

Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Wednesday evening, 10th. July 1929

Text: 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."

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This chapter is made up almost exclusively of precepts, exhortations. Precepts and exhortations and commandments of the Lord Jesus, and the holy apostles and prophets, have an important place in Holy Scripture, and if we perceive in the light of the Holy Ghost the importance that is thus given to exhortations and commandments and precepts, it will be for our profit. The place for these parts of the Scriptures, is the church of God, - living children. Not dead in trespasses and sins, but living children, the household of faith in and over which, Christ is Head and Lord and King, and He speaks in exhortations and precept and holy commandment in His own house. Arminians misuse and abuse such parts of the Word of God. They are neither given to the dead, nor are they to be legalised. They belong to the household of faith. Exhortations are given with respect to stability, to humility, to steadfastness and propriety of conduct; how we should behave ourselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God - the ground and pillar of the truth, and to every church, every visible church, exhortations are given, written and sent, and they have their place in experience even as they have their place in the Scriptures. They have their place in you who are called by grace, in you who have some knowledge of God, and have a place in His heart, in His house, among His people. A great example of this truth you have in that typical nation, Israel. God constantly talked to them, so to express it, about their conduct. They were His, His own people; a peculiar treasure to Himself, and so He would have them walk according to His mercies manifested to them, and that nation has the anti-type of it in the church of the living God, and to every living soul here.

There are three things in every Christian man and woman more

or less distinctly known and felt. The first is doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, who, when they are dead in their experience under the law; when they are guilty, and wretched, and miserable, and naked, and blind, receive in different measures the whole gospel, the everlasting gospel, whereby they are brought into liberty, into the house of the living God, the church of God, and being so placed, by divine mercy they have an experience, and that is the second thing, a real experience wrought in them by the eternal Spirit. They know something of God. You know, who are born again, you know something of God, of His majesty, His greatness, His jealousy, His terribleness, His mercy, His love; something of the Holy Spirit's teaching; something of that great wonder of all wonders - the atonement brought to the conscience, of that mystery and mercy - justification in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. O what a mercy it is to be so blest. And having experienced the fruit of doctrine, the doctrine of Christ by the Holy Ghost, - then you have the third thing, - practise. "Walk not as other Gentiles," says God to His people. By Peter, He says, "The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles." By Paul to the Ephesians, he says, 'You were dead in trespasses and sins, but now you are quickened and you are born again and you are formed for good works which God works in you, and you are formed to walk before Him, and in the world.' "I pray not," says Christ, concerning them, "that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." But because of the corruption of our nature; our tendency every minute of our life to turn aside as the Jews were and did, "God put;" - I think it was Philpot who said, - "two hedges by each side of the path the people of God have to walk in. One hedge is promise, the other is precept." We need them both. We need precept and exhortation, and you find again and again in the early history of the church of God, how His servants exhorted the saints. Barnabas was sent by the apostles to Antioch when they had heard of the grace of the people there, and when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad. And then he exhorted them to continue in the faith, and the apostles went about confirming the disciples, as you have it in the Acts, and exhorting them, that it is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom. And we find, again and again in the epistles, the same line of teaching - giving good doctrine, insisting on gracious

experience, and then giving out precepts and exhortations, and if there were no need of them, they would not be where they are in the Bible.

God has put no superfluous word in this Book. Supposing the children of God could not lie one to another, then He would not have said in the Word, "Lie not one to another." We have got these deceitful hearts; we have different dispositions, and God says to us as we belong to Him, "Lie not one to another." If nobody were covetous in the church, God would not have spoken against covetousness and exhorted them against it. He would not have told them that covetousness was idolatry, but because of the disposition in man to that sin, there is the warning, - flee this. Said Paul to Timothy, "Flee --- youthful lusts." He had just said, "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have --- pierced themselves through with many sorrows." These things we are to notice in Holy Scripture. Exhortations calling the attention of the people of God to what they are to do, being the people of God; how they are to walk, being the children of God; how they are to please God, being brought near to Him by His grace and Spirit in them. See here in this chapter - "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Look at these exhortations, hanging on these - if ye be risen with Christ, if you belong to Him, if He has claimed you by his grace and Spirit, - then, "set your affections on things above." One may say, "If I only knew I were right, I should not be carnal." Well, when children are children, they speak as children, and when people speak like that, God is not displeased with them because He knows they are sincere, only He teaches them by little and little what foolishness it was to speak so. No, He knows very well that all of us who fear His name, have a terrible tendency, a constant tendency, a powerful tendency to set our affections on things on the earth, and He makes us know, O, He has made some of us know, painfully, that things on the earth can only bring trouble when we set our affections inordinately upon them. As I said, through this chapter we have just exhortations, - do this, forbear that, - and these are addressed to the people of God, and I thought it might not be an inopportune time for me just to make these general remarks on the nature and

