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Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
on Sunday Evening 7 November 1920.

Text: Colossians 1 verse 9.

"For this cause, we also, since the day we heard it,
do not cease to pray for you, and desire that ye might be
filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom
and spiritual understanding;"

We noticed this morning a little concerning the will of God,
what it is, and where in an especial manner it is. This evening
we are to notice what it is to have the knowledge of that will,
and the manner of that knowledge, in all wisdom and spiritual
understanding.

There are two ways of knowing the will of God. One is a
rational, natural way by reading the scriptures, and this is
within the capacity of every man who reads the scriptures. You
all know the scriptures and I trust that we may say that as a
congregation we believe in the inspiration of the scriptures. We
have no doubt that the Bible is the word of God, and moreover as
a congregation, we have some acquaintance with the leading
doctrines of the scriptures, the doctrines of God, the doctrines
of the Trinity, the doctrines of the fall, the doctrines of the
utter inability of man to recover himself, to help himself, the
doctrine of the incarnation of God's dearly beloved and only
begotten Son in the miraculous way in which we are informed He
was born, and the doctrine of His vicarious sacrifice of Himself,
also of His resurrection and also of His ascension into heaven.
These doctrines we all believe and may the Lord grant we may
never deny them, never deny any one of them. You may know them
and I wish you may know them constantly, rationally,
intellectually, but I must say this - God grant you may not stop
there, for he who knows no more of the doctrine of the Bible than
that, never finds the sanctifying influence of those doctrines on

his heart, never manifests their living power in his conduct, and will never enjoy their blessedness in Eternity. Dear friends, you are right so far as you believe in the Bible, but you must be led further than that. May the Lord give you and give me too, His Holy Spirit, that we may savingly believe what we believe, that we may hang about and hanker after the Lord Jesus which is far beyond any rational perception of truth that we may have. You may perceive a great beauty intellectually in the truth. There is a beauty in the truth. The highest truth that can ever occupy the thoughts of man is in the scriptures. However beautiful natural knowledge, science and any sort of knowledge may be, a knowledge of the Bible exceeds all and there is a beauty that nothing in nature knows but that is not sufficient.

The second way of knowing the truth and the will of God is by the Holy Spirit coming and revealing it, and this was so clear to the Apostle that he prayed the Lord to fill these godly Colossians with the knowledge of His will. They had already some knowledge of it. Now he would pray and wish for them a fulness of it, that they might be much enriched in knowledge. What is the will of God, but that His dearly beloved Son should be the Saviour of the lost. What is it to know that will, but to know that He saved you. You must be soundly convinced of sin before there is room for you in the Lord Jesus. You must be soundly convinced that you are ruined, that no duties done, no excellences possessed, no religion professed can help you in this matter. That it is not a matter of acquisition but of revelation, not something you can pick up, but something that is put in by the Spirit. When men are convinced of sin, what poor creatures they find themselves to be, what turning to a variety of devices there is, what wishing to be good, what efforts to cleanse themselves, what longings to be sincere, what feelings that if they were but sincere, and if they were but assured of being sincere, they might then pray, but they are beaten off prayer often by a sense of their wickedness. They think perhaps that they might hope in God's mercy if they were repentant, if they could shed a tear over their state, but they are brought off

from that. They think sometimes if they were steady in their feelings about God, in their repentance before Him, then they might hope, but they are beaten off that, and by degrees, sooner or later each struggling, travailing, burdened, afflicted sinner is brought to feel that he is a sinner. Not partly so, but wholly so. That there is not one spot in his nature on which he can put his finger and say, well this is clean, though all the rest is polluted, but he is wholly bad. I cannot express it as it should be expressed, but I know it painfully. Now the knowledge of God's will, brought to a person in this condition teaches him that it is the will of God that a poor, distraught, miserable, bondaged, gloomy sinner should come to the throne of God's heavenly grace and look on the person and sacrifice of Christ with the eye of faith, should believe that that sacrifice is infinite in its merit, is infinitely suitable to the sinner, that God will have nothing joined to this sacrifice, to this Saviour. That a sinner is not to be of anything, no not of one dry scab, to refer to the case of leprosy. No, not the removal of one single thread that is rotten in his righteousness, and a sound thread put in its place, but wholly and entirely the sinner is to receive the Lord Jesus as a perfect Saviour and when the knowledge of this is had by the Holy Spirit it has an amazing effect upon the soul. It brings the soul even at the end of a long pilgrimage, it may be, as well as at the beginning, to say with good Toplady

Nothing in my hands I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling
Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for grace
Black I to the fountain fly
Wash me Saviour or I die

And I should be glad to have, to be at that pass on my dying bed, as I would be glad to be at it this moment, and glad for all of you to be at it, for he cannot be nearer God's heart who is near to the cross. He cannot be far from God's mercy, cannot be far from Christ's righteousness who is near to this. O what an

amazing thing it is to have the knowledge of this will brought home to you, into your very heart. It turns a man's thoughts, it turns his mind, turns his heart completely to Christ. The Apostle warns these Colossians against philosophy and vain deceit, worldly wisdom. He says - Beware lest any man should beguile you therewith, and this prayer answered means that, for as sure as a sinner gets some knowledge that it is God's will that Christ should be all in all to a sinner, it saves him from the corrupt and subtle reasoning of his own mind. It brings him to a simplicity that is pleasing to God, and beneficial to the sinner. He hangs all his soul's interests on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Now where this is in some measure it is good, but Paul says to the Colossians, I pray you may be filled with this knowledge. If we are filled with it, one effect will be this, we shall be conformed to that exhortation that occurs further on in this epistle "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him" We shall, I say, be conformed to that exhortation. It brings the soul off from every prop to this one support, and I would direct your attention to this particular. This is the knowledge that God's children have of the will of God that they are to be saved wholly and alone by the Lord Jesus.

