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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday evening 29 July 1928

HEBREWS 12 v 15

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace  
of God; lest any root of bitterness springing  
up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled"

The implications of this text are very solemn; two states are implied. A state of grace; a state of grace in which, when a person stands, there is before him eternal blessedness. A state of nature, a lack, a non-possession of grace, which means death in trespasses and sins and everlasting hell. And which of these two states we are in, God knows, and some of us know, and some of us want to know, and some do not want to know. All born again want to know and in the assuring witness of the Spirit they do know occasionally, they are comfortably assured that it is well with them; well while they live, and well when called to die. Others of you seek this; your consciences are not easy; you are not comfortable; you have no bed to lie on, nothing to cover you. The bed of moral goodness and the covering of a profession, not sufficient for you. You cannot lie down there; you cannot cover yourself therewith; and so you are uncomfortable. Now go on, as God helps you, seeking Him. Pray, pray; the door is open.

Pray if thou canst or canst not speak

The Lord has said this comfortable word: "They that seek shall find". See what is before you; though you cannot believe it on a man's testimony, here it is. I say it is a most comfortable word: "They that seek shall find. To him that knocketh it shall be opened". And there are others here who do not want to know, whose hearts say in every aspiration and desire, in all actions, say to God: "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Now will you listen to me? Let me say one faithful word and say it affectionately. The God you do not want, wants you and will have you, either in the

justifying righteousness of Jesus Christ or in terrible justice. You wont escape Him. You cannot escape Him. No mountain, no hill, falling on you would hide you from Him. No den, no cave of the earth, could be a refuge and a hiding-place from His gaze, to prevent your arrest by His justice. If you fail of grace, if you lack grace, when you die, what a state you will be in through eternity; what a state. Your hearts deceive you now; they tell you that you will have pleasure; they tell you that things will be better one day and perhaps they say, well you can put religion off until you are older. But remember this, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; you cannot know it. Well, these are the implications of this text. Attend to them.

This morning I spoke a little about grace; charming, saving, beautiful, effectual, lovely grace. Grace greater than sin; grace not to be put off by sin, nor turned away by guilt, nor resisted effectually by the devil. Grace in the Father electing sinners. Grace in the Son dying for sinners. Grace in the Holy Ghost quickening, teaching, leading, blessing sinners. A gospel for sinners. O what a gospel it is; the gospel for sinners. Elect angels do not know it, as the guiltiest, vilest creature on earth knows it, to whom the Spirit brings it. Angels will sing the chorus, but the song of redemption only saved sinners can sing. Well, it is a mercy, a great mercy, that sinners are capable of being saved. Do you believe it? I am glad I can believe that a sinner is capable of being saved. Not of saving himself, nor helping himself towards salvation, but of being saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

We are to look, by this text, diligently into the matter whether or not we have this grace. Whether the Father's love, the Son's redemption, have been brought to us by the grace of the Spirit, that is to say, whether we are born again and whether we have our backs on the world and are struggling up the hill to reach the top of the mountains where the house of the Lord is built. This is what the text exhorts us - to look diligently. A mere glance at, a thought about, religion, we have not in this text. We have a diligent enquiry, an attentive question, an intense question. Lord, have I this grace? And I commenced, on this side of the subject, by saying that the people of God have faith. This is the cardinal grace, this is the

grace that brings a person to say from the heart, I believe in God. Do not think that that is a small matter. For one to be able to say in his heart, with some apprehension of what he is saying, I believe in God, is nothing short of a miracle. Miracles are possible and this, of all others, the gift of faith to a sinner that he may believe in God. A child of God does not always see his faith; a Christian believes but often cannot see his faith. Abraham, on a given moment, when the Lord spoke to him, said: Lord God what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and this servant in my house is the heir of all I have; what wilt Thou give me? He got a demonstration that made him believe unto righteousness. Look to the heavens, said the Lord; behold the stars, can you count them? "So shall thy seed be". And he believed; he had faith before but it was staggering; the promised son had not come. Jacob had faith, but on occasions he did not seem to know that he had. "All these things are against me" he said, though he was walking in obedience at that very moment, for the Lord told him to go back to his house and country and he was going back. But trouble came, an enemy intervened between him and the land to which he was going and he said "All these things are against me". David had faith, but did not see it always. He said to Jonathan once, "As the Lord liveth there is but a step between me and death". Though the anointing oil was on his head and the promise of God was in his heart, yet he said, there is only one step between me and death and I shall soon take it. If you have got faith, you have got other things. You have got unbelief, a tempting devil, a wicked heart, and these things will always be standing in the way of faith, trying to hinder it.

