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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 3 April 1935

COLOSSIANS 3 v 16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"

The Lord, in the Holy Scriptures of truth, has been pleased to make known the oneness of the Church and, in a variety of places, you will find exhortations to the union which eternally, in God's election and decree, has subsisted between each member; to maintain that unity. The people of God are not at liberty to do as their nature would lead them. You here, members of the Church, and godly people, are not at liberty to just do and say what you think to be right. You have all given yourselves to the Lord and then to one another in Him and as children and as members of the Church of God, the Word of God teaches you, sets before you, what you should do. This precept which I have read will be a very attractive one to every gracious person, but it may be a very convincing and painful one to those of us who have solemnly, sadly, neglected the Scriptures. I do not mean by that that we have neglected the reading of the Bible. We do read it every day, but how many of you, myself included, can say before God that we do study, prayerfully consider, what we read. Do we seek that God would speak to us - and that, as the effect of that, we may speak to Him - in and by the Holy Scripture. We talk about the Bible - I do - O, but what convictions we may sometimes feel in our consciences that this revelation of God - for that is what it is - this revelation of His purpose, His decrees, this revelation of His Son, the incarnate Son, this revelation of the doctrines of grace; how little, alas for us, how little have we read the Word of God. One effect is, we are very carnally minded often. One effect is that we are like children, tossed about. May the Lord forgive us, and stir us up by His good Spirit, to look into carefully, pray over, the blessed Word of God. This precept, as I have said, must be attractive to every gracious soul that is rightly exercised. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly", not to be as a stranger coming to look at you and passing on, or lodging a few hours with you, but dwelling in you; be an indweller; richly, abundantly.

The first enquiry is this; what is this word of Christ? I take it that it begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The Apostle Peter, you remember, those of you who read the Bible, says that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets and that even the prophets searched diligently to understand what the Spirit of Christ meant, who was in them and by whom they prophesied. And he says this was the salvation, salvation which had come to those to whom Peter wrote of the dispersion. He said this salvation is come to you of which the prophets enquired and searched diligently what was the Spirit which was in them; that was the Spirit of Christ. So we are not to confine the word of Christ to the New Testament. No. Oh, what prophecies, what manifestations, what types, what shadows, what many beautiful revelations in the Old Testament concerning the Lord Jesus Christ; the word of Christ. This word of Christ we may then say embraces doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, of His Person, the Seed of the woman prophesied, promised in Genesis, the Seed of the woman. It comprises the whole revelation that this blessed Book has in it of that divine Person incarnate, of that sacred humanity which He took into union with His Person, of the purposes of God in sending Him, of the Name of God which is in Him, of the prophecies which went before Him concerning His work, His death, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His Priestly work there, His Kingly waiting there till all His enemies be made His footstool. This word of Christ - let us take it then, first of all, with regard to the doctrine of it. Moses was inspired to say in the Name of God: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb....." (Deuteronomy 32 v 2). That is the doctrine of God. Bless God He has never revealed Himself apart from His Son incarnate. It is a subject too deep, too important, to be dealt with in a sermon - one can only mention it - that from Genesis to Revelation, in the Old Testament as well as in the New, it is one revelation of the Son of God incarnate, by type, shadow, promise, prophecy; by the actual incarnation, by the blessed life of the Saviour, by the vicarious death of Jesus, by His wonderful resurrection, by His manifesting Himself by many infallible proofs

after His resurrection, then His ascension into heaven. If we had eyes to see given us; if we had hearts to consider; if we had a mind to study; if we had prayer to pray over the blessed Word of God; we should be more stable and more gracious than we are. That, at least, is my conviction concerning myself, and I believe I may say it is true of you. We are poor, unsteady believers, unbelieving believers, carnally minded believers very often and there is no cure for that state but the word of Christ. By the opening, revealing and application of the word of Christ we shall be cured of our evils; no other way. There is no substitute for the word of Christ. You may think I ought not to speak so, but I am certain it is true and as you are taught of the Spirit you will say, he did not half tell us things. How can I? "Living tongues are dumb at best". But still, as the Lord helps me, let me speak to you, first of all, about that doctrine. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain".

