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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTIST

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 30 June 1919

HEBREWS 13 V 1

Let brotherly love continue

During the greater part of my absence from you this word was in my mind and some of the things which I thought about it I wish, if enabled by the Lord, to say to you now.

It is a divine word and therefore claims attention and obedience. It is spoken to brethren, children of one Father, members of one family. Love is here exhorted to; love in a restriction, not universal, but limited, characterised as brotherly. Difficulties may be said to be in the way of it, and therefore the exhortation - let it continue. Whatever opposition it may meet with, give not away to them; yield not to the enemy who, as a whisperer would separate very friends. But let it, being in you, continue. Love, speaking generally, is a very wonderful thing. Naturally it is wonderful. All love is relative; it relates to somebody; it relates to some things. It is relative. There is natural love, which has been said to be the best rag of fallen human nature and doubtless it is so. Family love, restricted properly, and woe be to that nation when family love ceases to be. It is no secret that there are numbers of people in our highly favoured land, a part of whose awful programme is the destruction of family ties. O young people, beware of the specious things of this day, cleave close to the family, to your parents and brothers and sisters. There is love of nations, of empire, and this, in God's providence, is ordered for good among men. There is love of race and again this, in God's providence, is good causing cohesion of men and giving mutual interest and concern, and such love, we may say, should continue. God grant we may have love of nation among us, that we may, in God's providence, cleave to our own people, and pray for all men; for kings, our king and all in authority under him. We have been a favoured nation and we have become a wicked nation. And I may say there is natural love in religion. There is a natural religion which acknowledged is good because God is acknowledged in it, and this was

once a great glory to England. Men clave to the Bible and held the form of religion and regarded the Sabbath largely, and lives of men were regulated by the Scriptures. Alas that we have lived to see it so diminished.

But all this, so good in itself, is not what is spoken of in the text. It is something different, singular, pure, beautiful, because spiritual, and restricted, because brotherly. Brothers are the people of God, of one family, whose Father is in heaven. Many of the children cannot say "Father" but, having the life of God, He is their Father; they are truly His children. It is a spiritual love to which here we are exhorted, and I would speak a little of this. In order, with God's help and mercy, to make it quite clear, I would speak first of all of this great truth, that the children of the Most High have one Father. There be gods many and there be lords many, but to us there is one God the Father and we in Him. He begets His children. "Begotten again by an incorruptible seed by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." That has taken place in them - "Ye must be born again". Begotten by the word of truth that ye may be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God" nor is Christ ashamed to call them brethren. The privilege of being children of God we shall never be able properly, fully, to enter into, to realise. O it is amazing that sinners who are dead in trespasses and in sins and alienated from the life of God, through ignorance and wicked works, should have their state altered and become possessors of a new life, a life that cannot die. "I give unto My sheep eternal life" says God. That this should be in any of us, what a privilege, what a mercy. Think of it dear friends, you who hope you are born again, that God, the Holy Ghost, should have come and quickened you into eternal life, should have given to you a mighty life, pure, powerful, though you feel it not to be powerful often; blessed, rising up to Himself, making Himself the one thing needful, the best of all, the only desirable one, and make Him so "All" as that, at times, you can say to Him - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." "To as many as believed on Christ" it is written, to them gave He power to become the sons of God. The privilege of being taken from one state, a state of condemnation, into a state of adoption and the relationship ineffable, which adoption is, indeed is very wonderful. The praise

of it all belongs to God; the fountain is God; the streams come from Him, from the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, these streams that purify the thoughts of the children of God, these streams that make sin bitter and purge the filth of it from the spirit from time to time. God is the author of all and this is a life which unites to God, and unites one to another, those who have it. We have all one Father. Every child of God is united to his Father, his heavenly Father, and, as he is, in the gospel, warranted to say it, so he shall, by the Holy Ghost, be enabled to say it, at times, "Abba Father", and God owns this sweet kindred. And descending from this there comes about another great wonder in heaven that will never cease to be a wonder, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Elder Brother of all the children of God. The poorest, feeblest, unworthiest in his own judgment, the tried, the tempted child of God has in heaven a brother, an elder brother who is the Son of God, the true, proper Son of God. Think of this, tossed about as you may be, many of you, and afflicted by a sense of sin and unworthiness, that Holy One, Jesus Christ, in heaven is your Brother born for your adversity, able to succour you as now tempted, because He Himself once was tempted, tempted like unto you, in all points, but without sin. Your complaints, temptations, weakness, fear, strong cries in and because of your fear, He understands, for He was tempted. He was crucified through weakness. He offered, in His affliction, strong cries and tears unto God and was heard in that He feared. This relationship transcends all earthly relationships. There is no real parallel to it in this world. It is heavenly, it is an everlasting relationship, and an amazing thing it is that God, who took a piece of sin and attached that piece of sin, namely a sinner, to Himself and to His Son, took that sinner into the relationship of a son to Himself, and of a brother to His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of all Christian union. The union that is so talked about today of various professing bodies, if it could take place, as is very unlikely, would but be made of iron and clay. There would be no real cohesion, no abiding relationship. But this union, this blessed union, this divine relationship must abide and abide for ever and ever.