Look diligently, and you will find - as the life of God shines upon you, as the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, shines in you, you will find you have faith given by grace. Saved you are, by grace, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Given is this faith; one of the greatest blessings the Lord gives His people is faith. If we believe that the Son of God is come, then we live in the Spirit, are led by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit, and the light of divine teaching always leads to this. The Father draws to Christ; the Spirit leads to Christ; Christ draws to Himself, and this is done by faith. The light of truth leads a sinner to God's holy hill and to His tabernacles. The leading of the Spirit leads him to humility, humble prayer, humble desire, humble

confession of sin. Grace leads a man to leave the world and to be what Christ said - though in the world, not of it. Grace, charming grace, shines in the eyes of all gracious people and they say, O, if we had but grace. Grace makes a man know his gracelessness in the fall, and makes him realise that there is a salvation in the Lord which is sufficient for him through eternity. I say again, this faith is not always on the surface. Look diligently, like the woman who lost a piece of silver. She swept her house diligently till she found it. You find, again and again, this faith wont be on the surface; sink, like the axe-head into the water, but God can effect the miracle by bringing it up again and causing it to swim again. Faith in the bleeding Lamb; faith in the Intercessor; faith in the arm of omnipotence; faith in the mediation of the Lord Jesus, in the promises which are yea and Amen in Him to the glory of God. Faith in the faithful wisdom and in the fulness of God. It is grand to have this faith; it is called the faith of God's elect. But none other - O what a solemn truth - not one other poor person, has it - the faith of God's operation - for it can only exist as He works it. Precious faith; precious in itself, and precious in its Object. Precious in its fruits and effects. Looking diligently. It is one thing to profess it; it is another to have it. If a man says, I have faith and I live above the world, and have no conflicts and no changes, his profession says he has no faith.

Now there is another thing I would name to you here. If we have grace we have knowledge. A very blessed thing this, and if you look into this wonderful Epistle of the Holy Ghost, you will find again and again the knowledge of God is spoken of as being possessed by His people. "We know" says John, "that the Son of God is come". "We know". There are two testimonies to this which every child of God sooner or later possesses. But very few believe the testimony of Holy Scripture: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". That is the testimony of the Scripture. "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". That is the Scripture. "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." That is the testimony of the Scripture. That testimony could be multiplied by many many times. Your acquaintance with the Bible will supply you with many, many

testimonies to the great and wonderful truth that the eternal Son of God became Man. The incarnation of the Son of God is a vital truth, essential to salvation. Now you, who have read your Bibles, who hear the Bible read, are not without that testimony, and therefore, you are without excuse. You cannot have this Book in your hand, you cannot read it and be excuseless when you disbelieve, when you trample under foot the testimony which God has given of His Son, Jesus Christ. But there is another testimony, not different from this, but in accordance with it, even the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the heart. Hereby know we that we love God, that we dwell in Him, that He dwells in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. Jesus said it was expedient for His people that He should go away, for if He went not away, the Comforter would not come. That Comforter is the Holy Ghost, and, promising Him, Christ said: "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you". Now look if you have got that. Sometimes it will be covered over; sin, some sin committed, some carnality indulged, will cover it. Some vile temptation of the devil will cover it, and you will have to look very closely to see if you have got it. It is there; a covering does not destroy it; temptation cannot destroy it; nothing can invalidate the testimony of the Spirit in the heart of a sinner. But when it is covered, that sinner says,

Where am I and what am I?  
Strange myself and paths appear

Have I ever heard God speak? Has He borne witness with my spirit? Have I received an unction from the Holy One to know these things, or have I only had them in my judgment? And he looks diligently into the matter; it is no indifferent matter to him whether he has got it or not. Think of it my friends; it is no indifferent matter; it wont be an indifferent matter when you are on your dying bed whether you have got this testimony or not. Have we had it? Has sin buried it? Has temptation covered it? Has God hid His face from us for a season and for a particular cause? Search diligently, look diligently, sweep the house; you will get the lost piece of silver; sweep the house. O, it is a great thing to say that you believe that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh, and to be able to say: "Who loved me and gave Himself for me". "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace

of God".

