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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Friday evening 1 January 1926

PROVERBS 3 v 36

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He
shall direct thy paths"

We have a good reason for this because, in the first place, He tells us to do it, and He gives, sometimes, His good Spirit to us, so that we are enabled to do it, and, in the next place, it is profitable to do it. "It is good" said David, "for me to draw near to God" And then it is good, because of the issue. Answers come. "He shall direct thy paths". And it is becoming us, as a people - though we are very much affected by sickness, and the weather - it is good for us as a people gathered here now, to seek to do this before this blessed God who has, for so many years, looked after us and helped us. It is comely to praise God, and in doing that, there is an acknowledgement of Him. It is good to thank Him for His mercies. If we take our personal cases, how good it is to acknowledge God in the ways in which He has dealt with us. He has dealt with us patiently. Who has needed this patience of God more than one's self? The God of all patience; not dealing with us after our sins, neither rewarding us according to our iniquities. If He had met with us in some ways, as we deserve - if He had said: "I will tear the caul of your heart"; if He had said: "As you have sown now so shall you reap" - what would have become of us? What would He have done to us? In this then, may we be enabled personally to thank and bless God for His patience. Acknowledge Him in this, His way with us, His dealing with us, His kindness to us.

Let us also seek to acknowledge Him in the supplies He has bestowed upon us. O, poor creatures, if He had shut up His hand we could not have complained justly, but He has not done it. Although that Scripture belongs, at least to me - "Neither were they thankful" - still He has kept His hand open, sent daily bread, mercies, and comforts, and these temporal blessings should be, and are, when faith

is in exercise, and love is felt, acknowledged as being from Him. In all the ways we have walked in providence we must acknowledge that God has been good to us. We have had fears, but He has had mercy. We are weak; He is strong, and He has shown Himself to be so, so that, though there have been difficulties, and troubles, there have also been suitable supplies, sufficient supplies. Whatever you may say when you come, sincerely, and in living faith, to look back on what God has done for you, and to you, you will have to say - "He hath done all things well" - even in providence. And then the supplies that He has sent to our souls, as at least some of us must acknowledge. If He were to say to you - "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness?" what would you say? What would you say to Him? You would have to say, you had been the wilderness, the wretch, the wicked creature; you had been all barrenness in yourself, but He had been merciful, and long suffering. And there are several things that He has sent to us, spiritual things. He has sent His Spirit, He has given His good Spirit, that Holy Spirit, that unction from the Holy One, that Divine Teacher, whose light shining on a fallen nature has made that fallen nature look abominable beyond expression. Whose light, falling on the cross, has made the dear Saviour, seen by faith, more glorious, and excellent than the mountains of prey. We owe every ray of light, every gleam of hope, every feeling of God's goodness in our souls, to this Divine Spirit. I do wish the Lord may help me, and help you, to acknowledge, and love, the Holy Ghost. God has also sent another mercy of a spiritual nature, namely His Word. We have it in our hands, but sometimes some parts of it have been put into our souls. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them". Now a reproof, then an encouraging word, then a testimony of His mercy, and His love, and such things have come in sovereignly, and powerfully, so as that our very hearts have been moved, melted, drawn up to the Lord, and He has been made precious to us. Another mercy is this, that He has granted us access to Himself at times. O this is wonderful, the Almighty God drawing to Himself a sinner, permitting to come to Himself, a sinner, to seek His mercy, to gaze on His well-pleased face. This is what God has sometimes granted to us. We must say then that He has granted us life, and favour, and His visitations have preserved our spirits. And, not only has He done this, but also He has paid us such merciful attention as to heal our sick souls at times, bind up the broken-hearted, and given liberty to the captives.

The moments we have had before Him, the solemn feeling of His presence, the views of His goodness, the melting of His mercy; these are not to be sought for twenty years back, but sometimes in the year just expired. I have said, and you perhaps have said

Though temptations seldom cease,
Though frequent griefs I feel,
Yet His Spirit whispers peace,
And He is with me still (801)

Is it not wonderful? Does it not break you to pieces, melt you into contrition, and raise gratitude in your heart? O what a God we have; what dealings of God we are favoured with, although sometimes you may be disposed to say

Tis winter all the year with me

yet really, and truly, you could not say it when you think, when you remember some of the visitations of God to you, you must acknowledge Him.