Now on this ground one must build in this exhortation "Let brotherly love continue". First of all, the love, secondly the

restriction of it, brotherly. The nature of it implies a restriction. And thirdly, the exhortation respecting it, let it continue. There is love, an affection of the mind, a passion of the soul, something in you that attaches you to another and something in that other that attaches him to you, and a oneness of spirit in Christ. "He that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him". This is the ground, God is the begetter, the children of God, the begotten, and on account of Him who begat, the begotten loved ones enter. Do you see it, and is not it wonderful, is not it beautiful? Is not it wonderful that you should be part of the family in heaven and in earth, as Paul said in the Epistle which I read? "Of whom" - of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named". Ye are come, not to Mount Sinai but to Mount Zion, to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12 v 23) and that explains why you feel sometimes a peculiar love to Abraham, when you see him falling on his face as God communes with him. And you have just the same in measure when you feel a peculiar attachment to David as he says "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." When he prays "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me". Again, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" and again "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation". And also the same when you feel you can go and unite with Peter who went out from the presence of the Christ he had denied, and wept bitterly. And when appealed to by His restoring Saviour as to whether he loved Him or not, he said "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee". And to the Apostle Paul who says "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." How united you have felt to these good men, some of you. It is no presumption. It may seem to you to be so, as you think of it, that you, such poor creatures, such sinners - and I am with you in that feeling - that you should feel a love to, and claim a relationship with, these blessed men who are now in heaven. And yet, the same God who gave them life, has given us life as we hope. The same God who gave them pardon, has blessed us with the same. The same God who drew near and communed with them has drawn near to, and communed with us. And it is the same today. Are there not people here who love one another? And why? Because they see the grace of God in each other. Because the one Spirit of God has taught them that they

are sinners, taught them that there is a Saviour in heaven, and taught them to trust in Him, and given them grace to receive the salvation of their souls as a free gift from God. This, this is brotherly love. This is love, sweet love, uniting love, love that makes each one who has it, and whose breast is warmed by it, to esteem others better than himself. This is it that enables the people of God to esteem others highly, in honour preferring one another.

Well my brethren, when all other things go, when you have no need of faith, because you will see clearly; when you have no need of hope, because you will realise fully, this will remain. "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three and the greatest of these is charity". You may gain an ounce of something by contention but, as one says, you lose a pint of love. It is a great thing to have real love. This is the love which is born of God's love in the heart. If you have love from Him, you will love Him. If He has begotten you, then when you see others who are begotten of Him, you will love them. "He that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him".

Look at the character of it. It is relative, brotherly. It is restricted to a family - "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named". One Father, one great Elder Brother, one sweet union. O it is wonderful to feel you have got a brother here in Christ. The pure nature of it is seen in this, that differences of temper and disposition, social and all other differences, can make no difference here. Where you see the grace of God, having the grace of God yourself, you will find love. When Barnabas went down to Antioch to see the disciples and enquire into the matter of God's working there, he was sent to do so. We read this "Who when he came and had seen the grace of God was glad..... for he was a good man". (Acts 11 v 23/24). Just ask yourselves this question.- Did I ever feel glad to see the grace of God in another person? Have I ever had in my spirit that mark of a child of God, the love of the brethren? Have I possessed that evidence of being born again? "We know" one says "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren". That is a great point. Notice this then my friends, it is brotherly love, an attachment of heart, and it has several characteristics which I would name to you.

