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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 4 April 1928

Hebrews 10 verses 23, 24 and 25

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith
without wavering; (for He is faithful
that promised;) And let us consider
one another to provoke unto love
and to good works: Not forsaking the
assembling of ourselves together, as the manner
of some is; but exhorting one another: and
so much the more, as ye see the day
approaching"

Can you measure the distance of heaven from the earth? "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Has God taught us to know even a little of our ignorance of Him? Have we ever entered particularly into what it is to make a profession? And I do not mean by that exclusively to make a public profession by baptism but I mean to make a profession of, and before, God. Think of what it means. I have been a little looking at it today. What does it mean? We saw on Lord's Day morning that the meaning of the word profession is to say the same thing. What thing? A very solemn thing is involved in it. Take the Holy Scripture as being the infallible revelation of God in His work of creation; in His permitting of the fall; in His first promise of the gospel; in His holy, wise, universal providence; in His choice of the Church; in His sending His Son to redeem her; in the death and the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ; in the infallible proofs that Jesus Christ gave of His resurrection and that He was the same, the identical, imperishable Person before their eyes, who was crucified and buried. The gift, and the descent from Him, being sent by Him, of the Holy Ghost and His dwelling in a sinner's heart and revealing Christ there. O just look at what this word "profession" embraces. I think you will agree with me, as you are led to consider what the profession embraces - you will be ready to say - O how ignorant we are. I have just said that today, O how ignorant I am. Philpot says something to this effect, that true religion is very much made up of

desire and there is truth in it. Your desire may be what mine is, and reach to where mine reaches. It may be for God and reaching Him. Desire may reach Him before there is any apprehension, comfortable apprehension, of Him. May we never, never look down on desire as if it were a small thing. If you desire to fear God, if you want to know God, who gave that desire, that want? Profession? Ah some of us have talked a good deal too much perhaps, and now we have learned enough to put our hand on our mouth and say, we have uttered that we understood not. That which we see not, teach Thou us. Dear friends, may we be followers after God. Do not think you know much - nobody does - of the blessed God of all grace. The mercy is to know anything. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, if you have life to animate your souls so as to have strength enough to send a desire to heaven, if you have light enough to see that there is a kingdom, a divine kingdom, and a glorious king of that kingdom, the Lord Jesus, think upon the greatness of that work in your souls. Profession? It is enough, when you consider what the word involves and embraces to make you afraid of opening your mouth about God. Who is He? "I AM THAT I AM". A word which, if you at all think about by faith, not by human reason, will make you reel, and make you say, I am a child and I do not know anything. There is a great deal in the Apostle's word in this Epistle in another chapter, gently rebuking those Hebrews. Speaking to them of the Lord Jesus, he says of whom we have many things to say and hard to be uttered. And the hardness, the difficulty of uttering them, did not lie with himself, but just with their dullness. "Seeing ye are dull of hearing". Writing to the Corinthians he said, I could not write unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes, and the inability to write otherwise was not in himself, but in these people. My brethren, let us, God helping us, fall flat on our faces and cry to the Lord to teach us. That which we know not teach Thou us. Let us not be ashamed to confess we are ignorant. If anyone in the chapel ought to be ashamed of ignorance, it is myself, these many years that I have professed His Name and spoken about Him, but let us not be ashamed if God has taught us how ignorant we are. There is one thing I will name to you and that is His compassion. He will never reprove you for going to Him with your ignorance, but if you went to Him strutting before Him as if you knew something He would not take any kindly notice of you. Let us go with our ignorance, all that we have and feel to be against

