God. Some wont allow it of themselves but their disallowing of that through their fear wont alter, cannot alter the fact God has brought them into His house. Ye are come, not to Sinai. Well, say some interrupting, we are there. If ye be there now, and if God be speaking to you out of His holy law, condemning you and bringing you in guilty; if He be stripping you of every ornament and you are slowly learning that you are lost, and deserve to be condemned, one day you will say the minister was right when he told me I should come one day to lovely Mount Zion, the holy mountain, come to the house that is built on the top of the mountains. There I should see and there I should hear the Lord speaking, and teaching me out of His holy gospel how to believe and how to wait and how to love and how to walk. Brethren, let us take heed to our sweet relationship. But, says Paul, I commend you to God. This commendation of the people was not praising them for what they were but committing them, putting them, as it were into the hands of the dear Redeemer; putting a word in for them. Lord, they are in danger; do keep them. Wolves are coming, do preserve the sheep. Perverse speaking is to be among them, even by men of their own selves, do keep them. That is much of the exercise of a pastor; Lord, keep the people. What shaking I have had when I have thought of that solemn injunction. Take heed to the flock. Know the flock, says Solomon, know the nature, know the number, know the condition of the flock. (Proverbs 27 v 23) I commend you to God. Christ is God

Christ is the keeper of His saints
He guards them by His power

The best way a minister can show his concern for the church, over which God has placed him, is secret prayer. Yes, I know of no better way for a minister to walk among his people than to carry them night and day, as God helps him, to the throne of God's heavenly grace. He will seek the good of the people's souls. He will seek their good in temporal things. His sympathies will be with them in their afflictions; he will seek to strengthen the weak, to confirm the feeble knees and lift up the hands which hang down. Ah, outsiders may say, it is a pretty easy thing for a preacher. They do not know; for one called to be a minister and made a pastor over a church it is not so easy a thing as is imagined. Even godly people may be unaware what it is for a minister to have to commit his church into the hands of God. "I commend you to God."

To God the Father who says in the Corinthians by Paul, "Come out from among them", that is the world; from Belial and all the things connected with him. Come out from among them and I will receive you and I will be to you a Father and I will walk in you and you will be to Me sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty. Go, as you can, dear brethren, to this good God. Seek to have His presence with you, His power with you, His walking in you. It is a wonderful thing for a sinner to walk with God, but it is more wonderful for God to walk in a sinner. His life, His holiness, His goodness, His love, His wisdom, His grace, His power, manifested in the heart of a child. O may we be children and have that sweet holy, humble confidence, to go to Him as to a Father. "Your heavenly Father", he says, "knoweth that ye have need of all these things". Whatever you need in grace and in providence, God knows. I commit you to the Son of God, to Jesus Christ. He bought you with His blood. If He did that will He neglect anything that is for your good? Will He not look after you? If He give you a pastor to take notice, to care for you, will He not also add whatever may be lacking in that pastor. He will add to you out of His own fulness and grace. I commit you to Jesus Christ. He is the Shepherd of Israel, He is the stone of Israel, He is the only foundation of Israel, He is the head of the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all and in all. He is the head of the body, and, says the Spirit by Paul, You are members of His body, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, and members of His body in

particular. What a relationship, what a union, O think of it. And when you get in your souls a testimony that He is your Saviour, then every attribute that He has, every relationship that is written in the Scriptures concerning Him and His people, you have an interest in. All things are yours. Ye are Christ's and Christ is God's. I commit you brethren to the Lord Jesus. He can care for you and will.

I commit you to the Holy Ghost. Since the ascension of Christ and the day of Pentecost, in a peculiar manner, the Holy Ghost has had committed to Him the care of the church. "If I go away I will send you another Comforter and He shall abide with you for ever". The bodily presence of Christ would not have been for the advantage of the church. This He knew, and so He said, I shall go. You see Me after the flesh; ere long you shall see me no more in that manner, while you are in the world, but you shall not lose by my removal from you as to My body, for I will send you the Spirit and He shall teach you and comfort you. He shall reprove you and guide you; He shall bring mercies to you, fill your heart with love, and form Christ in you the hope of glory. O what a God to be committed to. I commend you. You are helpless; He is almighty. You are ignorant, He is wisdom; you are weak, He is the strength of Israel; you are liable to be shaken, He is unshakeable. He is the immutable God. You are liable to many afflictions, He will see to it that your afflictions shall be to you as the crucible and He will be also to you the Refiner, sitting there to watch the operation of the fire on the metal. The scum comes first; the metal is purified. There is one crucible into which the church will never be put. "I will melt you as lead" is one awful word of God concerning professors. When a child of God is put into the crucible, gold is put there. Well dear friends, this is a great word. The Apostle says, "I commend you to God". I lay your case before Him; I mention your character as a church. You are given, this church, overseers. I commend the overseers to you, O Lord, and I commend the church also.

Thirty years ago - it occurs to my memory - thirty years ago last year, the end of the year and three months of the next year, I was unable to speak. Six months I was laid aside as to preaching and I remember how the last time I spoke before being laid aside from the

ministry this was the text: "And now brethren I commend you to God" - He will take care of you; when I am taken away, I believe He will take care of you - "and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified". This latter part of the word I cannot enter into this morning.

AMEN.