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

Colossians 1 v 9

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

The Apostle Paul and his son Timothy sent the salutation that we have here to this church at Colosse. They had heard a good account of the people and felt stirred up in their spirit to thank God for His great goodness to them. "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which ye have to all the saints." It will always be matter for thankfulness to the Lord's people when they hear of His goodness to others. Barnabas was a good man and when he went to Antioch, being sent, and had seen there the grace of God, he was glad, and you will be glad, who possess grace, whenever you hear of grace being given to another, whenever you hear of anyone's faith in Christ, causing a cleaving to Christ. It is a mark which the Scripture gives us of our being the children of God, when we love all who are begotten of Him. It is a mark of a lively state of soul to be glad at any spiritual prosperity we may hear of in others. If you have a true interest in the church of God you will surely be glad if, in any place, prosperity is given, and you come to know it. God's people are so sensible at times of their own fallen, wicked condition, that, as they believe God has redeemed them from it, they feel glad, and that qualifies them for a gladness of spirit when they hear of the same abounding mercy in others. And this moved these servants of the Most High God to pray for the Colossians. For this cause - the reason of our being so stirred up in love to you and prayer for you; the report we heard of you - we do not cease to pray for you. Do you feel an interest in the Lord's people? Does your heart say, "Peace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity?" Do you pray for the peace of Jerusalem? It is a great mercy to have such a spirit; such a loving, humble spirit to move us to thank God

that He has been good, not only to us, but also to others. "For this cause we also since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you". Praying without ceasing is a great thing. It does not mean that you are always on your knees, but it means that the trend of your spirit and the life of your soul is to call upon the Name of the Lord. "We do not cease to pray for you and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." If there is an infinite God, if there is a personal God, He has a will, and that will is to be known by all the people of God, and that these Colossians, who already knew it, might be filled with the knowledge of it, is the Apostle's prayer. We have then to notice, if the Lord will help us :-

First of all, what the will of God is.

Secondly, being filled with it and

Thirdly, the manner of that being filled with it, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding".

First of all we have to notice the will of God. My friends, it is absolute; it knows no limitation; it knows no external influence; is just an absolute, free will. The only free will that exists is God's will. We talk of free will in ourselves, but our will is bound. God's will is free. Strictly, no man moves just according to an absolute will in himself. We move in providence; we decline to move; we turn to this hand or to that; we choose this, we refuse that, according, not to the absolute freedom of our wills, but, as far as we are able to form a judgment, according to the effect of this or that cause, of this or that choice. Circumstances, probabilities, expectations, fears, external to ourselves, move us in our choice. I am sure you will follow me in that. But O, the difference there is between this kind of will and the influence of externals upon it, and the absolute will of God. Nothing outside Himself influences Him. It could not do so because the will of God and all its volitions, motions, choices, rejections, were eternal. Everything, that is, comes from the decree of God, and the decree of God is God willing; willing that such and such things shall be; that such and such things shall not be. Willing that we should be born when and where we were, and of what parents and what our circumstances should be, our positions in providence. We choose, as we think; the mind inclines to this

