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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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AMOS 3 v 3

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"

The Word of God spoken here by His servant was against the whole family of Israel which He brought up from the land of Egypt saying "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities". It is the privilege, the painful privilege of the people of God to be chastised for their sins in this world. But Israel here might be saying - for sin is of a very hardening, blinding nature - how is it that these troubles have come? How is it that we are so perplexed, that difficulties and enemies arise and have power? The question asked in the text would meet such an enquiry on the part of these poor, self-blinded people. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Can you walk with Me while you are living indulging sin? Can I walk with you? My service you have forsaken, My ways you have turned from, My fear you have lost, and how can I walk with you? If I walked with you in peace I should be agreeing with your evil ways, with your sinful conduct. If you enquire unwisely why trouble comes and never search and try your ways and turn to the Lord, saying to Him - I have destroyed myself, but take away all iniquity - you may get this question in your conscience. Can two walk together; can a professor walk with God while he is indulging some lust? Can God walk with him, while this poor, unwise creature, is living as he is? It is an arresting question; it may be made a piercing question touching us and causing us to look to our ways. There is such a thing as God and men walking together, but it must always be on the ground of an agreement, an understanding. It must always be when the sinner agrees with God's revealed nature and will, agrees with God's commandment in the Holy Gospel and when God agrees with the sinner. Not so easy to believe the latter as the former. You may again and again find your heart in tune with a sweet agreement with God, but that He can be in agreement with you, seeing that you are - and know it - an unworthy person, unworthy of His notice, and unworthy because of some things in you and some things

done by you, how can you believe that He can be in an agreement with you? I would like to be enabled to answer the question on both sides; there are always these two sides. First of all, are we in agreement with God? With God as He has revealed Himself, not with God as we may judge of Him and as we may imagine He ought to be. Not with God according to the rule of a corrupted reason, a reason in which there is a very poor and miserable astigmatism. Not with God according to our rule of justice and love and pity, but just according to the revelation which He has made of Himself. This Book is to be our guide as to that. How has He revealed Himself? The great and dreadful God inhabiting eternity, having for His throne, heaven, for His footstool, earth, and before whom all nations are as a drop of a bucket, all creatures as the small dust of the balance, less than nothing, and altogether lighter than vanity. God who, in His infinite nature, cannot be viewed by us nor borne, but who has revealed Himself in His dearly beloved Son in such a way as that the revelation is beautiful and He Himself is bearable and we can see Him; God, as He has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. This revelation is beautiful; it is worthy of Him; it is attractive to sinners to whom that blessed manifestation is made known. According to Paul "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, for He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". Well, in Christ there is a sufficient atonement, a justifying righteousness, an efficacious Priest, a blessed, infallible Prophet, an all ruling King, and if, by faith, we see God in these characters - God in Christ - we shall indeed be in an agreement with Him.

Now, in this, first of all, let me say, are we in agreement with God, as to the meeting place? for if two are to walk together they must meet somewhere. There is a meeting place between God and man, only one meeting place. When the Pharisee in the temple thanked God that he was not as other men, and so on, he was not in the proper meeting place. To be sure he was in the temple, but not in that Sanctuary, that Tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. They were not agreed - this great God and this great Pharisee - as to the place of meeting. When Asa's feet became diseased, he did not meet with God in his trouble, but sought unto physicians and not to the

Lord. To seek unto physicians was lawful and proper, but to seek to them only and not at all to the Lord, as appears to have been the case with him, was to make a huge mistake, and Asa and the Lord did not walk together in that affliction. When a professing Demas forsook the Lord he might have perhaps kept up the form of religion, but he did not walk with God; he missed the meeting place. What is the meeting place? Where shall we unworthy people, sinful men, meet with the holy God and where can He, who is of too pure eyes to look on iniquity and cannot behold sin, meet with sinners in amity? Where can a holy Being, between Whom and a man, a creature, there ever must be an infinite distance, where can they meet on ground common to them both and on which they both can be; in a way they both can walk comfortably together? Well, the answer is given us in the Scripture. "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace". "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary". We have a tabernacle, the tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, the sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus. When God commanded Moses to make an Ark and to put therein the testimony, the law, and to cover that Ark, with the law in it, with the Mercy Seat - and on that Mercy Seat were to be the cherubims - what did He say to Moses? "And there I will meet with you". When the temple was dedicated by the twelve princes of Israel and each one brought his gold spoon and so on, and the bullock and the lamb, what happened at the end? And when Moses went in to speak with Him, he heard a voice speaking to him. (Numbers 8 verses 84/89) This is the meeting place. Sinner, are you agreed with God as to this meeting place? Here it is that he espouses and betrothes people to Himself. Here it is He dispenses His gifts, gives out His pardons, brings near His righteousness, speaks His peace, breathes His Spirit into His people and tells them that He is their God and that they are His. Here it is that in the Covenant He says, I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more. Now when you, if you at all, pray, when you pray, it is here. Let honest conscience ask, when you seek God, do you seek Him in this way? You never agree with Him except on the Mercy Seat. He will never agree with you, except here. What is it that takes place here between God and sinners? This takes place; He listens patiently to their complaints and their confessions. He receives graciously their arguments, for they have arguments; they use them. What is the substance of all the arguments they use? It is in that Word that Christ Himself tells us to use: "If

