

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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Philippians 3 v 12

"Not as though I had already attained, either were
already perfect: but I follow after, if
that I may apprehend that for which also I am
apprehended of Christ Jesus"

The everlasting destiny of the church of God is set out in Holy Scripture but it must be made manifest in the hearts of the people of God or there is no understanding of it. Man, fallen, is, according to the book of Job, abominable. A very great thing, that, that a man, in God's sight, is abominable; God's great work, greatest work in creation, of which He said, it was very good, because He Himself had done it and because also man was made in the image of God and after His likeness. That image consisted in uprightness, perfection in his entire being. That beautiful estate was not continued, that pure man became abominable because the image and likeness of God, in which he was created, he lost. It was defaced by sin. We all became abominable, deformed, huge, without shape. What a solemn truth that is and what a shame it is but what a good thing it is to believe it. What a humbling truth it is to the soul on which God does imprint His truth respecting the fall. We are just vile creatures, disbelievers, infidels, thieves robbing God, full of all sorts of lust and wickedness. The end, as to time, is the death of the body. Coming from the dust, to the dust it is to return. The soul, if there be no regeneration by the Holy Ghost, no new birth, must sink into eternal ruin; fire, brimstone, worm never dying, all setting forth the severe and holy punishment of fallen man in eternity. How many of us believe that, God knows. But as many as do believe it are concerned to know if there is a hope of escape from that fearful condition and the Scripture tells us there is and the Spirit brings the Scripture that tells us that there is into the heart and thus, a sinner born again, apprehended, arrested by God, has given to him a heart to seek a better state even than that from which man fell. This morning I addressed you upon the last part of the verse, inverting the order.

Paul said he did not reckon that he had already attained to the resurrection of the dead, which he sought, but one thing he did, and that was, "I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus", and I endeavoured to set before you what this apprehension of a sinner is, the arrest of a sinner by God, arrest by the law, by God's teaching, by the opening to the sinner of his own wicked heart, by the pressing on his conscience of the claims of God on him and his self condemnation. This is the apprehension. I might have added, though I had no time, that there is a continual business between God and His people, He apprehending them. When wandering from Him, He arrests them by trouble, bringing them back, fetching them from various vanities which they indulge, and would always be indulging in if allowed. He apprehends them by affliction. When He sees them preferring some vanity before substance, that is Himself, then He just allures them into the wilderness. In many ways for their instruction, for their coming again to Himself, after their wanderings, He apprehends them, does not leave them to destroy themselves. He does not leave them to go on uninterrupted in evil ways. As of old He sent prophets rising up early and sending them to Israel saying O do not these things, so still in the Spirit He sends the word. Sometimes by a minister, sometimes specially and alone by the Scriptures and the Spirit, He apprehends His people and when they are thus apprehended they have a desire to know why. What has God in view when He apprehends or arrests a sinner? What is the end that is to be accomplished when He thus deals with a sinner? This is what the Apostle speaks of concerning His own experience. "I follow after, if I may apprehend", lay hold of, grasp and know why God has apprehended me. You will of course follow this thought that the Apostle, being arrested by the Lord, wants to know why. Thus may the Lord help me to follow a little now.

Why did God convince any of us of our sinfulness, and of our sins? Why did He lay on our hearts the want of Christ, and set before us the worth of Christ? That is a question. What end had God in view, is what a child of God seeks to know. Well, when the Lord apprehends a sinner and reveals to him his sinfulness, the end of that particular teaching is that He may forgive him, that He may speak that sweetest of words, pardon, that He may seal on his heart the blessed truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth him from all sin. It is not easy