Now I gather from this chapter another particular evidence of possessing grace. The people were in trouble. The Holy Ghost writes to them, by the Apostle, this Epistle and he says to them, now consider what that great cloud of witnesses speak, consider their testimony. Their testimony was sealed with their blood; consider it. They could say, there is a Passover instituted and Moses kept it; he forsook Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king. All these witnesses say the way to heaven is troublesome, but there is a good God to bring pilgrims to their haven of rest and it says in this chapter, now consider Christ who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. And consider this, that God, when He deals with you in troubles, deals with you as a father deals with a son whom he chastens, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not. This brings me to the evidence which I gather from this chapter to possessing grace, namely to accept and to remember the chastening of the Lord. "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons". If you lift up your heads and say, well we shall bear this as well as we can, there is no acceptance. But if you fall humbly before God, flat before the throne of His heavenly grace, and say - I acknowledge my sins; I am sorry for them; give me grace to humble myself under Thy mighty hand and bless this trouble to me; sanctify it to my soul's good; let this loss make more room for Thee; let this weakness be a place for Thy strength; let this dark dispensation make room for the inshining of the light of life - that is grace. Do you, at times, find in your heart a power to accept what God lays on, to accept what loss He is pleased to visit you with? Have you had grace to say, with some understanding of what you were saying, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven". Thy will be done in this poor heart of mine. Let me not cast off Thy yoke. Let me not break asunder the cords. Keep me, keep me; bind me to Thy throne, to Thy way, to Thy sovereignty, to Thy wisdom, to Thy goodness, to Thy right, to Thy power. Bind me. Look diligently. Sometimes this acceptance seems lost in a fretting spirit; covered with a feeling that you would be glad to get out of your trouble anyhow. Sometimes it is lost by the feeling of independence and pride. But it comes again and again, "Thy will be done". It will cross your nature, but it wont cross your interest. It will cross

your imperious will, but it wont cross the purpose of God for your good. Grace, O wonderful grace. It says, in the blessed Bible, "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace", and what is written here the Spirit will write in your hearts. Look diligently for this. See how your heart is affected toward God. I think the Apostle John would be a companion to some of us in one particular state and frame of mind; John the Baptist; he baptised the Lord Jesus. He said - I saw Him; I knew Him not, but He that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me: Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He". And he said, I saw. He got that blessed, wondrous sight. Oh, the glimpse he must have had of Eternal Deity, in the Lord Jesus". Oh, the glimpse he must have had of the infinite kindness and love of God in the Lord Jesus. And he preached Him; without doubt in the matter, he said "Behold the Lamb of God". "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world". And John the Baptist was put into prison; this preacher, this forerunner, this messenger of the Lord was put into prison. You might say, if you had what he had, the revelation he had, no trouble would trouble me. But if the Lord let you be put into some prison and did not pay you a visit, did not say a word to you for a time, as would appear to be the case with John the Baptist, then you would be as he was. His patience got worn out, his faith came to an end, and was expiring almost, so he sent two of his disciples to Jesus and said: "Art Thou He that should come or look we for another?" Does trouble affect you like that? Do you question when you are in some affliction whether you have ever had anything from God? Now take notice what the Lord said; just notice His blessed word. First of all He heals the sick, He preaches to the poor, He heals the lame, and so on, and then He sends the mesage to John: Go tell John what you have seen, what you have heard, and tell him that the poor have the gospel preached to them; and I am that gospel, I am the substance, I am the love, I am the greatness, I am the goodness of God; and say this : "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me"; whosoever can hold on, bear his cross, live in the desertion, hang about Him when He seems to take no notice, pray when prayer seems to have no regard paid to it. "Blessed is He whosoever shall not be offended in Me." Look for this. Unbelief will cover it; the absence, prolonged absence of the Lord will make it doubtful. No message sent to you; the Holy Spirit maintaining a silence, very

painful, will make it very doubtful, but look for it. "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God", lack it.

And dear friends, look for love. Grace will always have love about it. Faith and love go hand in hand. Faith worketh by love and love works by faith and they sweetly agree in the soul. O, it is a great thing to say, a very great thing to say, "We love Him because He first loved us." If He had not first loved us we never should have loved Him. Now when He comes and shows His lovely form and bestows His blessed grace and brings His mercy and shows us that He is an Intercessor, ever living to intercede for us, then we love Him. But to love Him when He comes with a cross, that is another thing; at least, it is a different motion of love. To love Him with a cloud between; to love Him when the devil maligns His holy character, when unbelief questions His faithfulness, when present distress and weakness seem to say, He takes no notice of you; then, then to love Him; then to say He is good, He is gracious, He is faithful; this is love. An untried love is not a certain love, even as an untried faith can never be depended upon.

Looking diligently lest a religion and an easy, respectable profession, should beguile you. Look to see if you have got a struggling faith and a love that will never die, though it seems near to expiring sometimes. And then again, this grace is a waiting grace; grace that waits in particular trials and circumstances. One said "I will wait for the Lord who hideth Himself from the house of Jacob". Do you wait for Him?

