

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday evening 10 July 1932

Ephesians 5 verses 1 and 2

Be ye therefore followers of God as dear  
children and walk in love as Christ  
also hath loved us and hath given Himself  
for us an offering and a sacrifice to God  
for a sweet smelling savour

The concern of God with men is a matter of pure revelation, and it was expressed after the fall by that wonderful gospel promise of the Messiah, the seed of the woman who shall bruise the serpent's head. And the manifestations of this concern of God with men have from that day, from the utterance of that promise been in the fulfilling, and with special reference to the Church, like as when God dealt to the nations of the world their portions, just what land they were to possess, He did it according to the requirements of Israel. Israel first in the mind of God, in the decree of God, got what he wanted or needed and the world had the rest; so with regard to the Church of God. His dealings with men, His raising up of kings and putting them down, His permissions of sins, all have some reference to the Church of God and to the individual members of the Church of God. You will find that as God is gracious to you, His dealings with your families and your businesses, your troubles, perplexities, enemies, if you have any, all of them have some reference to your soul's prosperity. Chastening has reference to your profit, that you may be partakers of His holiness, and we have in the chapter which I read, which immediately precedes this chapter, God's purposes, His concerns with men whom He has redeemed and quickened and blessed and to whom He speaks with reference to their natural corruptions and exhorts them against these corruptions. And in the verses I have read He sets before us two examples which we are to immitate. The word "followers" is in the original tongue "immitators". Be ye, because of God's goodnes, immitators of Him. The larger the view, the deeper and more powerful the

experience of God's forgiving love, of Christ's offering Himself to God for a sweet smelling savour, the more powerful will be the influence of that and the more earnestly we shall desire to immitate that wondrous example. The division into chapters of the Scriptures is not always happy, and the division between the fourth chapter and this chapter, at least at the beginning is an example of that. The beginning of this chapter should be attached to the conclusion of the preceding chapter. As you know of course the division of the Bible into chapters was not the original way of writing; it was written in rolls. The various Books of the Bible, parchment in rolls, but in the days of our Reformers, yea earlier than our Reformation, these divisions into chapters came into use, and it has real use, but if we connect the conclusion of the chapter preceding this we may see how beautiful the connection is. If we are children of God, if renewed in the spirit of our minds, we are exhorted to put away lying and to speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another; to be angry and sin not. O the difficulty of this; you know it who have been angry, provoked by somebody or not; when the devil has stirred you up, Who does not know that in some painful measure. " Be angry and sin not". Do you know what it is to be angry without sinning? "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more; rather let him labour working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace unto the hearers". Do you have this before you when you meet with a saint or some saints. Friends, do you have this before you that you may minister grace to him or to them? Is there profit before you? Do you entreat the Lord to grant that when you spend half an hour with some of His people it may be to their profit and your own edification? The Scripture exhorts you to do it. How sadly short we come. The practical part of vital religion is not much attended to by us. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." We read that Israel vexed and rebelled against the Holy Spirit and that therefore He was turned to be their enemy and fought against them. A painful, bitter

experience; when the Spirit takes some scriptures and turns them into swords to pierce your consciences, then you have heavy work. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice". If you go, or think you go to God with these evils in your heart, you will not get near Him. You may deceive yourself, the devil may deceive you, and you may think you have got near Him, but you have not. While we nurse any sin God will oppose us. "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward". He resists the proud. "And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" Therefore immitate God. This is the connection. Be ye therefore immitators of God as dear children. He makes His sun shine on the evil and on the good. He waters the field of the evil and of the good. As dear children born again and adopted into the heavenly family. Heavenly relationship calls for heavenly conduct. Therefore, as Paul said in the preceding chapter in the beginning "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called with all lowliness and meekness". And we are to endeavour, being thus blessed, we are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Not to make the unity; you cannot do that. The real union of God's people one with another flows from their union with the Lord Jesus but where that union is, there is the devil, and he wants to do what he cannot do; he wants to break it. But though he cannot break it, he can interrupt it as to its action. Some of you know what I mean.

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. This sweet smelling savour God spoke of and acknowledged that He received it. In the early days of the life of the world, that is to say when the flood was over and Noah stood on dry ground he offered sacrifices to God and God smelled a sweet savour and the word is a savour of rest. He rested there. And in Ezekiel the same word is used when the Lord said that after He had dealt terribly with His people in the

wilderness He would be a Sanctuary to them, and He would cast out idols; and then He said I will accept you with your sweet savour - the savour of rest, and that sweet savour is the same that we have in the text - a savour of rest. God rested from His labour at the end of the six days' creation work, but there was no sacrifice then, everything was good, everything pure, everything beautiful, but when sin came the only rest that divine justice and goodness and purity and love could have was in the suffering of Jesus Christ and whenever you get access and God smiles on you, forgiving your sins, it will be because of this sweet smelling savour.