occupation or to that, but who inclines the mind? It is God. It is an absolute will without any limitations at all from circumstances, or any influence whatever from circumstances. Hold this fast. It is more important than perhaps may appear to some of you at the moment, much more. When men limit God's freedom, when they say He could not do this, because if He did it, it would be contrary to all human justice, remember this, that they limit the Holy One of Israel, and they bring the sense of men and of human justice to bear upon Him who is absolute, whose ways are just, but beyond comprehension by us; whose goodness is infinite, though it may not appear to be so to us. Hold fast, my dear brethren, the absoluteness of the will of God. But in what way shall we notice the will of God? It is revealed in certain acts of His; it is revealed in certain decisions, decrees, purposes. The Scripture reveals the will of God, and first, and most important of all as I judge, we may say that the will of God is concerned in the Person and the work of Christ. Everything resolves itself into this - the will of God in Christ. God willed to make the worlds by Him; He willed to uphold them by the Word of the power of incarnate Deity; He willed that the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world should have power to take the Book and loose the seals and open the Book. It is the will of God that Christ should have authority; all rule and all authority in heaven and in earth; He gave Him this. So it is a most important point for us this morning to notice the will of God in, and concerning, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this point, let us notice the will of God respecting the incarnation of His only begotten Son. Of this Christ Himself speaks in the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms where the Psalmist writes, and Christ in him, says: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire;burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God". The coming of Christ was to do the will of God; the will of God as it had been expressed to Him in the covenant; the will of God as it had been revealed to Him, the Man Christ Jesus, that He should come and die. The will of God as it was expressed to Him that He was to bear the sin of many, in His Own body on the tree; as it was revealed to Him that He should lose none of all who should see Him and believe on Him, but raise them up at the last day. "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on Him should not perish, but I should raise him up at the last day." What a

will is this will; a subject so great, so glorious, so weighty, so embracing the whole of the election of grace, so all-embracing in respect of their interest through time and eternity, that if we have but faith to regard it, it will prove a subject of such deep, wondrous, spiritual and eternal interest to us, as that we shall never tire of meditating upon it, as the Holy Ghost may be in us. What, was it God's will that His eternal Son should become incarnate, that wicked people should become holy? Was it God's will to make an exchange, incomprehensible to us in its greatness, between Christ and sinners, He taking their sins; they receiving His righteousness? Was it God's will that wicked people should have, between them and the God against whom they had sinned, a Mediator, a High Priest, who should take their cases up and plead for them and present, on their behalf, His own death? Then my brethren, what a glorious will is the will of God. It reaches all creatures; it reaches the highest creatures in heaven; they are His servants. It reaches the deepest depths of hell and all wicked spirits there. It reaches providence in all its perplexities and mysteries, and things which are beyond our understanding. But this, this is the subject of subjects for us this morning, the will of God with respect to the coming and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the will of love; yes, it was a will of love, eternal, unalterable love. It is expressed in the infallible gospel. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." There is the will of God. He will have people with Him in heaven. How shall they get there? They are unfit for such a holy place; they are unfit for such company. How shall they get there? Why, by the coming of the eternal Son of God in human nature, by His taking on Him their debts and their sins, and by His removing their sin from them by the sacrifice of Himself. This is the will of God, my brethren; a will of love. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". Go, said the eternal Father to His Son, Go; be made a man to make poor men the sons of God. Go and bear their sins; be made sin for them that they may be made the righteousness of God in Thee. And He, the eternal Son, said - "I delight to do Thy will, O God. Yea, Thy law is within My heart". You may feel very willing, by sweet occasions, to do the revealed will of God, as that will is revealed to you in His providential dealings with you and by His Spirit, and that will which

you are willing to do may be a very solemn one to you. It may involve you in much trouble, many fears and exercises, and some losses. But O, what is all that compared to what the dear, the only begotten Son of God, who was eternally in the bosom of His Father, who was holy, holy, holy, and all glorious, undertook in obedience to His Father. He, He had to come; He willingly came; He thus, with infinite desire to do it, came to be the passive, slain sacrifice for His people. He came; the infinitely rich and glorious Son of God became poor that His people, through His poverty might be rich. It was a will, not of love only, but a will that His Son should become the substitute of His people, should be vicarious, standing, not alone, but for others; working, suffering, not for Himself for He had no sin - He did none of Himself - but for others, and God placed Him, and He placed Himself, in the stead of His people. He atoned with an atonement that did atone and that does atone and that shall bear fruit for ever. It was not an effort to reconcile enemies to God, but it was a work to redeem from death and hell, and He accomplished it. He became the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. It was a great thing for God's will to give a substitute, for God's will to determine that wrath, due to a company that no man can number, should fall upon the Blessed One who came and took the place of that number. Wondrous is this will of God; wondrous is it in the eyes of all to whom it is revealed. It was a will of death to Christ; my brethren, it was a will of death to Christ. God commanded Him to die, to lay down His life. No man taketh My life from Me. I lay it down; I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father.