ye shall ask anything in My Name I will do it". His blood is the plea; His righteousness is an argument; His Name is sufficient; it imports everything that can be needed. So when sinners are to walk with God they come to Him in that place, meeting Him in that tabernacle which He pitched and not man. Now it is clear from the Scriptures that a person may have religion and pray and seek and seem to serve God, and yet miss. A Jew might say, here is a a bullock, blemishless, and I will offer it to the Lord, but it is a long way to take it to Jerusalem; I will offer it in this corner of my field. He does so, or thinks he will do so. What says the Lord about this? That soul shall be cut off. O, but he offered; yes, but he did not meet God, nor did God meet him there except to judge him. On the throne He sits; on the altar He looks. On the altar must ever be the sacrifice, the morning lamb, the evening lamb, the annual atonement; all, all of them on the altar. Blood must be sprinkled on the horns of the altar.

Sin to pardon without blood
Never in God's nature stood

Be very careful about this, then. Every prayer that is offered to God in the Name of the Lord Jesus is a prayer that God accepts and every approach to God that is made by a sinner under the leading of the Holy Spirit is an approach that pleases God, and the sinner, one day, will have such a sensible approach of God to him as that these two will be in wonderful agreement. May this then be settled in us that we can never walk with God until we meet with Him and we cannot meet with Him except in that place which He Himself has ordained, and that is the Mercy Seat. Here comes a difficulty. In that chapter in the Hebrews from which I have quoted: "Let us come boldly" and so on, we have this: "The Word of God is quick", living, "and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing assunder of soul and spirit and the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, for all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do". Those of you who have been under the dissection of that holy, quick Word of the living God, Jesus Christ; whose hearts have been exposed to your own pained gaze, and you have seen, in a measure, what God has seen perfectly - a wicked heart - to you, it can have been - it never can be - an easy thing to

approach God. What, go to God with this? What, approach the infinitely, holy God in such a state, with such a heart, with such thoughts, schemes, aims, designs, that no eye of man can look on without abhorrence, that I, myself can scarcely bear to see? Yes, sinner; if you do not go with that, you will never go at all. O, but says the Spirit, we have a High Priest, and we have One who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Do you feel sin? Sin was imputed to Him. Do you realise what the law says to you? "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them". He had that curse poured like fire into His bones; He knows the sorrow of sin. He never did sin, but He knew the sorrow of sin; He knew the burden of sin; He knew the guilt of sin. And so, as the Apostle would set before us, He is able to have compassion on us. Now, says the Spirit: "Come boldly". "Come boldly" sinner. Publican, harlot, "come boldly"; leper, "come boldly"; debtor, "come boldly, unto the throne of grace". A throne speaks a King; grace is divine favour. Come to this King for this favour. "Come boldly". "Boldly"? This seems inconsistent; No, 'tis to nature; 'tis right to faith. "Boldly" means in some places "liberty". "Boldly" means coming in the courage of a God-wrought faith in the divine atonement. Here then if we come to this place we shall be in agreement with God. "I will meet with you"; "There I will meet with you". "I will be sanctified in all them that draw nigh unto Me". Very often in the law, in the ceremonial law, God speaks this to His people. "I will meet with you there"; "There I will meet with you". So, in the gospel, it is there, in Christ, I will meet with you. There, in His atonement, in His righteousness, in His Priestly office, in His precious blood, I will meet with you. Sinner, this will meet your case, and wont you find it wonderful when you meet God and He meets you. He meets you with a smile while you go to meet Him with tears trickling down your face. He meets you with mercy, while you go to Him fearful because of your sins. It is one of the sweetest of all meetings that can ever be imagined; that a gracious God and an extremely wicked person should meet, and that they should be in agreement. Their natures are different, but the ground on which they stand is common to them both and delightful to them both. The Person in whom they meet is welcome to them both. "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", and if you meet the Father in Him you will never find the Father's displeasure, but only His pleasure. I am well

