

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 15 July 1928

JAMES I v 25

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law  
of liberty and continueth therein, he being  
not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work  
this man shall be blessed in his deed"

There is something very wonderful in being a Church of God; wonderful to have a congregation, many of whom, as it may be hoped, have the fear of God in their hearts, and who look for redemption in Israel. And in this day to me it is remarkable that God has here and there a people fearing Him and following after righteousness, and in particular, that we here should continue, as we hope and believe, holding to and following after the ancient things. I am old enough to be able to make comparisons and to look on our beloved nation today and compare it with what it was when I was a young man, and to see the various changes, the religious changes. I remember when in the Anglican Church, the national Church, ritualism was very much spoken against by the great bulk of church people. Now the Anglo Catholic is numbered by his thousands, and Anglo Catholic Churches number thousands. And the dissenting pulpits in my youth had very much truth in them. Today, I am obliged, alas, to say, as all of you must know, that the great majority of the dissenting pulpits are occupied by modernists. What is a modernist in the religious world? In the sense of theological preaching and teaching, a modernist is a man who says the Bible is not inspired; one who says he pities the mentality of people who believe in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Take the profanity of the nation. I remember when the Lord's Day was much more religiously, I use the word generally, observed than it is now. Look at this town; go into our main roads, the road from London, and all other parts; see today those roads crowded with motors and people bent on pleasure. And why are not we among them? One of the leaders of all mischief and pleasure seeking I would have been but for grace, having an intensely worldly disposition. And why are you not with such people? "Who maketh

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thee to differ from another?" is the Scripture question to the saints - "and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Why are your backs on the world and your faces toward God? Why do you need and feel and seek the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and why cleave to this blessed Book? May we say - Thanks be to God for His great goodness. And yet I have fears concerning this congregation lest when the old and grey-headed people remove, being removed by God, there should be a falling away. As you know, many of you, I have buried the whole of a congregation during my time here and a very solemn reflection it is. And to see this morning the congregation, knowing that a goodly number of our friends are absent, and therefore their places are vacant, is to me a worry. And these reflections perhaps have been occasioned by the death of my dear old friend Barrett. I do not wish him back from heaven into his place with us, but I feel his removal, and if the Lord, taking away one and another, does not replenish us, what must the effect be? 'Tis open to all, but one thing is better than all the rest. I have seen great changes here; I have seen this chapel so crowded that there was not room for another person to come in; yea, people have gone away from the door unable to get in, even to the vestibule. I have seen great change, but one change I humbly hope I can say has not taken place, and God grant it may not, namely this - He has not left us; God has not left us; what a mercy, what a mercy; we are not torn to pieces by dissensions; we have had sorrows, but not divisions and quarrelling. What a mercy. Now you young people let me speak to you. You have dangers, dangers that some of us who are old have got past in a sense, though, with a wicked nature, there is nothing too bad for us if we are left of God. But you young people have dangers; you read of necessity, and you will come across atheism clothed with a thin veil of religion and you will hear this Book spoken against. Very probably you will hear it spoken against as not being inspired and you may hear it said that justification is impossible because a man cannot justify one who has done wrong; therefore justification, even by God, is impossible. You may hear the vicarious death of Christ spoken against, that there is no special efficacy in it. You may hear Him spoken of as crucified purely for an example of