As far as I can judge of things amongst us today - I do not mean here simply, but the Churches we know and are connected with - there is a sad impatience of doctrine. I have heard ministers say, we do not want doctrine, we want experience. You will never get experience worth having apart from doctrine, never, and I therefore exhort you, my brethren, to take very diligent heed to doctrine. Not dry doctrine; there is no such thing really. There is no such thing as dry doctrine. Doctrine may be dealt with dryly, may be dealt with carnally, but doctrine itself can never be dry. God is in it; grace is in it; love is in it; wisdom and power are in it; it cannot be dry. It shall drop as the rain. What is it? It is the doctrine of God. The doctrine of God is the doctrine of Christ. He spared not His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all. That Son has in Him, as I endeavoured to say last Lord's Day morning, has in Him everything that can be for the glory of God in the salvation of the Church. This, God give us grace to attend to it, for if we are not interested in what was in Christ then hell must be our portion, but if we are interested in what is in Him, then it behoves us to attend narrowly, carefully, prayerfully to what is revealed concerning this divine Person.

This word of Christ, His dear, His wondrous, His glorious Person. Take that word concerning Him by Isaiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is givenHis Name shall be called

Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" and of His government there shall be no end. It is on His shoulder. He has the keys of hell and of death. Now what a Person this is, the divine Person and human nature, One Person. Why did He become this? God had no necessity for creatures; still less had He necessity for sinners. Yet for sinners He became all this, for "sinners" - Hart has a beautiful word -

Sinners are high in His esteem
And sinners highly value Him

Do we value Him and have we had a testimony in our consciences that He highly values us. The proof that He values sinners, as the Scriptures give it, is that He came and took their place, stood in their room and stead, took their debts, their sins, their guilt, their death, their curse, their hell; He took it all. And when you believe it, when you feel some testimony of it in your souls, then the word of Christ is in you; not a picture outside for you to admire. You may admire, and properly admire, the truth, but when the word is in you it is an inhabitant, an indweller; not just a stranger; not a passing stranger; a word in your heart, in your thoughts, in your feelings, in your affections, in your understanding, in your will. That is a great thing, for the word to be in a sinner. It is a great thing to be a sinner fit for this word and then for this word to come. May the Lord help us to obey this divine precept: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you". Be it in you as a living, powerful, gracious word, a living word, an illuminating word, a guiding word, a protecting word, a strengthening word. What a grand thing it is to have a religion that God gives you; a word containing the whole of Christ that God gives you. Attend to this doctrine of Christ, and not only the doctrine of His Person but the doctrine of His work. Take His word, first. What does He say of it? "The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life." And when you hear in your own souls any word concerning the Lord of life and glory, and it comes into your heart with an efficacy you feel conscious of, that is not a stranger, or a passing guest, but an indwelling word, a great word. When you see in Holy Scripture the work of Christ, you see the work of a Substitute. You see in His miracles a type of what He would do and what He does do in the souls of His people. Follow this blessed work

as well as you can. O, men have written about the life of Christ who do not know Him. How then could they write His life? But a poor sinner, with very little intellect, little or no learning, perhaps only just able to read the Scripture, led by the Spirit he can follow the life of Christ, step by step, and see God there, and see God there, and see God there, in the actions, the kindnesses, the love, the miracles that He did. God was in all. "Let this word" says the Apostle "dwell in you". Consider the work of Christ; consider His position in His work. What was He doing here? Why did He walk in Jewry? What was the sympathy He showed when He fed thousands of men beside women and children of a few loaves? Was it not to display the goodness of God of which He was full, and the perfect representative? Yes, and as faith follows Him here, it has a strengthening effect. When you follow the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit in His life, you will find, I say, a strengthening effect. Follow Him to Gethsemane - gloomy garden. If we see Him there, as the Scriptures tell of Him, we shall see God in human nature and we shall see human nature in its perfection, under suffering. Its perfection was this - "Not as I will but as Thou wilt". The will of that blessed Man Jesus, when He had a very near view, an awful view, of what was about to take place; that He was to be taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain. He saw it, yea, He saw the curse - it began to come into His very bones - and such was the agony that His very pores sent forth blood. If you see that you will see One in the place of a wretched, a hardened rebel who mocked and trampled on the wounds of God. And if you follow Him to the cross by precious faith, as the Scriptures set Him forth, there you will see, not what men see, a Man dying in the dark. Christ did not die in the dark, but He experienced awful darkness for hours beforehand. God forsook Him, and how could there be light then? The curse came upon Him and how could He be blessed then? And yet, in all that, Jesus was offering Himself without spot to God and, when the curse was ended, - when His soul - His very self - that had been in the hell of suffering, not hell, a place, but the hell of suffering; the curse of God is hell - when that was exhausted, He triumphed: He cried with a loud voice "It is finished". It was an earnest of His resurrection. Now this word of Christ, the Apostle says, let it dwell in you; be it in you abundantly; the Holy Scripture, full of it. You say, I am in trouble and that is what troubles me. Well, how are you to have trouble