Bring no money price or aught

There are many things in our experience to turn us away from this. Many temptations there are to bring us off from this, many, many. Christ said - Take heed what ye hear. Take heed how ye hear, and we have great need for this exhortation lest we be diverted from that one only object of saving faith, Jesus Christ. It has the effect of bringing a person to look for redemption out of every affliction, to look for perseverance to the end in the face of all opposition, and sometimes to expect to be brought honourably through, notwithstanding the many difficulties that are in the way. If we turn to the Romans, we find the Apostle Paul there expressing the condition that God's people are brought into through knowing the will of God in Christ. He says - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,

who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit!" That is the condition, the state of every child of God, but the old man says - surely this is not everything. There is a pharisaism in our nature that opposes this exclusive gospel. You must know it, some of you. This exclusiveness is abhorrent to our fallen nature. What, am I to be, at the end of my profession, no better, nothing more in myself than I was at the beginning of it? After now more than fifty years, as I hope of God's mercy experienced by me, it is not a little struggle, it is not a small matter to come down into the very dust and be nothing but a sinner. I use the word sinner, because it is quite enough. We can use hard names about sin but we shall never make it anything more. We are sinners, and if God tells us so, then we find we need a Saviour, a Saviour all through, and to know that it is the will of God that Christ should be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us is no little attainment. No condemnation. Why, you say you often feel condemned, and I am glad you do, but it is one thing for a man to condemn himself and a good thing, that is if he does it from the presence and teaching of the Spirit within him. It is one thing for a man to condemn himself, I say, and another for God to condemn him. If the Lord condemn you not, O how happy you are, however troubled you may be, and men in that state that the Apostle expresses in that word, have sometimes through the Spirit's teaching, a very sweet inkling of the last of what follows in that chapter. "What shall separate us from the love of Christ, shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." And to know this part of God's will is to know a great deal. What, will God keep you to the end? Will He allow nothing to separate you from the love of Christ? Does the love of Christ wrap you up, enfold you in its arms, and is it, thus, as expressed, the will of God that you should not perish? Even so,

as it is written it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. O, one says, we know all about that. Do you know anything about it? Do you know it by the Spirit? Did He ever bring any of it to you? Men may say they know all about it, and die ignorant of it. The thing is to have a little of it, but still greater to have this petition answered, to be filled with the knowledge of His will respecting yourself, respecting your standing in Jesus Christ. With the knowledge of His will that He did, in eternity predestinate you to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He did adopt you into His family according to the good pleasure of His will. That He gave you a standing, a being in Christ, from which nothing shall beat or separate you. My brethren, this comes suddenly sometimes, as in a moment. Now you may get a flash into your conscience that will show you how utterly lost you are. Then you may get a thunder clap in your conscience that will arouse you to your danger, and then the sweet, soft, penetrating, pervading, persuading light of truth descends from heaven into your heart, and you find, in a moment, your thoughts, the current of your thoughts, quite diverted, and instead of looking for hell, you look into the face of Christ and see a smile there. Instead of expecting to stand in your filthy garments in eternity before the eye of justice, you see yourself clothed in Christ's righteousness, and instead of fearing you will die with all the pollution and corruption of sin and your fallen nature, you look and see yourself standing in the purity of Jesus Christ. It is done in a moment. The intellect is left behind. Rapidly, apprehension of things is left behind, and the incomprehensible is known. We may apprehend what we can never fully apprehend. We can never comprehend what God does, but we may be filled with this knowledge of His will that He has loved us with an everlasting love, and therefore with lovingkindness has drawn us.

This then is a great matter, and the Apostle speaks of the manner of it, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. There is a spiritual perception of things to which nature can never aspire, never reach. A spiritual perception of God's presence