the place of exhortations. They are spiritual, and so they belong, are addressed to, spiritual people, not to dead sinners. The Lord will speak to them either in mercy here, or hereafter in terrible judgment. The Lord will speak to them as dead people, as transgressors, but when people are brought into the church, then says the Lord, 'You are Mine, - walk as Mine. You have heavenly light, - walk in that light. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.' O my friends, God help you, and help me, more and more narrowly and prayerfully to study the Scriptures in their various relations to us, for they are related to us and we are related to them, and turn not away from the exhortations because you feel unable to keep them and walk in them. The Holy Ghost, when He leads people in this particular, He leads them to ask, for power to keep the Word of God, and, what Augustine said, "Give what Thou commandest; command what Thou wilt." And Hart has it:

"Give power and will, and then command,
And we will follow Thee."

Do not turn away from exhortations. When I was young in the way, exhortations, I remember painfully, had no place in my mind, but God has made me perceive that it is a good thing, a merciful thing when one is brought to regard the holy precepts, exhortations and commandments of the Lord Jesus and His holy apostles and prophets.

Look at the text: "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 first thing to notice is: "The word of Christ." The whole gospel, and not a part. No one particular saying of Christ is here intended, I think, but the entire gospel. What He taught, what He said, what He revealed concerning His Father, concerning Himself, and concerning the Holy Ghost; the promises He uttered, and the gracious dealings of Himself with His people; all, all comprised in this, "the word of Christ." It is a great word too. Begin with His incarnation. What a word it is. "Unto us a Child is born." "I am come a light into the world." This is His blessed word. "Emmanuel, --- God with us", and He came forth to speak the words which He had heard His Father speak, and to do the works which He had seen His Father do. That is a great word, is it not, - Incarnate Deity speaking the words which had been uttered in the eternal counsel of peace.

"I came forth," He said, - 'and I came, not to speak My own words,' that is, not to speak without His Father, nor to speak anything that had not been uttered in the counsel of peace in the covenant of grace and concerning Incarnate Deity. We have this said in the Hebrews. After the first important and wonderful chapter, the Holy Ghost says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

And, the word of the atonement. This is "the word of Christ." "I lay down My life for the sheep", - "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep," and that was because His eternal Father had made Him to be sin. For Christ to be made sin was the most tremendous act of God, - the act of His love to the fallen people of God; and for Christ to be willing to be made sin, was to be willing to be the Father's Servant and the church's Saviour; to bear the burden of their sin; to bear the awfulness of their guilt, and to bear the terrible curse of the law due to them in their sin and in their guilt. O what a work it was He came to do! What a work it was. "The Son of man came", He said, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." His blessed life was in His own power, and He said - no man taketh My life from Me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. My Father commanded Me to lay it down and therefore He loves Me because I lay it down. - Very important words are such words as you find in John -(chapter 10 verse 17 & 18)- My Father commanded Me to lay down My life and He loves Me because I lay it down, and this is "the word of Christ." And the word of Christ is this: that as Jonah was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, the Son of man shall be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights and He shall rise again the third day. And this is His word, and a great word it is, for if He had not risen from the dead; if He had not taken again the life He laid down, no sinner could be saved. "If Christ be not risen," says the Apostle, "--- ye are yet in your sins." So that is a word - the word of Christ, and the word of Christ is: "It is expedient for you," - my disciples - "that I go away." If I go away I will pray the Father and He shall send you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, and this Spirit of truth shall guide you poor disciples, very ignorant, very ignorant of My kingdom, "He will guide you into all truth." - "He shall glorify Me," and so it is expedient for you, desirable for you, good for you, that I go away,

but you shall see Me; though I go to My Father, you shall see Me, for the Spirit shall glorify Me. "He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you." "The word of Christ" then, we have in these great truths, and the whole gospel concerning Him. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Well, it is great to have the word of Christ.

Now in the second place, the Apostle says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." And first of all, this, has to be said: before it can dwell in you, it must be put in you. That, that you have not got, cannot dwell with you. Has God given us His word? Has the Holy Ghost brought the word of Christ to you, to me? Has He put the doctrine of Christ in our hearts? If we have that doctrine, if we possess the Son of God, then we have the Father also. To have Christ revealed in you, - this is one of the best, the greatest, the sweetest mercies that you can ever have, - a revealed Christ; to be enabled to say sometimes, 'I saw Him. I received Him. I embraced Him.' Then you have got it, and a great thing it is. What a possession! What a wonderful possession, to possess the very Son of God. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." - "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." That faith sees, faith lays hold of Him, and this, we are told, is life eternal, for if He is in you, you know Him, and if you know Him, you know His Father, and to know the Father and His eternal Son, is life, life eternal.