sanctified, but by this blessed Person. How can the curse of affliction be removed but by Him who bore the curse? How can the cloud of trouble have any light in it except light come radiating from the cross of Christ? How can peace come to you except it come to you by and through Him who made peace by offering Himself to God?

Well, if this word abides in us it will have a gracious effect upon us; I believe it will endear Him to our souls. It will make us say in heart, if we do not sing the word

Jesus is precious, says the Word
What comfort does this truth afford

Let the word of promise dwell richly in you. The promises of God - you say, they are not given to me. If the Lord helps you carefully to see them, look into the contents of them, and to see how that they meet bad cases, that they are given to the poor, to the distressed, to the bondaged, that they are given to those who cannot live without them, then, though you may say, I have not had that, I have not had the other, yet you may say, my soul longs for them and prays for them. You may say, I do ask one thing of God, namely: "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". God's voice is in this word; God's voice is in the promises. The Apostle Paul, treating of the promises when writing to the Corinthians, says: "The promises of God are yea and amen to the glory of God by us". And very likely some of the Corinthian church might have said what some in Galeed say at times, we have never had them; yet they were written. He said these promises are written and they are yea and amen, uttered by Him who is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. And very sweet it is, sometimes, to find, when the Lord the Spirit begins to work and speak to you, word after word, promise after promise will come, bubbling up in your heart. It is good to have them in memory; Bunyan says something to this effect - Fill your memory with the Scripture and if the Scriptures do nothing else, they will keep worse things out. May you be filled with the Holy Scripture. O, sometimes it grieves me to reflect how little I have looked into the Word of God. The word of Christ is a word of promise. He has promised to be with His people in the fire, in the flood. He has said neither the one nor the other should destroy those who are in

Him. His promise is to feed the hungry. "I am the Bread of Life" and His Word is this. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life". As if He should say, these things about which you are so anxious only nourish your flesh; that which will bless your souls is the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, and He is that meat. "I am that Bread of Life". His promise is to send the Spirit - Whom I will send; Whom My Father will send. And that Holy Spirit, thus promised, is to lead, guide, bless and seal. He is the earnest of the inheritance. When He is given to poor people, what a gift.

Let the word of Christ concerning the Church and her ordinances and order dwell in you. They are not given for nothing; they are not given that we may just give a passing thought to them. The constitution of a Church, the order of a Church, the ordinances of a Church, and the officers of the Church - there are two, Pastors and Deacons. You say these things do not touch us. They ought to do. If you profess to fear God you ought to look into these things. The day may come when there will be a kind of necessity on you to look at things which now may have no interest for you. Look at the Scriptures; what do they say concerning the Church of God? They say this - as it were combining all into one word - that the glory of God is in the Church by Christ Jesus world without end. A great word, a word that claims solemn, prayerful attention. Is His glory here? You say, if I get a good hearing I am satisfied. It is a great thing to get a good hearing; when the hearing is good it humbles you; it makes you tender; it causes the fear of God to be in active exercise in you; it causes you to seek His honour and glory; it has a satisfying effect upon your spirit. But that is in the Church; the glory of God is in the Church by Christ Jesus, from whom the good hearing comes. Mark well the Church of God; walk about her towers; look at the bulwarks and tell them; examine the foundation of the Church; examine the walls; look at the door. Well, these are the words of Christ. May our hearts enlarge their plan, and may we be led to examine those solemn things which affect the Church of God because, if we are living people of God, we have an interest in these things, and if we are led by the Holy Spirit rightly we shall feel it to be so.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly". The word of Christ