How willing was Jesus to die
That we wretched sinners might live
The life they could not take away
How willing was Jesus to give

and He did give it. So when He had accomplished that solemn will of His Father, we read, He dismissed His spirit. This is the will of God; the will of God is that the redeemed should be born again. Without the new birth none can see the kingdom of God, none can enter into it. And so the Holy Spirit comes, in the fulness of time, to each person redeemed by Jesus Christ, and gives to him a new heart,

implants in him a divine principle of life; gives, what Christ declared to be necessary, the new birth. "Ye must be born again". It is not religion that will put you right; plenty of people have religion but they have no grace. It is not religion that will put you right; it is not holding the truth in the form of it - good and important as that is - that will put you right; it is the new birth, the gift of divine life, the operation of the Eternal Spirit. The gift to men who are contrite, docile, ready, willing? No! Given, not to men who are humble, attractive to God, No! but to the dead, to the loathsome, to the hypocritical, to the Pharisee, to the infidel, to the wicked, to the wicked liver. It is a gift according to the riches of God's grace, my friends, wherein He abounds in all wisdom and prudence. It is a great gift, this gift of life, and this is the will of God; blessed will.

The appointed time rolls on apace (for each redeemed one)
Not to propose, but call by grace,
To change the heart, renew the will,
And turn the feet to Zion's hill

A sovereign will this, irresistible. "Who" says Paul to the Romans, "hath resisted His will?" Wicked men say it too, and therefore they say - "Why doth He yet find fault for who hath resisted His will?" Says Paul, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God. Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast Thou made me thus?" Shall a creature criticise the Creator? Shall an evil person judge a good God? "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" To whom does God owe anything, but justice and hell? What man could lift up his face to God and say, with truth, that God owed him something beyond justice and hell? If then we are all equally bad and lost and dead, God owing nothing to us, but punishment, O what a mercy it is that He willed to give the new birth to some. "You hath He quickened". You Ephesians, out of the Ephesians, "You hath He quickened". While others cry "Great is Diana of the Ephesians", "You" - first the twelve men; then a few others, and later, more - "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." It is the will of God that these persons should repent; God commanded them to repent and what He commands, He gives. He hath commanded all men everywhere to repent and He gives that very repentance. Repentance toward God; it is a

great gift, a gift of God's will and Spirit; He comes to a sinner and convinces him of sin. Conviction of sin derives from a standard; listen, sinner, conviction of sin derives from a standard; a straight line you must have if you will convict of a crook or a bulge. And what is the standard by which conviction is brought? God is the standard; holy, holy, holy, God in the law, is the standard. The law is holy, and just, and good, and when that God, in some measure, speaks and reveals Himself to a sinner, conviction follows. There may not be great terror, but there may be great feeling. O, I have sinned against God. There may not be great motion, but there will be deep feeling sometimes; I have sinned against God, what shall I do? One of the sweetest of all voices that heaven hears is that - What shall I do? I have sinned against God. Angels rejoice at that sound; there is joy over one sinner that repenteth. O, repenting sinner, if such is here this morning, you do not know at this moment, cannot conceive, what the joy in heaven is over you. You hate yourself; angels look on you, the Father looks on you, the Son looks on you, the Holy Ghost looks on you, with approbation. It is the will of God that men should repent, and because they cannot repent of themselves, He gives them the Spirit of grace and supplication; He gives them the Holy Spirit who convinces them of sin; then they believe. This is God's will concerning them, so He sends the Spirit who works the work of faith with power, that the Name of the Lord Jesus should be glorified in them. And you know, those two things are in the Scriptures concerning the people of God - Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Two great things essential to godliness, essential to true, experimental religion. Repentance, whereby a sinner comes and says - I am sorry. "I said I will be sorry for my sins". Faith, whereby he sees that there is plenteous redemption. "With the Lord there is mercy and with Him is plenteous redemption" The first pleases God; the second opens the riches of Christ to a soul. The first, as it were, gives the door of access; the second gives a sweet prevalence. O, if you have faith in the bleeding Lamb, your faith will open the riches of grace and the treasures of heaven for your soul. This is God's ordained way. The dying Lamb utterly forbids despair to all who love His Name. What a great thing it is to have faith. It is knowledge of the will of God. But we desire this for you, that you may be filled with knowledge. My friends, we do sincerely confess and mourn over our ignorance. I say "we", for I