Let us look a little at this. All the ordained sacrifices by blood and by fire under the old dispensation had, for their great end, let me repeat it, the rest, the satisfaction of God and that flows to the sinner who is accepted by God in that savour. O if you dear godly people, if I, a poor minister, were now perfumed with the holy merit of the Lord Jesus, we should be accepted of God. There is no interruption to this as before God, but there are many interruptions of it in experience. You must make a distinction between the eternal satisfaction of God in Christ, and your occasional acceptance in experience. The latter is subject to many fluctuations; now it rises high, then it sinks very low; now it, as it were, just covers you, perfumes you in your experience, and you feel accepted in the Beloved; then the ill savour of your sins comes up, and you can scarcely bear yourselves. Since in myself I can hardly bear to see and to feel what I am as a sinner, what must I appear before God. But when the Holy Ghost brings again and again the sweet smelling savour of Jesus Christ and perfumes the soul with it, all is well. But between a sinner's longing for this and enjoying it there are many experiences. Now fervent prayer with a sweet feeling that perhaps God accepted you; now a good hope through grace; then some Scripture attracts you, warms your heart Godward; again you get sweet repentance, mourn over your unworthiness and vileness and the ill treatment that God has at your hands. You wonder, do you not, I have wondered many a time, that God has permitted me to live seeing my unprofitableness, my bad treatment of Him. O but

He is long suffering. This is the sweet smelling savour, Jesus Christ in His offering. That is the end, His great end in offering Himself to God, that the savour of that offering should perfume the souls of His people and take away the ill savour of their vileness.

Come then repenting sinner come  
Approach with humble faith

this dear Lord Jesus. His love is the pattern but His love first of all was vicarious. His love is instead of our hatred. Think of it and the larger the view the Spirit gives you of that the more amazed you will be that God should be so kind to you, so unworthy as you feel yourself to be. This offering is vicarious in the place and stead of others. What offering could we bring to God to give any satisfaction to Him? But this one offering of Christ perfected for ever them that are sanctified. So although the briars and thorns of our wickedness are set up before God, and we legally set them up as if He could not save us, because we are so vile, He says I will go through them; I would burn them. Or let this legal creature take hold of My strength and make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me. What is it to take hold of God's strength? It is to take hold of Christ by living faith; it is to close in with Christ by saving faith and find God to be our friend for ever. It is to plead the atonement, to mention the Name of Christ, to ask all the good things that you need and desire and seek in the Name and for the sake of Christ. "If ye shall ask anything in My Name I will do it". May we not be allowed to forget this good gospel, a full gospel, a free gospel. When the Holy Ghost gives a saint a view of Christ it enlarges the mind, it fills the understanding with light, it animates the soul with divine life and heavenly influences. It makes the sinner humble and gives him access to God. He views the character of God in this offering. The holy, just, loving, merciful, wise character of God, the sinner sees in this one offering that Christ made of Himself when He gave Himself to God, and it is that that enables a sinner, while

viewing this wondrous Jehovah to sing

Let wordly minds the world pursue  
It has no charms for me  
Once I admired its trifles too  
But grace has set me free

This grace, this wondrous grace, this wondrous offering of Christ, Christ the Mediator, Christ between a holy, just God and a condemned sinner, Christ the Strength of God, Christ the Stone of Israel, bearing the weight of all that building of mercy built upon it - the stone of Israel. Christ, pleasing to His Father, His blood satisfying justice. Now the Apostle was inspired to set this before the Church of God, - "Be ye therefore followers of God" who forgives you; mind that. Therefore be ye immitators of God; be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. You will never be able to justify any anger you have against a friend, even against an enemy. You will never be able to justify it. O but you may say, I was provoked; that is no justification. But I have good cause for anger; that is no justification. Nothing will ever justify us in sinning against God and nursing anger against any of His people. Therefore the word is - Be ye followers. God has been good to you; see that ye be good to His people. Be immitators of God in this particular.

"And walk in love" Now this we may look at briefly in two ways. Walk first in the love of God. That is the first, mind that; that is the first. Anything that you put before that is of the flesh. Walk in love. How can you? When it is shed abroad in your heart. You may see it in the Scripture and the sight is a beautiful one. O how like the blessed sun the love of God shines from Genesis to Revelation. Its declarations are here; the Word is full of them; the love of God. " He so loved the world". "In this the love of God was manifested toward us in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." When we know this, then we have the strongest

incentive to endeavour to walk as we should walk according to the Scripture exhortation toward all saints especially, but toward all men. "Do good unto all men especially unto the household of faith."