And have you had the word of the atonement? That blessed atonement that has brought you into an acquaintance with the psalm that says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Is not it wonderful to have had the peace of God in your soul. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Can you be thankful enough for that peace, that honourable peace? It is honourable, - it is honourable to God who gives it. He is honoured in forgiving sin, and the sinner is honoured who gets forgiveness spoken to his heart. Every forgiven sinner has that within him, - forgiveness of sins, blessed forgiveness of sins, and this is the word of Christ. It is in some sinners. Some here may say, 'We have not got that.' Well, if your souls are after it; if you cannot do

without it, that is, if you cannot rest; if you are unable to be happy, or at peace; if the Holy Ghost, although you may not think it to be Him, leads you to cry mightily to God for it, one day it will come. The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed from the pit, and that his bread should not perish. Every hungry soul has a promise on his side: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." There is in this pardon, a fulness of peace, with a fulness of love, and a fulness of Christ coming, a fulness of goodness. Ye are filled with goodness. Every good thing as it were, comes with this forgiveness of sins. "Blotting out," as the word is, in this epistle, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross," that is, every charge that was written against you, every indictment that could be brought against you, every foolish thought, every idle word, every lustful look, and every evil thing that you have done and thought and wished, - blotted out. And, as if all had been written, just written and written before your very eyes and on your consciences, Jesus Christ came and took the whole away, and lest it should arise and come against you again, He just nailed it to His cross, as if it should never come again. You may remember, and will remember all your things, but it will never come again. This is "the word of Christ."

And, the word of His righteousness. Messiah was cut off. He made an end of sin; He brought in everlasting righteousness, - (Daniel chapter 9 verse 24 to 26) - and He says by Isaiah, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation." Ah, and when righteousness drops down from heaven, your heart, like the earth opening to receive rain, opens to receive that blessed robe. And then you sing, "Surely --- in the Lord have I" - the most unjust person, the guiltiest of all sinners, - "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Is not it wonderful that God should do that, and drop that word of righteousness into your heart? so that you do not say, 'I think justification is by Christ imputed,' but you say, 'I know it.' O it is a blessed and a beautiful thing to be brought into this experience. I know some are brought into it, and I know some of you are not. You want to be. Go with your want and tell the gracious Saviour that you cannot be happy without that justification; that you desire to be acquitted from all charges brought

against you, and that justly, "Surely --- in the Lord have I righteousness," one will say, when this word of righteousness comes and drops into his heart.

And the word of eternal love and covenant. Jesus gives to His people the word He received to speak. He says to His Father, as you know, in John, (chapter 18 v. 8), The word which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, and they have received it, and known surely that I came out from Thee. Not a picture to admire, but a living word to speak to you. Not an idea floating in your brain, but a living word talking in your conscience and in your heart, and bringing God to you and you to God and forming a union between you. Ah, some may say, 'It is a long way beyond us.' It may be, but it can soon be brought to you. One moment, like a holy flash coming from God into your soul, and you receive it by faith. The word of Christ given to sinners.

And, the word of assurance. "Ye are bought with a price." What a word to assure a sinner that he is right; that God is his, and he is God's. "Ye are bought with a price." - "Ye are not your own." The price, His own heart's blood. That was the price. This Mighty One conquered death and hell; removed sin, and then He says to His people in the Spirit - "Ye are not your own" - 'I have bought you with My blood.'

And, the word of precept. Perhaps God has spoken great holy precepts into some of your hearts, as I believe and hope He has spoken into my heart. It has often been said that the Lord's people find the precepts as dear to them as the promises. That is a great thing to say, but there certainly is in experience, this: that whenever a divine precept is dropped into a living tender conscience, that precept does become very dear, and the sinner's desire is to walk in it; to obey the Lord. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God." The one is connected with the other, and what God hath joined let us not put assunder. - "Glorify God." And perhaps He has said to some of you, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." It is not legal, it is gospel. There is liberty in it. There is peace in it. There is humility in it. There is instruction in it. It shows you a good way in which to walk, and stirs up your hearts to desire to walk in that way. Perhaps He put a word of promise into your heart. He may have said to you, 'I will

never leave thee, I will never forsake thee.' Perhaps He has spoken to you as to some providential matter, and said to you, 'Bread shall be given; your water shall be sure.' He may have given you to believe that the barrel of meal, nearly empty, shall never be quite empty, and the cruse of oil, shall never quite run out. He may have said, - when you thought you were forsaken; when you have said with Jacob, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God," - He may have said, 'Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, hath it not been told thee, that God, the everlasting God, the Creator of heaven and earth fainteth not, neither is weary, there is no searching of His understanding.' The word of Christ, dropped into your soul.