believe I speak the mind of many of you; we do feel how little we know. But I will maintain this - I have said it before you more than once - that the religion which God gives to His people is a religion of knowledge; they do know some things. They know there is a God, and, by knowing that, they know that they are sinners. They know there is a Redeemer, and they know they need Him and feel their need of Him and pray to have Him. They know there is a fountain of blood and long to be plunged into it. They know there are sons of the Most High, and long to be adopted with them into God's heavenly family. They know there is a Holy Ghost, and pray He may dwell in them. They know there is a throne of grace and long to get to it continually. They know these things, but they do not know them fully. We here know but little, and the little may sometimes seem to be decreasing, and we may be afraid we shall one day be made manifest as never having had the unction which teacheth of all things and is truth. Now the Apostle may meet some of us this morning in this petition - "that you may be filled". That it may not be an occasional ray darting into your understanding - great as that may be - but that the sun may continually shine into your hearts and give you "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" and that you may not see truth as a beautiful picture outside, hung upon a wall, but that you may feel it in its life and power and holiness. That you may not think of God only, but feel Him. We do feel after Him if haply we may find Him. And Paul says - I pray you may have Him; that you may know His will; that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will; that you may have such manifestations of His work for you, such applications of His work for you, as that you may be filled with the sweet assurance. As in this same epistle, Paul prays for the Colossians and for them at Laodicea, that they might "come unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ. In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And here, let me say, in passing that the apostle has that before him which is the opposite of the false, the deceiving philosophy against which he warns these Colossians. "Beware", says he, lest any of you be deceived, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." There is plenty of philosophy in

the world today, but, says Paul, now I pray that you may have knowledge of God's will, that you may not be carried away by vain speculation, but be grounded and settled in the knowledge of God. It is very different; there is a vast difference between empty, cold speculations and warm, humbling, enlarging, establishing knowledge of God brought to you by the Holy Spirit. Paul did not say - Now you increase in knowledge. He did not say, study hard and clear things. He said, I pray God to give you this. I pray God to come, to come to you, and enlighten you and enliven you, and warm you by discoveries of Himself. "That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding". If they could have acquired it, why should he pray for it for them? But, seeing they were likely to be injured by vain philosophy, he says, now I pray the Lord to be your teacher. I pray He will graciously teach you what His will in Christ is; that you should be men. That He will be so good, that you should have the forgiveness of sins and justification and sanctification. That Christ should be your High Priest, that He should look on your sore places and leprosy, that He should offer Himself to God without spot, for you. I pray that ye may know this will of God. And so may the Lord give us to enter into this, even that we may be filled with knowledge. We have never attained to much; may the Lord grant that we may attain to a great deal yet. He who knows a little of God, by the Holy Spirit, will go to heaven, but he who knows more is established. Says Peter - I pray that God, after you have suffered awhile, may strengthen, establish, settle you, and He will settle you by knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and it surely is good, for Solomon says "That the soul be without knowledge is not good". Do you see, do you feel, the need of knowledge? the need of an instructor? Who is that instructor? The Spirit. What is that knowledge? The knowledge of God's will, the will of God as it is specially expressed and revealed in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. O, what a wonderful will it is; to will that a sinful person should be spotless and without blame before God in love; that an alien should be adopted into the heavenly family of God; that a stranger should come into the house of God; that a poor piece of sin should be made part of that heavenly building that is builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. May the Lord give us to know His divine will.

AMEN.