And then in the second place walk in love which in your heart is born, begotten of the love of God shed abroad in your heart. You will never feel the love of God and not find love the fruit of it. But sure as ever you know in any degree of confidence and comfort the love of God, you will find yourself loving all begotten of Him. And this is the exhortation, this is the example set before us, - Jesus Christ hath given Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. Now how can anything we say one to another be acceptable to God, for nothing that we do is perfect. How then can anything that comes from us, that is done by us, be acceptable to God? Well the Apostle teaches us this, that the offering up of the Gentiles is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the Romans we have that exhortation "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." By the Holy Ghost that renewing is done. So all acceptable kindnesses that you may show to a child of God, all the forgiveness of one who has injured you, all must come from God and return to God as a fruit of His goodness through the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore vital religion is a practical religion. It is a vain thing for us to talk about godliness if we do not practice it. We are only hypocrites. Suppose you talk about the truth of God and hate somebody; suppose you talk about the love of God and are doing wrong to somebody; in that you are but hypocrites. There is nothing acceptable in you to God. If you have grace it is buried for the time but when it is revived and brought to the front again then you will be sorry; you will be sorry that you behaved as you did. How is it I can speak like this to you? Because I have experience of it. I do not speak out of a mere theory of such and such things. I know them. And I tell you distinctly that if your profession of God, of His holy

gospel, yea if you be members of churches, of this church, any of you and you walk against the Scriptures, you will find God's word to be true "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward; with the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure". "God resisteth the proud". And so I would exhort you, rather I would draw your attention to this exhortation - "Be ye therefore followers of God". What blessed examples we have in the Scriptures of following God. Twelve spies were sent to spy out the land of promise. Ten were unbelievers; two were believers, and of Caleb, one of the two, God said that he followed Him with all his heart. Now following there was believing in God, and bringing a good report. He did not say - O the land will be quite easy for us to overcome. He did not say there were not giants. He did not say there were no walled cities; he acknowledged everything of that kind, but his faith rose above them and said - We are able. Why? Because the Lord is with us. You may have difficulties, many of them; you may have strong enemies in your nature and sometimes you will say how can these enemies be overcome. Faith in you rising and standing in the power of God will enable you to say -We are able; we shall have victory; we shall get the land of promise. Why? Not because these enemies are dead, but because "the Lord liveth and blessed be my Rock and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Joshua followed the Lord fully, with all his heart, and he was enabled to follow the Lord who told him when he was to succeed Moses he was to have the Book of the Law in his hand, before his eyes, and to meditate therein day and night. So, said God, shall your way be prosperous and you shall have good success, which, in the gospel means, when God is before you, when His word is in you, when you realise the greatness and the truth of the Word of God, then you follow Him fully. O you see the loveliness of Christ, the suitableness of Christ, the goodness of Christ, the virtue of His death. My soul, rest there you say, and all is well. That is following God; that is following the Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul when he went about the Churches to establish them, did not deceive them. He did not say now you will get through without persecution, you will have no enemies. No, he said "It is through much tribulation we must



enter into the kingdom" But he exhorted them to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. That is the ground; and when we are enabled by faith to do these things, then we follow God. And when we see the Lord Jesus offering Himself without spot to God, and being a sweet smelling savour, then that sets us free from the law, brings us into the liberty of the gospel, the perfect law of liberty, and enables us to immitate Him, follow Him. Now suppose you know some very poor child of God and you say I sympathise with Him and do not give him anything to relieve him, though you have some ability, that is nothing but hypocrisy. "How dwelleth" saith the Scripture "How dwelleth the love of God in him". But if, seeing him hungry and cold, you give him to eat and to be clothed, then it is following Christ. A cup of cold water is a cup that Christ never will forget - never. So I hope dear friends it may please God to enable us as a church and congregation very narrowly, particularly, and prayerfully, to observe these two verses; they are not given in vain; they are not written for nothing. And we, as a people, should take care, by the help of God, to walk in these gracious words. Calvin says somewhere - it should be the aim of a child to be like his father, and surely the exhortations of the gospel all tend to that end, and when we are in a right state of mind that is our desire, our aim. May we never lose sight of this "Even as Christ also hath loved us."

And what did His love do? It moved Him. He flew from His throne to the cross on wings of love, and justice, in its awful blaze of glory, and love in its fervency toward the Church of the living God and mercy and truth and peace and righteousness all came, kissed each other, and embraced, and ever are embracing the poorest, and the vilest of all sinners. Therefore may the Holy Ghost set this upon the heart of this church and congregation and enable us continually to aim at walking in the truth, at walking after Christ, at following Him with all our hearts.

AMEN.