to believe this when the sinner is just feeling that God must be against him because he is a sinner, but it is so. That is one first reason why the Lord has taken hold of the sinner and that the Lord Himself esteems it to be to Himself a name of praise and honour in the earth when He shall forgive the sinner the sins which he has sinned against Him. And look at the result of this in the sinner's conscience and experience, how in the first place the forgiveness of sins admits him into intimacy with Jehovah. It removes all bars, objections, temptations, unfitness and brings, as the Apostle teaches in the Ephesians, brings the sinner near. "You that were some time afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." That is the great point gained, a great end attained to, when a sinner is able to say in his measure of confidence and comfort with the Apostle Paul, when speaking of Christ, he says : "Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Now some of us want to know that. You may be saying why this misery, this bondage. I go to bed and say, would God it were morning. In the morning I say would God it were night, for your life hangs in doubt, no certainty, no comfort. Guilt on the conscience is the most troublesome companion you can possibly have. No one without the experience of it can understand the bondage, the fear, the dread, the burden, the uncertainty, the gloom that guilt on the conscience works in the mind. But the end of God must be attained and that is that that person who has that painful, shameful experience shall be made nigh to God by the precious blood of Christ.

That I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended by Christ Jesus. He does not give you conviction to leave you there. He does not give you to realise your condemnation to leave you in bondage and prison. He has another end in view that He may bring you forth out of prison. It is part of His blessed office to say to the prisoners, come forth, and to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. That becomes a real experience, in some early, in others later, but it is one end that God will accomplish most assuredly in all who are apprehended or arrested by Him.

Another point in this is this that an arrested sinner realises that sin is a real and a dreadful separation from God. Everyone convinced of sin by the Spirit knows, is assured of, that, that he is

separated from God. The soul, by that separation, can have no likeness to God. It is as true, as real, a separation as if your arm were severed from your body, so real, so true, so bitter, so awful is the sense of being separated from God. He is the Spirit of life, He is the life of His people. Now what is the end He has in view in impressing deeply upon the mind and heart of a sinner that sin, his own sin, as well as original sin, has separated him from God? It is that he may be made nigh. This honour have all His saints. Nigh, by the blood of Christ; nigh, so nigh as that the soul may feel nearer to God than to itself. So near, so sweetly near, so intimately near, so blessedly near as that for the time there is nothing like distance between them. Some know it. I believe some here know it and a wonderful knowledge it is. Do you follow after it? Has the Spirit set it before you as what is attainable, that though you have not attained to it, it is attainable. And that, that knowledge of its being attainable, stirs up your soul betimes to seek it. Bring me near. And I would press this upon your attention by one or two observations we have in the Scripture expressing it. It is expressed by the word "union", and that union is in the Scripture set forth in various figures. The union of the branch with the root, that it partakes of the fatness, that is, the virtue of the root, the fructifying, the living virtue of Jesus Christ in your soul. That is one of God's ends to make the union between a sinner and Himself, by that wonderful intimacy that the branch in its union with the root has. And the fruit borne by that union is natural, not by creature effort, but just natural. You graft a branch into a stock and if there be formed, by that grafting, living union, it is just a natural thing in the course of time that that graft shall be partaker of the root in its virtue. So, when a sinner is united to the living Vine the naturalness of it is that it brings forth fruit according to its nature, its new nature. If you have this in your heart and in your eye, O apprehended sinner, you will follow after it. "Lord make the union closer yet" will be your petition.

Another beautiful figure used is that of marriage. The marriage union, when real and proper, is one of love and the Apostle in the Ephesians tells us this. It is so intimate, so sweet as that he says "No man ever yet hated his own flesh", that is to say he does not hate his wife. "They two shall be one flesh" is God's order and that

blessed figure is used to set forth what the Lord has in view and will accomplish when He arrests a sinner, that the sinner may be married to Christ. In the Romans the Apostle says this also, you know the law. He says, you know it by its killing power in your soul, and you become dead to it and it becomes dead to you and therefore you are free from it and being free from the law you are free to be married to Jesus Christ. This, in the view of the Apostle, must have been very beautiful, very animating, when he saw that this union between the soul and Christ was one of God's great ends.

Another end is this that the sinner, cut out of the old wild olive and brought to Christ or, as the word has it, being born again and a new creature in Christ, shall bear the image of Christ. O what union this is, what blessedness this is, and the end of it is heaven. Yes, the end of it must be heaven. May the Lord set this before you. I am sorry to say that I cannot go on any longer. I am weak and exhausted. I hope it will please the Lord to open this to you dear believing friends, so that you may find with the Apostle that you are following after to apprehend why God has apprehended you.

AMEN.