pleased with My Son, and I am well pleased with the men who come to Me in Him. If we are to agree here with God we shall walk with Him in these things. First, He will walk with us in forgiveness. Jesus Christ was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance unto Israel and forgiveness of sins; the grand thing, the one thing needful, for heaven, embracing all the requirements of God's holiness and His holy heaven. "This day", said the Saviour to a sinner, "shalt thou be with Me in paradise". Everything necessary for that holy place, that glorious presence, wrapped up in the forgiveness of sins, and God walks with a forgiven sinner. Jesus Christ was in the midst of the seven churches and He is in the midst of His people, walking with them. He forgives their sins and remembers their iniquity no more. God forgets some things; that is to say, He takes a frail faculty in us, a memory that, in some particulars may be like a seive, letting everything pass through it, so as that many, perhaps many things we would like to remember are to us, in that forgetfulness, as though they had no existence; so the forgiveness of sins by God is said to be a forgetting of them. I will remember their sins no more; I will never bring them up again. When God forgives you, He casts your sins behind His back. That does not mean you will forget them; No, the more powerfully you realise forgiveness, the more powerfully will you be sorry for the sins which are forgiven and also the more truly and deeply will you hate them. When you know that sin will never be punished in your persons you will hate it, and when you know it was punished in the Saviour, you will love Him. Then God will walk with you there. And O, the smile of God; it is indescribable, but it is knowable; it is enjoyed sometimes; it is a penetrating smile. As rain soaks into the earth and reaches the roots of things, so the smile of God penetrates a sinner's soul and fills him with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Ghost, and God walks with him. No complaint to make against him; no controversy with him, has God. But you say, that cannot be. But what if God says, it is? Then your objection is nothing. What if He says you have no spot in you, and He walks with you in that purity which He Himself declares belongs to you? That is a sweet experience. "Thou art all fair My love".

He walks with you in righteousness. "I bring near My righteousness". God and unrighteousness are opposites; God and

righteousness are wonderfully agreed, and when He brings near the righteousness of His dearly beloved Son to you, He will walk with you in that. "Christ", says Paul to the Romans, "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth". "I came, not to destroy, but to fulfil the law", and He did fulfil it and so He is the end of it, and being the end of it in you means that you no longer are called upon to obey it, but that Jesus Christ, having obeyed it for you, becomes your Prophet; liberty from that law and you are under the law of love to Jesus Christ. God walks in that righteousness and walks with a man who has that righteousness. And the complete gift of righteousness is made known in that singular, that blessed word concerning the Church. "This is the Name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness". So intimate is the union, so perfect is the imputation of righteousness, so absolutely righteous is the sinner now in Christ as that the Name of the Lord becomes his name. As the Name of a husband becomes the Name of his wife and is her Name, so the name of righteousness - Jesus Christ our righteousness - becomes ours. But now wherein is the agreement of a sinner with God here in respect of forgiveness? His conscience receives it, his soul enjoys it and he agrees that God is infinitely good to him in this great act that has been passed upon his conscience, the forgiveness of all his sins. "Having forgiven you all trespasses". And in respect of righteousness, faith says, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength". And these two then, in respect of forgiveness and justification, are agreed; therefore their walk is in peace; they walk in peace. And this means that God has nothing to say against the person who is thus acquitted, forgiven and adopted into the family of God. Think of it. What, God who has nothing to but complain of in you; every day you fail and come short of the glory of God. Very few, if any, have learned much of that word: Do all things, whether you eat or whether you drink, or whatsoever you do, do all for the glory of God. But on this ground that Jesus Christ's precious blood has cleansed all sin away and His righteousness has been imputed and become the righteousness of the sinner, on this ground the sinner walks with God in peace and equity, and God is at peace with him. This is the ground of all communion, comfortable inter communications between God and His people. If you attempt to walk with Him on any other ground you will miserably fail and if you belong to God you will find your souls in grievous bondage, but if you are enabled to look to

the blood of Christ, plead that blood, believe in His righteousness, and wait on God in those particulars, you will find that He will have no quarrel with you, and you will have no quarrel with Him. When people say, so and so gets a blessing; I wonder we do not; that shows one sad thing, that all who speak so are not, as yet, thoroughly emptied, and have not their working arm broken. But when they are thoroughly emptied, when they can do nothing in and of and for themselves in respect of salvation, then forgiveness, that joyful sound; forgiveness, that infallible word spoken on the conscience by God; forgiveness, never to be revoked, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Then the sinner has peace with God and God is at peace with the sinner. This is to be distinguished between the peace a man may speak to his own soul. O, peace, peace, some say to themselves, when sudden destruction shall come upon them. God forbid it should be so with you and with me. But when men are saying woe, woe unto us, for we have sinned; when they, Paul-like, are saying, the good we would we do not and the evil we would not that we do, and are groaning out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" God and that sinner are at peace. Says Paul, "I thank God". He had enquired who should deliver him from the body of death under which he was groaning. Then he breaks out in the triumph of faith - "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself", the Apostle Paul, "I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin". There was no quarrel between Paul and God there. "Can two walk together except they be agreed" in this particular? They walk in peace, they walk in love. God says to the sinner "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee", and the sinner says: "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee". God calls His people His treasure, His peculiar treasure and they, walking with Him in peace, say, each one, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". So they walk together in love; they walk together in inter-communications. God speaks to His people; they speak to Him. He speaks blessings to them and they bless Him. When He blesses them He gives them something; when they bless Him they speak well of Him; they set Him forth in their high praises. So they walk together. And while this mercy is with them they walk in peace with God in respect of providence. Providence is a strange act of God; He rules the