Firstly, it is grounded upon the truth of God. The truth, as the truth is in Jesus, binds the saints together. Think of this. If you really have the truth of the gospel in your hearts, then you will feel an attachment to all who have it, as you can form a judgment. Truth in you will love truth in another. Grace in you will love grace in another. The love of God in you will produce love to another, as you meet that other and he is commended to you, and he will love you as you are commended to him. And this implies something else, namely communication. The people of God are not dumb. They speak sometimes. They speak out of sorrow for their sins. Paul speaks out of sorrow when he says "O wretched man that I am" and he gave an expression of his trouble. He was a sinner and he could not keep from sinning. The things that he would not do he did, and the things he would do, he could not do, and that brought him to that point, "O wretched man that I am". If you go in his conflict, if you suffer his defeats, if you feel his shame, you will enter into a brotherly feeling with him. Paul will be a brother to you and you will be a brother to Paul. The saints speak too out of their comforts; Paul did. "Thanks be unto God". I am a poor wretched sinner but there is a great Captain who will give me a victory; in whom I now have victory. "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". I might run through the Bible in this point, but your memories will supply that. You will see the conflict in the saints all through this Book and often feel, as God is with you, that you are attached to the people who have their spiritual sorrows and their spiritual comforts; their defeats which are shameful, and their victories which are glorifying to God; their despair and their hope; their sinking and their rising; their distance and their nearness; their prayers and answers of God to them. This as mutually felt brings an attachment of brotherly feeling, a real love, and this, in the providence of God, brings about churches. Every true church is built on the life of God and the union in every church arises from the spiritual instruction and the communication of that instruction, a mutual communication. It is brotherly love. It brings people together. It is restrictive, brotherly, not universal. If all were Christians then there would be all this union amongst them, but no, it is restricted. Happy the man who feels it. He is an heir of heaven that finds his bosom glow with love. "I was glad when they said unto

me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122 v 1). Nations shall say to one another - "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths:....." There is union, there is love. All men will walk, everyone in the Name of His God, and we, say the saints, we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God. We will go this way; 'tis a painful way, a way of conflict, a way of tribulation, a way in which we are humbled, in which the pride of a man's heart is broken, in which there is much mortification to flesh and blood, but it is a way where God is, in which He is found. We, by His grace, will separate ourselves from all evil, as we know it. Says God "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you and I will be to you a Father and ye shall be to me sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty." It is great then to be inside this word, and be a subject of this exhortation. "Let brotherly love continue". As if Paul should say, I have taught you about the law; I have set before you the Person and sacrifice of our great High Priest, and given you to see how that all, as called by grace, have access to one God and Father in Christ and by His sacrifice. And now, having laid down that foundation, I exhort you, let that love, which as brethren, you have, continue. "Let brotherly love continue"

There are certain characteristics that I might continue to speak of for example, if you love, you have interest. If you have brotherly love you will have brotherly interest, an interest in the church of Christ, in the members of the church to which you belong. You will have a real interest. It is not a human society, but it is a union of saints as such in the bonds of affection, in the bond of truth. Do you feel that? Do you feel sometimes that your heart is led out respecting one or more of your brethren, a case or cases laid on your heart, whereby you must, you are under a heavenly constraint, to seek the face of God for them. It is a great thing that; it is as if the Lord comes to you and lays a great privilege on you and gives you a great honour, saying in your heart, now labour for that poor sinner, that child of mine, your brother, your sister. Labour for them; they are in trouble. And this is not dependent upon your being told by that brother or sister that he or she is in trouble. God can do it and does it in many cases without any such communications being made.

Distance is nothing here. Absence from each other is nothing here, does not enter into the matter. It is the one Holy Ghost inspiring a poor child of God to pray for another in whom the Holy Ghost is; one who has trouble, laid upon your heart. It is a beautiful thing in the church of Christ, a thing to be noticed, a mercy to be looked at, an honour to be highly prized. Bless Him if He has ever given you one poor sinner to labour for, to pray for; one child of His, at some particular time, to look after at the throne of His heavenly grace. That person is highly honoured who has this, and the person for whom the labour is is also very favoured, favoured of God. You mark it dear friends, if God ever lays one child of His particularly on your heart, because of some trouble, of which you have not heard except as you hear it now from heaven as it were, mark it, I say, it is one of the high favours of God given to you as a child and as a brother. I sometimes remember a particular of this sort in my own case many years ago. It took place when a godly friend in Holland, of another nation and speaking another language, whom I knew, a correspondent, wrote to me and said : I know you are in trouble - not that I had mentioned it, although I was in sore trouble - because of the spirit of prayer and the access I have for you from day to day. Time and distance and language will have no place here. It is a particular operation of the blessed God of all grace who gives this great honour to brethren from time to time. This is different from the usual mention that we are in the habit of making, and properly so, of the people of God in prayer. It is peculiar and it comes by occasions. Now, says Paul "Let this love continue".