us. Profession? 'Tis a great thing but not to be discouraged. This word is before us, not to be discouraging to us; rather to be an incentive in our hearts to entreat the Lord to give us a gracious understanding in the things to be professed. We profess Jesus Christ, that blessed Man, that compassionate, faithful High Priest over the house of God. We profess Him to be a prophet and say the very thing that Moses said: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me. Him shall ye hear, and the soul that will not hear Him shall be destroyed. Now we may say we do not know who this prophet is as we would know but mercifully we can say we want to hear Him. We are not in that word, the soul that will not hear Him. No, we want to hear Him. "Be not silent to me lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". You cannot reach the Lord, but this is our mercy, He can come to us. He is able and it is an able thing, indeed great and infinite ability, that He should be able to leave the infinite, the inaccessible depths of His own glorious, natural light, which no man can approach unto, and come forth in our own nature and say "Behold Me, behold Me." Think of His stoop, just think of the stoop He made when He came down and said "Behold Me, behold Me". Ah, and when you see Him you love Him; you could not see Him without loving Him. Your own nature there united to His divine Person, not your sin, but your nature. And the sin which God took from you and imputed to Him, He took away. He came to put away our sin and in Him is no sin. We profess these things. We, as a congregation, profess these truths, great truths. I stand, as it were, before them sometimes, in my own mind, as a poor little child. I look at them and they are infinite and I am a poor creature of a day. Then when I think, as I do continually, of my position and that I have to come here and speak to you. It is no little thing to go and speak to people as if one knew things, and I do know them a little, but the infinitude of these truths, O how wonderful, and yet not beyond our apprehension and not beyond our being in them, not beyond God causing them to be in us. Salvation? O it is a great thing and Jesus is this salvation. "Thou art My salvation" God said "to the end of the earth". And when you go on your knees before the Lord, when you are moving about your house and in your business and yet crying, O Lord bless my soul for Christ's sake, see what a profession you make, and not displeasing to Him. No, every eye shall see Him, every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue shall confess to Him. And when a man and a poor woman

shall come before the Lord Jesus and say I protest that I was an Assyrian ready to perish, that my father was a Hittite and my mother an Amorite, but now, do bless me for Christ's sake, what will the Lord do? Hear the prayer and answer it. Think of what you profess when you say for Christ's sake and when you mention His precious blood. What do you say? You take on your lips that which is of infinite worth, that which satisfied justice, that that can satisfy your conscience by purging it from dead works to serve the living God. God can make us understand a little the reality of religion, true religion. I think I believe I see it a real thing. God is real, God is true. God is real in His Son. He makes Himself real in the hearts of His people and some of us are going to see Him. I believe I am going to see Him and I shall then know Him. We know in part now, but then we shall know Him even as we are known. O what a prospect this profession holds out to us. What a prospect. You would not part with it if you had got it for all the world. There is nothing to be compared with it; nothing in all the world to be likened to it. It has no parallel. Time and eternity, how can you compare them? The infinite God and the creature of a day, and yet this creature is so blessed as to be in union with that great God and they are to be together to all eternity. Are we to be His guest? Yes, some of us; O that we all were. Do you see anything in Him, this great One, of whom you make a profession, that makes Him desirable? Ah if sacks of sovereigns were put before you and Christ crucified put before you and you had eyes to see that which is good you would say, give me Christ, Christ and His cross, and let the rest go. Ah my friends there is a reality in this profession that we make, a blessed reality, and we know it in a small degree. Let us hold it fast. Why, says the devil, you will let it go one day. We should let it go before we get to bed tonight if we were left to self. One says, I will never let it go. Do not say it. Say, rather, "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe" Keep me and I shall be kept. Teach me and I shall know what I am taught. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things". Nothing is well known, that is savingly known, except it be by that unction. The unction there is the Holy Ghost; the Holy One is Christ who sends Him. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One." Well, dear friends, I am going on; some may say I am rambling. Never mind, if I am well inside the gospel and I believe I am. This blessed gospel if I only knew how to preach it I would be glad. Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners, the High Priest between poor guilty people and a

holy God, the Prophet from the bosom of His Father to declare the love and the purpose and the grace of the Father in the Church and to preach the Father's Name in the Church. This is the substance and matter of our profession. Hold fast what you have professed and do not let it go.

But I hope you will not talk about knowing things so much as rather to say I wish I did know. This does not mean you are to give up what the Lord has taught you, but you may make a bad use of what He has taught you. If you think well of that and think now I have got it and that diverts your attention and prevents your prayer, as it were, from reaching the throne of God's heavenly grace, it is not a good use you make of it. It is rather like turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. Hold fast, without wavering. To waver is to decline to the right hand or to the left. It is the opposite of steadiness. An unsteady mind, an unsteady eye, an eye that would look on two objects at the same time - a physical impossibility, and an impossibility in the soul. Only one object can be seen at one time. Without wavering. Do you waver about the Being of God? Do you waver about the Trinity? Do you waver about the gift of God, the best gift He had? Having one Only Son, He sent Him. Do you waver about the virgin birth? Do you waver about the imputation of sin to Christ and of righteousness to the Church? Do you waver about His death on the cross, that vicarious act of His? for His death was His own act. He laid down His life at the commandment of His Father, and Paul tells us that He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Do you waver about His resurrection, that that same body that was hanged on the cross and laid in the rich man's grave, rose on the third day, after its burial; the same body, unchanged? See Me, He said, handle Me, a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have. Do you waver about His leading His disciples out as far as to Bethany and blessing them and being taken into heaven from them, and they looked up as He ascended? Do you waver about His presence in heaven as the Priest, able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them? You may waver about your interest in all this, but do you believe all this? Yes; some of us may, perhaps falteringly, sometimes say. But a thought of disbelief is a pain inexpressible. If you give up any part of the gospel you give it all up. The whole is so connected and so one, that