and God's love and God's great mercy, melting mercy. A spiritual perception that you are accepted in the Beloved. Perception of your name being written in the Lamb's Book of Life, of your name being deep sculptured on the wounded heart of the Lord Jesus, of your name being engraved on the palms of His hands, and that you will never be removed out of His sight, and there is an understanding of this and it is comprised in that word of the Apostle John as in his first epistle "And 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". You feel troubled some of you. You think you never shall reach this, do you? You beg for it and it has not come yet. You have waited and then left off waiting. You are convinced of sin and you think often perhaps that your convictions are but natural. You pray and cease praying. Hope and cease hoping. Melt and get hard. Think now and again you are nigh, then get very far off. These changes affect you seriously as to the conclusion you are forced at times to come to, about your standing before God. Now let me just tell you this, that conviction of sin which you have, may turn to be one of the best friends you have ever had in your heart, and that feeling that Christ and Christ alone can do you good may be from the Holy Ghost, and may be the means, and will be the means, of your coming again and again, just as an empty, lost sinner, and you will find that sometimes, as in a moment, that flash that I just named as to conviction, will also come as a revelation of Christ, and turn you completely round, and you will see the way to God, the way to justification, to sanctification, to wisdom, to redemption. The way from your mud and mire, to the Rock of Ages, the way from your dangers, to a house of refuge, whereunto you may continually resort. And when you have this knowledge, the wisdom of it will be in your soul, like a voice, saying, now seek God this way, seek this atonement, seek this righteousness, seek this blessing. Seek forgiveness of your sins, and seek the sealing of the Spirit in your heart, and the distinction between nature and Spirit will be brought to you, perhaps also at that same time, as Paul here says in spiritual understanding. It is beyond a rational conception of religion

even of Christ. It is a spiritual understanding of the love and the grace of Christ, and the love and the grace of the Spirit, and the love and favour of the Father.

Then the Apostle in the next verse - "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God". It is very striking that the Apostle uses the word knowledge, in this epistle, very often opposing it, to that spurious philosophy, and vain deceit, by which Satan seeks to turn aside the simple from following after God. Now you may perceive sometimes, to turn to a practical part of experience, that God has a will concerning your life. You may think that I need scarcely make such a remark, but I will make it. You may perceive that God has a will concerning your life. Who cannot perceive that, one asks? Many men are blind. They see there is a moral obligation resting on them. They see there is an obligation on them in their relations in life, as the husband's obligation to his wife, and the wife may see her obligation to her husband, and parent to his children, and his children to himself as their parent. All that is good and proper. A master may see, by the scriptures, what he should do for his servants, and the servant may see what is due to his master from himself. That is very natural, and very proper, and if England so saw herself in the light of the scriptures, and what God, the creator and former and maker and preserver of nations, requires of nations, O what a change there would be in this our beautiful island in a short time. It would reform men; it would reform masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. O it would make a very Eden of our land, in a short time, and that would be beautiful, and God would own it. Shall we live to see such a day? But there is something beyond that. A child of God is in some trouble, and his nature frets, and he may think, Jonah like, that he does well to be angry, and to nurse his heart and wounded feelings, is natural to him. To think as to what course he should take, with respect to the thing, is natural to him. To sullenly rebel, is natural to him. Says the Apostle Paul - I pray that you may know and be filled with the knowledge

of God's will, that the best course for you to take is submission to the will of God, to fall flat before God, put your case, put yourself into His hands. Employ, on your behalf, Omnipotence. Follow, as you can, the leadings of God in providence. Ask Him to show you the way wherein you should walk, for you are lifting up your soul unto Him, and then you will walk in a proper way, walk humbly depending on your Lord, humbling yourself under His mighty hand, waiting on Him to see what He will do for you, what He will do with you. One sustains a loss and nature says - now I must do this to meet it. I must do that to get over it, and the will of God comes, the knowledge of the will of God comes, and says to him - you go to God with it. If it please Him that you should walk under and in this loss, it is better for you than that you should have a full supply as you have had. If it is God's will that you should walk in this straightness, it is better, than that you should have all that enlargement that you have enjoyed before.

That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will. And that this has some truth in it experimentally, I am disposed to say, and maintain from what follows. "Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness." Yes, with joyfulness. As the godly Hebrews, of the dispersion, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, so the child of God, when the knowledge of God's will is imparted to him, is enabled to do also. Strengthened with all might, by the Spirit who makes the revelation to the soul of what the will of God concerning him is, he is strengthened to suffer, according to His glorious power, unto all patience, under God's afflicting hand and long suffering, waiting till He shall come, with joyfulness, that He condescends to notice you, that He loves you so well, as not to allow you to have your own way, and not to live independently of Him. That you might be filled with the knowledge of His will, that you should walk uprightly. This is the will of God even your sanctification. He who lives according to the dictates of his proud nature, and lustful heart, knows nothing of grace, nothing of God. He who knows Christ savingly, and wants to live like Him, longs to be conformed to His

suffering image, and to walk unto all pleasing, longs to be conformed to that word in the Ephesians - Walk as dear children. Why? Because the Lord has loved you, and adopted you into His family. So walk as you have received mercy, as you have received many mercies. Therefore "be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God". May the Lord enable us to live according to our profession, and more than that, according to His will concerning us. If God is first, it is good. Follow that. If Christ is first, that is good. Follow Him. If the Spirit, as a teacher, is first, that is good. Follow His teaching. And if we follow God, we shall come out of the world. We shall be separated from it. Come out from among them, for what concord hath Christ with Belial, and what communion hath light with darkness. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty". This is God's will.

Dry doctrine cannot save us
Light hearts or smooth behaviour
Sinners can say and only they
How precious is the Saviour,

And as they say that, they also say, the Lord teach us how to live, to live as men who are alive from the dead, as men who have been planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, and also in the likeness of His resurrection; that we may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God.

Amen.