This is the third particular, there is an exhortation as it is in the Ephesians "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Not make the unity; there it is. So here, you cannot make this love. It is of divine origin. But, being there, let it continue, endeavour to keep it. Why, surely no difficulties will arise here; surely, if you love it will rise above all other things. But there are many things to damp it, many things. Iniquity abounding makes the love of many wax cold. There are many difficulties. Pride in us will be a difficulty often. We are quick to take offence; we are quick to think that we are injured where no injury is intended or really done. We are very quick here. And we honestly, at times, confess in secret that we are the chief of sinners, but among our

friends we act as if we were the chief saint, and hardly a sinner. If you notice your own heart in this, you will see the offence you are ready to take every day. You need scarcely a word; what you think a cold look, or a little neglect, not intended at all will bring out from your heart the bitterest feelings, which will overcome all the love you have felt for the time being. If one is owned in the church more than yourself, I might judge why you might feel this an offence, and if your Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, does not please you in some of His dealings with you, you will be offended with Him and be ready to quarrel with Him and ready also to quarrel with Him who is your Father in heaven because He, in His dealings with you does not please you. Who could express, who would endeavour or dare to express fully the awfulness of our bitterness and bitter feelings against God and against the saints, and for no real reason, but for a reason we vamp up in our own minds; some imaginary injury or offence. "Let brotherly love continue". May God give us grace to be in reality, what we confess with our lips often, the chief of sinners, the unworthiest of God's people, deserving no honour from Him or from men, and especially from His children. Aim at the dust dear friends, aim at the dust when you think of yourselves, and aim at a throne for your brethren when you think of them.

Let this continue. But how? There being difficulties, temptations in the way, offences readily taken, yet no offence intended at all, how is this to go on? Well there is one way I know of, the best of all ways, and that is on your knees by prayer and supplication. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication for all saints." If you can pray for your brethren, you will find it good. It will kindle a spirit of love sometimes and a warm attachment in you, so reviving in you a feeling that has been dormant through sin and make you rejoice in the honour done to another, even though you have thought the honour should have been done to yourself instead of the other. If you have this feeling in your spirit in prayer, it will be a great help to love. Endeavour; and endeavour by looking, as God gives you grace, at what He does for His children. Then you will in honour prefer them. Ah you will be more ready to speak of their graces than of their faults, more ready to see in them the work of the Spirit than to see in them the fruits of the flesh. Brotherly love is a great blessing in people, in your own soul individually, in a church

collectively; it is a great blessing. It binds people together, it makes them forbear, it makes each one feel himself to be the least and his brethren far above him in attainments and in everything. Let it continue. Does Satan work against it? Yield not to his temptations. Do personal feelings rise against it? God give grace to regard them as being wrong. Everything that comes against this feeling, may the Lord help us to resist.

Now I have brought these things before you because I have had them in my mind, as I told you at the beginning. This Scripture was with me during a good part of my absence from home and now I pray that the Lord may grant that we here as a little people may be enabled to walk according to this exhortation. Happily I can say I know of no special contradiction of this Scripture in our midst, and I hope I may not know of any, but we have got wicked hearts, we have got bad natures, proud, selfish, ambitious. Like the two disciples in their ambition, moved by their mother, against whom the other disciples had great indignation. We have got all that in us. I know a man in whom it all is, and you may know men and women who have all that is bad. But have we got grace? Has the Holy Spirit come to us? Has He given us life divine? Has He blessed us with grace? Has He brought us to the atonement and made the forgiveness of sins either desirable or most sweet and precious to us? Then, O that we may stand, and endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Endeavour to, "let", notwithstanding all difficulties, "brotherly love continue".

AMEN.