you cannot hold any part without holding the whole. You cannot give up any part without giving up all. "Without wavering". There is one place where wavering is stopped if there be wavering in a child of God about these things, and that is at the throne of grace. Ah you must sometimes get there and get such liberty and such feeling and such life and such love that you are ready to cast your soul into the arms and love and ocean, the illimitable ocean, of the love of God in Christ and then you do not waver; you do not waver. Well, but I cannot hold on; I am afraid of myself. That is what some say, nor is it a bad thing for them to say it. Why? Because it will bring them to this: "Hold Thou me up", and it will bring out this "He is faithful that promised". And it would seem that this may be said at this point, that an exercised state of mind, prayer, felt weakness, ignorance, inability, and an absolute promise are compatible, and they may be brought into the soul and be very, very sweetly united. There is nothing in an absolute promise against a sense of weakness, of ignorance, of readiness to fall. The promise is: I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee. Then again you come against a wonderful mystery, the presence of God with a sinner. Yet there are rooms, and spots in the country lanes, hedges in and by and behind which, the presence of God has been felt. Ah, you may go into this room in your house sometimes and say I have felt His presence there. You may go back into an affliction and say, I had His presence there. You may go into some particular place and say He indulged me there and I had some fellowship with Him. He is faithful. God is faithful who will perform what He has commenced. "Having begun", says the Apostle to the Philippians, "Having begun a good work in you, He will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Faithful - "If we believe not He is faithful; He cannot deny Himself." You may lie against your right at times, but He will never, never deny His work. The least degree of grace given to a sinner He will own and honour, but that least degree of grace will always work this way; make you want more. Faithful - Faithfulness has always respect to an engagement, and God engages Himself to sinners. The greatest of all mercies and one of the the deepest of mysteries, how God, the infinite, holy, glorious Being, in whom we believe and whom we believe to be incomprehensible, should make over some promise to a vile creature and so engage Himself, so engage Himself, as that if He left that sinner to perish, His honour would also perish. Can you lay hold of it? It is not easy. When you

are a poor, vile creature, when you feel your disposition is to leave Him, it is difficult to think that you can have that close, that intimate interest that I have named, but it is so. He cannot deny Himself. That is, He cannot deny His engagements. Therefore He says - "Put Me in remembrance" and faith says "Remember Thy holy promise". Yea, faith says, remember the covenant. And again faith says "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation; That I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance". (Psalm 106 verses 4 and 5). He is faithful. A faithful God lays the foundation of our hope in oaths and promises and blood. Here dear friends I want to live and desire to die. The gospel bears my spirit up. Great is the faith that will enable you to say that. The gospel bears my spirit up. He will bring us to heaven. If He has given a promise to the sinner He must take that sinner to heaven. See the connection there is between God and your soul, O favoured sinner. A connection that nothing can sever, a union that nothing can break; not the death of the body, not the ending of time, nothing. Faithful Jehovah must remain. Dwell on it; dear friends, as God may help you, dwell on His faithfulness. His mercy made Him engage Himself; His love brought Him to engage Himself; His goodness brought Him to do this. His goodness came out in a promise. God is good and so He will communicate what is communicable to His poor people and so promises come out of the infinite goodness. Sins grow, yes they grow; a sense of unworthiness increases. Sometimes distance, sometimes death in your feelings, sometimes prayerlessness. Many things come, and you say, I grow in sin, and I grow in unworthiness, but all that does not affect God. It affects His dealings with you. Your waywardness will bring the rod, but He is the same; He changes not. He said I took you in and I will never cast you off. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." How can I express as it ought to be expressed this faithfulness of God. Covenant faithfulness, loving faithfulness, tender faithfulness, yet expressed sometimes in the use of the rod. Then you may learn a little of that Scripture which is very great - "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men". Then you will say, I am sorry my sins have made the use of the rod necessary and yet you will say I would be thankful that God speaks such a word as that "He doth