greatness and nobility. And these things may catch you. There is the trouble to me, when I think of you; they may catch you; they may seem so reasonable, all so reasonable. I have not escaped this kind of temptation, and I know the bitterness of it, and the pangs of it. Now what I want for you, what I often pray for, for you in the night seasons as well as in the day, is this, that you may have given to you the Holy Ghost. He only can save you from falling a prey. His hand alone can keep you from the whirlpool. His grace alone can save you. May you have the Holy Ghost. May this blessed Book be spoken to your hearts. O you young people, it won't be long before you grow up; you will be men and women, are now many of you, and the devil will dangle some temptation before your wandering eyes. And if the Lord keep you not, there is no hand, no power, that can keep you. Now my dear old friend Barrett used to say to me, I cannot get as near to the Lord as I want to do. Would that be your confession, if you made one, concerning God and yourself? That would mean this, and did mean it in his case, that he sought the Lord. Every good man is a seeker; every new born person is a seeker. If he lives to be an hundred years old, he will be a seeker and he may often say "I have found," but when he can say "I have found", he will say this - "there is much more to be found than I have ever found". And so he is a seeker and will be a seeker to the end. You listen to me; you have listened to me many of you all your hearing days, that is all your life, and I believe you will listen to me as long as I am able to speak, but the day will come when I shall be gone. May something be spoken to you by the Lord so that you may say - "Well, he has gone, but the gospel, he tried to preach, and we love that gospel". And then you will cleave to the ancient things. I hope you will, so that when you die a minister here may say - "Well, we believe they have gone to heaven". What a great thing that will be for any one to say of you. I hope you will be able to say it of me. If I die, as I have thousands of times prayed I might die, you will be able to say it - "He has gone to heaven". I want to get there and if I do, and sometimes I believe I shall, then this, I have said, I want this word only to be put on a stone that may mark my grave - "Where sin abounded grace has much more abounded; that as sin

hath reigned unto death, even so may grace reign unto eternal life".

Now look at my text. But there is something gone before different from what now is to be said in this verse, somebody spoken against in a sense; their case, sad indeed, described. "For if any be a hearer of the word", that is the gospel as preached, "and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face", the face of his birth "in a glass". Does that apply to you? "For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Forgetful hearer of the word, look at this solemn Scripture. A forgetful hearer, a leaky vessel, as the word is in the Hebrews.

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip", like leaky vessels. Does the word leak out of your memory, your mind, your thoughts? And do you find yourselves sometimes on the Sunday after the morning service going to business, thinking of the future, nourishing some ambitions? Or are you thinking of some injury done you, as you think, which may be real or otherwise, and do you meditate revenge? Forgetful hearers! What a solemn thing. To be a forgetful hearer of God's Word seems to be worse than never to have heard it at all. Peter speaks of some who, by the influence of the gospel in the letter of it, left their pollutions, and then turned again to them. Very solemn.

Now the Apostle James comes to another kind of person. But though it be so with this forgetful hearer - "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed". There are two things necessary to looking into the perfect law of liberty. First, an eye, the seeing eye. Has God given us that; the seeing eye? Different this from the cursory glance at the Scripture, or the indifferent hearing of the preaching. The seeing eye; the eye that sees God; that, seeing God, sees sin in self. The eye that looks on ruin and mourns. The eye that looks on a heart which is described in the book of Jeremiah as being "deceitful above all things and

desperately wicked", with this question attached - "Who can know it?" The second thing is light. Put a seeing eye into a dark room; so shut up and shut out the light as that eye is, as it were, of no use to the body; there is a sad case. There are persons who have eyes and what they need is light which, in the Scripture, is called the light of life. That, falling on the eye, the seeing eye, guides it. Always notice what guides you. If you are guided to the cross, to the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, to the fountain of His merit, take very particular notice of that. The light of life guides a person; it fills the body with light. And if the body is full of light, the Lord Jesus says that, to that person, there is no occasion of stumbling because he sees what to avoid. A man walking in darkness does not know at what he may stumble, but if his body is full of light, and he is walking in that light, then he knows which way to go. And when there is a pitfall, he avoids it; when there is a stumblingblock in the way he sees it and begs of God to keep him from stumbling at it. Have we these two things? God has given the eye, the seeing eye to some of us. We have often seen Him. I have, and then I have never found that I did not, in that seeing of God, see myself. I would again and again say to you what I have often said. All your knowledge of yourself will be derived from a knowledge of God. When Ezekiel saw God, he fell down, and his comeliness was turned in him into corruption. The same with Daniel; the same with John; the same with Peter who, seeing God in Christ said - "Depart from me O Lord for I am a sinful man". That, dear friends, that is it that makes true religion a solemn matter to all who have got it. Without that, a profession of religion is very easy; a respectable profession is very comfortable. But this inward light coming from God makes the profession of Him more solemn than can be uttered.