world. Jesus Christ is the universal Governor; He upholds all things by the word of His power. He, and He alone, as the lion of the tribe of Judah, prevailed and overcame to take the Book out of the hands of His Father and sinners, blessed with reconciliation, reconciliation with God, to Him in all His holy requirements, are thankful to have their things, their temporal things, in His hand. Nature faints or frets, sinks or rebels. There is no sin in a moderated weeping when affliction is upon you - "Jesus wept" - but the man who has learned the secret of weeping without sinning when he is under the afflicting hand of God is indeed a wise man. But there is grace in Christ and He gives it. There was grace in Christ for Paul who, when he had the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, and thrice besought the Lord to have it removed, got grace to accept it, which was better than getting rid of it. To Paul it was better. He said I rather glory in infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. The will of God was better to Paul, with all the pain of that thorn, than the loss of the thorn, the riddance of the thorn, and the lack of that all sufficient grace. Affliction is a sort of death; affliction is a death blow. We must needs be brought to an end and affliction comes to the body to bring it to an end. How could you go to heaven if you did not die? Trouble comes and brings a kind of death, brings changes, and every change is a sort of death. Now the mercy is this, to agree with God in affliction. "Thy will be done" is a great word, used, perhaps, very thoughtlessly by us sometimes, but when affliction is on our loins and grace is in our hearts, enabling us to say, The will of the Lord be done, that, that is walking with God in humble submission to His divine will. When two wills clash there is no peace, and when your stubborn will clashes with God's imperious will there is no peace between you. Jonah said "I do well to be angry" and God did well to chasten him. But when this will of yours and the holy, righteous, imperious will of God come into an agreement, when you can say, Take me and all of me and all I have; take me with this poor will of mine and bring me into that mould, that Thou hast made, of the gospel, and give me grace to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt", then you are in agreement and you walk with Him in the trouble; walk at peace with Him and at peace with the stones of the field. The things that stumbled you do not now stumble you. How can I be brought to this? says one. This trouble of mine so irritates, so brings out the worst of my nature, that I can hardly bear myself. Well, take the

case of Christ's dealing with Peter. It may show how the Lord can bring our wills to His. When Christ was washing the feet of His disciples and came to Peter, Peter says, Dost Thou wash my feet? Thou shalt never wash my feet. What humility, some people might say. It was not humility; it was ignorance. Thou shalt never wash my feet. What, Peter oppose His Master? Now how did Christ bring Peter down; He did not sieze his feet with one hand and put water on them with the other; He touched Peter's heart. He said, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me", and that was too much for Peter. He had no opposition now; his impetuous spirit made him say, "Not my feet only, but also my head and my hands". Christ has a way of touching people's wills. The Saviour has but to put His hand in by the hole of the door to bring an unwilling wife off her bed of carnal ease. He has but to say to you some kind word as that was spoken to Peter and you will say, Here I am Lord, take me. Thus a sinner walks with God in affliction and may the Lord help us to walk with Him in affliction. Our wills, if we had all that they wish and dictate, would speedily land us in sore trouble, if not in destruction, but the will of God, "the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush", that will, prevailing over and against the will of a sinner. Not breaking the will but subduing it; you will always have a will; there will be wills in heaven as much as on earth; but when here, O to have this will, so ignorant, so stubborn, so bent on self-indulgence, to have this will brought into a happy unison with the will of God; for you, as it were, to lose your will and lose yourself in Jesus quite. This, this is good, and this is to walk in agreement with the Lord. And so these people, rebelling against the Lord, could not walk with Him and He, being rebelled against, could not walk with them in peace and equity. See then if there is an agreement between you and God. Never expect to walk with Him while you indulge some sin. Never expect His smile while you are pleasing yourself. Never expect Him to be with you for comfort while you are carrying your own burdens and seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own words. But when it pleases the Holy Spirit to work in you both to will and to do of God's good pleasure, then you will walk in sweet agreement with God.

And one brief word more. What is this agreement with God here; here, for a day perhaps, for an hour sometimes? What is it but a prelude, a forerunner, of that holy, everlasting walking with Him in

heaven? The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne leads His blessed company, in the midst of which He is, to living fountains of waters and they shall thirst no more, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. How can two walk together except they be agreed?

AMEN.