Now, says the Holy Ghost to you, to me, to all who have had His blessed word, - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Let it dwell in you as if you are a house, and here is a tenant; the Word of God, a living word, come to live with you, and to talk to you, and teach you, and uphold you, and guard you, and guide you; as if He should say, - 'Mind how you entertain this word.' What a wonderful thing it is to have a living word in a living soul; an instruction in a man who says, 'I am a stranger in the earth, Lord, hide not Thy commandment from me.' You may think sometimes that you get a word and it is gone in a few minutes, as if it just passed through your brain and nothing more, and you may say sometimes to the Lord, 'Oh why art Thou as a stranger in the land, as a wayfaring man who turneth aside for a night?' and you want Him to come and abide. He says, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." We let them slip sometimes; we forget them; we very often forget. I have forgotten things many, many times. I have been very glad that it is written of the disciples, then, "they remembered His words." They had forgotten it, but it came back. The Spirit put them in remembrance again and they got hold of it afresh by faith and looked at it; handled it, as it were, and felt its power again and said, 'Why, I had forgotten it, and now it is given me back, - I deserve it not.' Then the word is - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." Hold it fast. Look at what is said by the Lord Jesus in His gracious word in the Revelations, "Remember --- how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast." 'No,' says the devil, 'let it go. It is not fulfilled and it is not likely to be fulfilled.' Says Christ, "Hold Fast." "Hold that fast

which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." And one thing is certain, as I judge: that wherever Christ has been revealed, and the sinner has received Him by faith, there, the devil has much to do. Great business he will have sometimes with that person, trying to slay him, to ruin, rob and keep him. "The thief cometh not but for to steal, --- and to destroy", and as Herod sought to destroy the young Child's life, so the devil seeks always, wherever Christ is, to destroy Him. He will never succeed but he gives a great deal of trouble. He inflicts pain and deep wounds because he blasphemes Christ in the mind of a sinner who has got Christ.

Let it "dwell in you richly", that is, there, in great profusion, in richness. The wealth of one single word of Christ given to a sinner, can never be fully, adequately estimated. You will never know how rich you are, if you have got one living word from the mouth of Christ. It will go with you into floods and flames. It will abide with you in prison. You may forget it, but it will be in you, and when you most need it, it will come again and again. The wealth of it! Christ Himself says - Durable riches and righteousness are with Me, and He says - I will fill the treasures of all who fear Me - "I will fill their treasure." I will give them My word. Ah, the millionaire can reckon up his wealth; he can count his millions, but a poor pauper in the union, with a living, rich word of Christ in his heart, can never reckon up how wealthy he is. Durable riches, when all the millions and mountains of wealth in this world will vanish away. Then a poor pauper has got durable riches, everlasting riches; riches of grace, riches of love, riches of kindness, riches of wisdom; got them all in his soul. They are taken to heaven, and he will go with them. O what a blessed thing it is to have the living word of the living God dwelling in you, and dwelling richly, in a profusion, in an abundance, such as God only, can give, for He "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Ah, He has no little supply. He does not give niggardly, but richly gives an abundance. He has an abundance and He gives of it to His people. "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Rich in grace, rich in mercy, rich in forgiveness and rich in having the word of the living God spoken home to your heart.

"In all wisdom." Ah, it guides fools and tells them what to do.

It tells the poor sinner to go again and again to the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Ah, it tells the weak sinner to go to Christ for strength, who "giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." It says to the perplexed, "I wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions," and says the sinner, 'Let those witty inventions be made known to me.' And there is wisdom in the word and it dwells in a sinner in its wisdom always. When it moves and speaks, it turns the heart, and the eyes, and the face, and the spirit, and the understanding, and the afflictions, it turns them all to God. Have not you found it so? A word spoken to you, turns you to Him; sets your heart on Him; makes you long for Him; makes you hunger for Him. "In all wisdom." Well, we have to say we are fools, Lord, direct us - we are fools. And His direction is often given by His blessed Word. O hang about the word, and when you have got a word from Him, then may you be enabled to remember what the Apostle Paul says, which I quoted just now: "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." What damage I have suffered through letting them slip. You may say the same. Forgetfulness is a part of us. The Lord never forgets His people and never forgets His Word. You may say with Medley,

"My memory bad, but what is sad,
Can folly still retain;
O fill it, Lord, with Thy sweet word,
And let it there remain."

And with regard to the Scripture being in your memory and in your mind, think of what Bunyan says, there is a great deal in it. He says - If having a Scripture, (I am not quoting exactly his words, but the substance), if having the Scripture in your mind, if it only does one thing, it is a great matter, it will keep out worse things. It is a great thing for that. If you have got something of God's Holy Word in your mind and you are occupied with that, even though you might say, 'It did not come with power and I am not sure that the Lord gave it me, yet my mind is occupied with it', then it keeps worse things out. I wish my mind were so full of Scriptures that other things, worse things, might be kept out.

I must not continue. May the Lord help us to regard this blessed word - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" - giving thanks.

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