Now if we have these two things may we fall down before God and bless Him for the seeing eye and for the saving light, the light of life falling on that eye. This leads to looking; looking in this word is particular. It is the same word that is used with respect to the angels of whom Peter speaks when he says "Which things the angels desire to look into". And it means a

a stooping, a stooping down, a stepping aside to look intently into what attracts. Looking here then is not a passing glimpse or glance, not an indifferent look, but a look with living desire at the root of it. Is that so? O the carelessness of a sinner's heart, the indifference of a sinner's mind, with respect to God. How do you read the Bible? Do you sometimes say when you have read a few verses, what have I been reading? The mind has gone away; one to this and another to that, like the invited guests; one to his merchandise; another has bought a yoke of oxen, and another has married a wife, and all of them had an excuse. So is many, many times the looking, the cursory glance, even of a child of God into the glass. But sometimes it is different. His heart is not haughty; his mind is not lofty; his eye is not somewhere at the end of the earth; his heart says - Now here is a truth; here is a great truth; you are a filthy person. Here is the declaration of a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. And faith in the man's heart says - now you look at this; here is what will meet your malady; here is that which will cleanse your filthiness, that which will present you spotless and without blame before God whom you are seeking. And faith looks into it; the merit of it; the love of it; the grace of it; the suitability of it; the power of it. And the sinner says, O that I knew all that. He looks into it; he cannot turn, for the moment, his eye away from it, because there is heaven in his view; a heaven of holiness. There is a heaven of acceptableness; there is a heaven of purity; and he looks at it. Now my brethren I hope I shall catch some of you here. You will be saying that is exactly the case. When we get a glimpse of the atonement it has the effect of fixing the heart on the Atoner, the Lord Jesus. Remember what this looking is. It is a stepping, a stepping aside, away, from other things; aside from the world; aside from a legal argument; aside from an indifferent spirit; and a stepping, looking away from these things, to this blessed fountain. "Looking unto Jesus". You have there a word, looking away. That word is looking away from other things, all other things. Well my friends, who gave the seeing eye? Who gave the heavenly light of life, and who revealed to that eye, thus blessed with light, the vision of the atonement?

Ah, poor forgetful hearer, you miss this; you miss this! May you come to know it so as to say - Here would my heart abide, gazing at the atonement.

"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty". Three words here of infinite importance. The "law"; here it means the gospel, the law of liberty; the gospel. O what a law it is. The gospel considered in itself is that law of God's heart, electing sinners; giving sinners to Christ; giving Christ to them. The law of love in sending Christ; the law of love in Christ willingly coming; the law of the atonement, efficacious, infinitely valuable. The law of the Spirit's coming, descending from heaven, being sent by Christ. The law of the covenant; the covenant, that large, that wonderful arrangement and engagement in the Trinity, whereby the election of grace, all the saints, are saved, and every necessary provision for their safety on earth, their blessedness in heaven, God made. The gospel has an object to look into; the gospel is this blessed law; it is a perfect law, an ended, finished law. That is to say, nothing is to be, can be, added to it. All the perfection God will have His people shine in through eternity is in the gospel. Righteousness, holiness, perfection of every sort and kind that God will have His people walk in, they find in the gospel. And when the poor new born soul in bondage and legal fear wishes he could repent, and so go to God; that he were humble, and so could lie before God; that he were believing, and so could give God credit; his wishes are good in themselves, but they have a wrong end generally; a wrong end. And that is he wishes he had these things that he might thereby find some access and acceptableness in the sight of God. He will never succeed; he will never succeed. What he will have to come to is God's terms and God's terms are that he shall be a sinner, and as such, be saved. I have said lately to you at times, only a sinner is capable of being saved. Now that is true, only I do not like it; neither do you. No legal man likes it. But that is what you must come to; God will bring you to it; that you must be a sinner - "Sinners can say, and none but they, how precious is the Saviour." This is a perfect gospel; a glass without a flaw;

a glass that reveals the character of God, the love of God, the grace of God, the intentions of God, and the fulness of God in Christ. It is a perfect law, my friends. When this is in you, you will say - there is no law here; No! there is life, and there is love, and there is forgiveness. But in itself this is a law, and it is perfect.