in the next place is in precepts. It has often been said - perhaps thoughtlessly in some cases - that the precept is as dear as the promise. It needs a great deal of grace and wisdom to say that understandingly. A promise is one wonderful thing; it works. It is a sweet power; it is a heavenly guide; it is a wonderful provision to faith to prophesy good unto the glory of God. A precept may touch you, it may come across your path. A precept may say: "Set your affections on things above" and yet you have to say, Lord my affections are in my business very much, in my family; I am often drunken and surfeited with care. Then do you value the precept? Are you wrong and the precept right? Can you say that? - "I have esteemed Thy precepts above all things to be right" It may solemnly convince you that you are wrong. Let it dwell in you, says Paul. Because it cuts you, do not turn away from it. Because it shows you your imperfections, do not be displeased with it. Precepts? They are God's. The Pastor may talk about things but he can only, as God helps him, speak rightly when he is under the teaching of the Spirit. He cannot give precepts but he may be able to impress them upon his hearers. Precepts? They are God's; they must be right then.

One more word on this part. The word of Christ has respect to eternity. We are living a short time here; eternity awaits us. It reveals two places and two states. To which are we moving? Let the word concerning this dwell in you. Nothing that defileth or maketh a lie shall enter into that holy city; that is a solemn word for us. May the Lord cause it to abide in us richly, fully, abundantly, efficaciously. Let it dwell in you richly; not only a rich word, but dwell in you abundantly; that it shall be so efficacious as to displace other things. O sometimes the world so fills a soul that there seems no room for anything else. That is a solemn Scripture: Wherewithal shall we be clothed, fed. We do disobey, do we not. "Take no thought for the morrow". It does not mean carelessness; it means excessive thought. Take no thought; let it not absorb you; let it not be the one thing for you; let it not be, when you rise in the morning, what am I to do today? How can I provide for my family? It is proper such thoughts should be but when they become excessive then we are condemned. Why should we not take thought? "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you". There is a future beyond all these things.

When the word dwells abundantly it has an abundant authority; it has an efficacy; it has a power, and the soul says, yes, and I would fall under it; I would obey it; I would be moulded by it. There is a Scripture just occurs to my mind which I will quote to you as you have it in the margin. "God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine unto which ye were delivered". The text is "which was delivered you", but the word really is this "moulded". And you Roman Christians have been run into that mould and whereas, formerly, you obeyed sin, now spiritually you obey that, that is to say, you are in the shape of that mould. You have the shape of a Christian; you have the name and form of a Christian; therefore, walk according to it.

"In all wisdom". It will make you wise unto salvation and it will be profitable to direct you. Wisdom is profitable to direct, very profitable. Says a carnal mind, I want this way. The word of God dwelling in you in wisdom says, that leads to hell or it will lead to a distance between you and your God or it will harden your heart against His fear or it will bring you into bondage in some particular way. Now the word of Christ dwelling in a man says, Lord help me to walk as I should walk; help me to obey Thee; help me to cast my care on Thee; help me to follow Thee fully; help me to cleave to Thee with all my heart; help me to walk in the path of tribulation and give me Thy peace in that path according to Thy promise.

Dwell in you in all wisdom; wisdom which will point out a wrong way and point out a right way. Wisdom is thus profitable to direct us. Wisdom says, "the way of life is above to the wise that he may depart from hell beneath" Wisdom says, follow Christ whithersoever He goeth. This wisdom makes us wise unto salvation.

Now beloved friends, I am not going to continue longer. I leave these observations with you for your attention; rather I would just press upon you to notice this Scripture "Let the word of Christ" - the solemn, Holy Scripture, from beginning to end - "dwell in you richly". May you pray - may each of us fearing God be led to pray - that the Scriptures may not be a stranger to us but an indweller. AMEN.