Haste grasps at all and nothing keeps  
Sloth is a dangerous state

but if you have got grace to wait then the day will come when, if not before, you will say with Jacob at the end of the pilgrimage: "I have waited for Thy salvation O Lord". Ah, and He is worth waiting for. Think of His loveliness, of His condescending goodness, of His infinite merit, of His compassion, His suffering. Think of what He endured - the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Think of how He went into all trouble and under the curse of a broken law. Think of Him, my friends; and think this - I believe it is Dr Goodwin who says

- He has waited for you from eternity; may you wait for Him. "I wait for the Lord", said the Psalmist; "my soul doth wait". A great thing; it is a waiting sinner who is a finding sinner eventually. Waiting for deliverance, waiting for comfort, looking for consolation, for redemption. Looking for the Lord to come and not balked by the sight and sense of sin in your nature and constant failures in your conduct. Not put aside or turned away from waiting for all these things. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

One more word, looking diligently lest any man fail to possess that inestimable, that wonderful gift of the Holy Ghost. "Hereby know we that He dwelleth in us and we in Him because He hath given us of His Spirit". Do you need to be sealed unto the day of redemption? The Spirit only can seal you. Do you need fresh views of the Lord Jesus? He alone can give them. Do you need to be led again and again to the throne of grace? It is the Spirit who leads. He takes of the things of Christ; He reveals them; He leads the soul to Him by such teaching. He seals unto the day of redemption; He is now the earnest of the inheritance. Are you lacking prayer? He is the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Are you lacking humility? He can give such a sight of Christ as instantly to humble you in the dust of self-abasement. If we possess the Holy Ghost, we possess grace in a good measure. Look then at these things; looking diligently to see. But how am I to know if I have the Holy Spirit in me? Christ said to His disciples: Ye know Him for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you. Now I will give you one or two evidences out of many. The first is this, you will grow in a knowledge of sin; that is grace. Gloomy, one says. Yes, true. Sin can never be anything but black, horrible, hated of God, and hated by all gracious people; but to be ignorant of it, O, this is terrible. Now if you are to grow in grace, you will have an increasing knowledge of sin in the nature of it, in its subtlety, in its power, in its ceaseless working to overcome and slay you. "He shall convince of sin". You pray sometimes in the hymn

Convince us of our sin  
Then lead to Jesus' blood  
And to our wondering view reveal  
The secret love of God

Natural religion puts this aside, calls it gloomy, legal. Grace makes a sinner prize that, by reason of which he flees as from death and hell; he prizes conviction. Do not confuse conviction of sin with sin done and sin in you. Conviction of sin shows you the disease and that is preparatory to a manifestation of the remedy. Then the Spirit's work is to reveal Christ; a most wonderful work as in the first chapter of the Ephesians it is set forth. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His Own right-hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named....." Think of it; He reveals Christ. Christ revealed lifts the sinner out of the dust and takes him off the dunghill and sets him among princes, even the princes of His people; sanctifies trouble; helps the sinner to bear affliction. O, the gift of the Spirit, an amazing, gracious, glorious gift. Look diligently for this lest any man fail of the grace of God.

I must conclude by drawing your attention to a solemn Scripture. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad". (2 Corinthians 5 v 10). Look diligently, O sinner. If you have your eyes opened, you will see many things to frighten you, alarm you, distress and depress you, as you see yourself. But if your eyes are opened you will see many things to attract you, inspire you with hope, move you in faith, melt you in love, even the Lord Jesus, the Saviour, the Friend of sinners. Now may the Lord give us honesty. A general religion is easy; a saving work of grace is difficult - not to the worker, the Holy Ghost, but to the subject of it. He, the sinner, finds every step opposed, disputed - every motion of faith opposed - by unbelief. Every desire to be right opposed by a careless spirit, a worldly spirit. Every aspiration after holiness hated by a sin-loving nature. Look diligently then. I cannot preach an easy religion when I preach a saving religion, but I can preach a safe religion. O, it is safe if you have grace. Grace saves, grace humbles, grace unites to the Lord

Jesus, grace brings sap from the living vine, grace brings love from the loving Saviour and grace brings salvation into a sinner's soul. Well then may we sing

Grace, 'tis a charming sound  
Harmonious to the ear

It is; it has charmed me many times; it has charmed some of you above nature, above sin, above devils, above time. It has charmed our souls so as to make God first - the law of heaven accomplished in us - God first. He will be first and, says faith, He is first. I have put Him first, I will keep Him first whatever it may cost me. Now may the Lord help you and help me to obey the injunction of our text lest we be found careless, indifferent and dead.

AMEN.