Now look at the third word "liberty". A beautiful word rightly known and used - "liberty". It is a relative word. In this case it relates to a preceding condition, a preceding experience. The condition and experience of sin and law and condemnation; a condition of bondage, keeping you from the Lord; of sin, holding you back; of condemnation reigning in your conscience. A condition terrible to one who is born again. Now this law has full liberty in it. Liberty from all that is evil, all that binds a soul. Think of it, you who are in bondage, who are saying, O if we were but right; O if we only knew God was our God. I wish you did, but mind this, you must be in the mud and in the mire of sin; you must be shut up in condemnation before this blessed law of liberty will operate in your souls to bring you forth and set you free. It is liberty from unrighteousness - "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." Think of it. Now to be free from unrighteousness is to be justified. It is liberty from pollution as to its dominion in your conscience and feeling, for the gospel purifies. When one is washed in the washing of regeneration, he needs his feet to be washed, and they often have to be washed. And when they are defiled, the man is in bondage to defilement, and he needs liberty again. And that comes by the application to him of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus. There is liberty from the alienation of sin. Alienated in the mind by wicked works. Now there is liberty from that in the gospel. O "ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". Think of it - "Made nigh by the blood of Christ". And this being made nigh is being brought into a new relationship to God. And that is the relationship of a son. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father." This is liberty. And it is liberty from a hard

heart. That hardness, that locks you up sometimes, is taken away. It is liberty with respect to prayer. The prayerlessness of your mind, your heart, is removed, and you have access in prayer, and you can make supplications to the God of heaven. It is liberty from the devil's dominion. "Thy kingdom come", the prayer of the soul, is now answered. Liberty from the supreme will of the flesh - "My Lord Will be Will" And now it is - "Not my will but Thine be done". Whenever the gospel in its power and glory is brought into the soul, the soul has liberty. And seeing, looking into this law of liberty, is looking into that, that God has bestowed; really bestowed. And what a wonder this is. O it is a great wonder. I would speak of it with reverence; it is so marvellous, it is so wonderful. Namely, that a sinner sees himself justified; a polluted worm sees himself purified; an alien sees himself to be a child of God; a distant soul sees himself to be near to God; an enemy by nature sees himself to be a friend of God. My brethren, this is a miracle of the love and wisdom and power of God.

One word more - "And continueth therein". "He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved". Continuing is remaining on, looking at, following after, the things revealed in the gospel and looked on by faith. Continuing on. It is a solemn word the church of Galatia heard - "Ye did run well; who did hinder you." You did look on Christ crucified; who has bewitched your eyes so as to draw them away from that, so glorious object. "Ye did run well". Continueth - and the continuation will be just in the same way as Moses continued. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible". "Continueth" suggests opposition, trouble, difficulty. Whoever found it easy to get to heaven? I suppose the adult revealed in the history of the world, the church of God, who got the easiest of all others to heaven, was the dying thief. Born again, praying, getting an answer, and flying to heaven in a few hours. O what a blessing. But then that is an exceptional case. Here is a man born again and he is blessed with the gospel and he lives year after year, and the devil and his sins and the world and his disposition and circumstances, these come constantly in his way and say to him -

now turn aside. And there is some precious little thing in his nature, and it is an idol. He says - Spare it; is it not a little one? And something in his disposition rises up against Christ; an infidel thought pleasant to his natural disposition. O the difficulty; and the man says - I am so discouraged, I do not see how I can hold on. Well there is the Scripture, there is the truth of the gospel, that will meet you. May the Lord make it meet you. It is this, concerning Christ - It is said "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". And His courage will be given to you, and sometimes you will say - "I know that I shall not be confounded; He is near that justifieth me." I wont detain you longer. You have been able to sit quietly in the intense heat. Now may the Lord, if it could please Him to stoop so low, put something into your minds that has been said and cause it to abide, and be an instruction and a help, for the glory of His Name in your profit.

AMEN.