not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. Well now, look at this faithfulness. Let us go home and, as God helps us meditate on the greatness of profession, the seriousness of profession, the comprehensiveness of profession, that it might not be a light thing to us to talk about God. And then - though we be weak and ever ready to fall away and fall off from God; just as a stone flying into the air only rises as long as the momentum that sends it up acts upon it; when that action ceases the stone falls and you may feel like that sometimes, just get a motion and up you go, and the power stops, and down you fall - yet, with all that, meditate on this faithfulness; this blessed, this saving, this comfortable, this comforting faithfulness of God. But you may begin to object and I understand objections painfully. You may begin to object, but I have been so unkind to Him. You may say I quite know what the Church meant when she said to Him, as He knocked at the door and asked admission, I am in bed; I have washed my feet; I have put off my coat; I cannot rise. She was so comfortable, so wickedly comfortable, so cruelly comfortable. Then you say, O this unkindness. How often I have said it lately, O my unkindness to Him, this good God, this gracious God, this blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Then He says - by His operation He says - I will bring you off that bed; so He leaves the myrrh of His grace behind, and goes away. And the unkind creature, not suspecting His withdrawal, rises to open, forgetting that He was jealous. You have forgotten that perhaps until He has made you understand it. I have. My beloved had withdrawn Himself; He had gone. Did she go back to her bed? No, there was too much grace in operation. She went forth into the dark city and cried aloud to all whom she met - "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" Brethren, can you do without His presence? Are you comfortable without Him? If you miss Him do you go to your bed and say, He will come again? O what an abuse that is of your profession. But you say, I cannot get Him. You will seek Him; if you have grace you will seek Him. Present religion, present religion, present religion, will make you seek Him. Meditate on this faithfulness.

Now one word on this important connection. "And let us consider one another", look at each other. A mutual, a deep interest between the people of God arising from their union with their Head. Go and exhort each other, as the Apostle says "Exhorting one another and so much the more as ye see the day approaching". O do not let each other,

as it were, be left out. Help, Lord help us, to look at one another. "Look not every man on his own things but every man on the things of another". Let each seek his brother's welfare and so live and so speak as that there may be grace ministered by your speech. The Apostle said in one epistle - Ye all are partakers of my grace, the fruit of his grace in his labours and in his ministry, and your friends may be partakers of your grace. I judge that the people did it, of whom we read in Malachi - "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name." I judge they talked about God and their cases and each provoked the other to seek more of the Lord's favour. The word "provoke" is used ordinarily and almost universally in an evil sense. It is written "Fathers provoke not your children to anger lest they be discouraged" But in this word it is used in a good sense. Incite each other, exhort and help each other; put before one another the evil of living at a distance from the Lord. Provoke unto love, incite one to love the Lord by expressing His faithfulness, His loveliness, His goodness, His sufficiency. Good works; looking after each other's temporal interests, where there is any occasion. This shows us a state of the church which would be very beautiful, but alas, it seems very much lost, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together". There was great temptation to the Jews, the Christian Jews, of that day. They were offered comfort, offered many good things on condition of blaspheming the holy Name that was named on them and it would seem that there were some who were affected and left the assembling of themselves together with the saints. If we neglect the means that God gives to us it may be the beginning of an apostacy; we little know. God gives means for a purpose and if one should disesteem them, it may, I say again, be the very beginning of apostacy. Think of what is put within your reach and think of this word connected with it, and may the Lord lay it on your hearts and minds. It is His Word and it should bring us together from time to time, not in a way of custom simply - that, of course, will in a sense always operate - but the thing is to be in the way God has opened of a divinely given choice and love and desire to be found within the word we have here, remembering that He loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. All the private houses you may be in, your own and others, and the reading in the family - good and proper -

will never reach this. He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. He has ordained the ministry, He has ordained public worship, and anyone wilfully neglecting that that God may put within his reach, whatever profession he makes is very solemn, very solemn. Do not disesteem God's mercies; do not think lightly of His kindness in giving mercy of this kind. But I cannot enter upon it now; I just name it. Perhaps I might never name it to you again in a particular, direct way, but I just name it to you as being in the text and may the Lord open it in the importance of it and the solemnity of forsaking the assembling of yourselves together. It shows that whenever the opportunity is given and health and ability also, then not to be found there is very solemn. You cannot, my friends, be contrary to any Scripture and not be, in that particular, in some danger.

AMEN.