Take also this, with respect to providence in the handling of God. He has handled us wisely, though painfully. He has done it. He has sent affliction, sent it to some personally, sent it to many of our friends. The winter, in which we are, has thus far been to some very serious, terrible, full of affliction, and we have had, I was going to say, a large share of it as a congregation, so that our congregations have been thinner this year, this past year, in the winter, than I have known them for years, and years past. Now He is to be acknowledge in this - "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him." No, it is not good to despise it. He despises it who lifts up his head and says, I will bear it as well as I can. He faints under it who says, I shall see no more good. Now God squeezes afflicted sinners into the middle way between those two sins, gives them grace to say - "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good" It is the Lord, should I complain

It is the Lord, enthroned in light
Whose claims are all divine,
Who has an undisputed right
To govern me and mine (261)

And so thus far we have to acknowledge God in all these ways. Going back, as Moses said Israel was to go back - "Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God hath led thee" Remember the hunger, as well as the supply; the thirst, as well as the living water. Remember the chastening, as well as the mercy, and the comfort. "All the way the Lord thy God hath led thee". Well now, about the future. Happily we do not know what will be tomorrow. I am glad, I think I can say I am thankful at times, that I do not know what will be on the morrow. Ignorance in this is indeed a mercy for us. If we knew that the year on which we have entered would bring to us prosperity, and peace, and comfort on every side, the effect, unless the Holy Ghost prevented it, would be to shut us up from God, Prayer would cease, and an unrighteous confidence would be felt. If we knew that trouble was coming, and oppression, and affliction continually, then we should be depressed beyond measure unless the Holy Ghost were to enable us to hope in God; but He has kept the future from us. Quite enough to have the day by day. Living by the day is a good sort of living. I have known a little of it, and the peace of it is indescribable; when you can solemnly feel to say - "My times are in Thy hand". What I am to be, where I am to go, what I am to lose, what I am to gain, what friends I shall lose, what friends Thou wilt raise up for me; what supplies, now running, shall be cut off; what new supplies shall be sent; all, all these are in the hands of God. O, it is a good life; the Lord help us to live it. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". Now acknowledge this. Acknowledge that there is a God in heaven. Say you, Who doubts it? Do you always believe it? O, I wish I believed it every day of my life. Of course, I do not doubt it; but saying that is not the same things as saying I believe it now in my conscience. I believe in my soul that there is a blessed God in heaven. Now if you acknowledge this, you will kneel before Him. You will kneel in the spirit when you are walking; that is, your heart will kneel down, and your spirit will fall before Him, and worship Him, the living and true God. In this acknowledge Him.

Acknowledge Him in His Trinity. We have done, and I hope we shall do. Acknowledge the Eternal Father, the Eternal Son, the Eternal Spirit, Three Persons in One God. Acknowledge these blessed Persons in the Covenant of Grace, that Covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. Acknowledge the incarnation of the Son who, in the fullness of time was sent into the world, made of a woman, made under the law. Acknowledge the Holy Ghost, the Quickener of the purchased people of Christ. Acknowledge the blessed God. My dear friends, this Divine Person, the Father; this Divine Person, the Son; this Divine Person, the Holy Ghost, you will find to be the foundation of your faith, the rule of your life, the comfort of your heart, the strength of your soul, the peace of your conscience, as revealed in you from time to time. We are dependent on the Trinity. We are dependent on the Holy Ghost for faith, for prayer. We are dependent on the Saviour for repentance and pardon. We are dependent on the Father for receiving us, and calling us His sons, and daughters. In all your troubles, in all your difficulties, in all the sorrows, in your hunger, and your thirst, and your weariness, and your temptations, acknowledge the Trinity. "In all thy ways". In the way of prayer, in the way of faith, in the way of humble dependence, there is an acknowledgement of God. In your emptiness, acknowledge that the fullness that can supply you is in Himself. In your weakness, acknowledge that omnipotence is in Jesus Christ. In your ignorance, acknowledge that Christ is the wisdom of God. In all the things that are to try you, that do try, that will try, acknowledge Him. Acknowledge Him with respect to everything that befalls. Is it evil? - "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Acknowledge the rod that may be laid on. When the rod speaks, the wise man of the city hears it. Acknowledge Him in His chastenings. This keeps from fainting; it keeps from despising. Acknowledge Him as being a faithful God. He is faithful, He is faithful. I know it, and so do some of you. Some of us have got old promises, that is, promises that began with us many years ago, were given to us, and they have been fulfilled, they have been fulfilled. I have found promises to contain more than I thought they did when they were given to me. They will last as long as you will, and longer than this mortal state. The supplies promised will last till you cease to need them. O what a faithful God we have to depend on. What is His promise? - "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall

direct thy paths." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". And, as an individual is to acknowledge God, so is a church. Yes, so is a church. The life of a church is Christ. The form of a church is when He gathers believers one to another, and brings them through the holy ordinance of Believers' Baptism, and unites them from time to time in the power of His word, strengthens their faith, sweetens their cares. enables them to walk before Him in the light of the living. Acknowledge Him. He is the Head. Call no man master, "for one is your Master, even Christ". One is your Lord, even Christ. This, this, every gospel church will, more or less distinctly, as the Lord is in it, acknowledge. "In all thy ways". A church has its ways, its ordinances, the ministry, and prayer meeting. Here you have a life of the church in the officers, and in the gathering together of the people of the living God in one place, called Christians. Acknowledge God in all this. We have good reason to do it. I live a good deal in the past now, and two feelings sometimes fill my soul. One is a deeper shame than I can ever express. O my barrenness, unbelief, unprofitableness, worldliness, contraction of mind, selfishness, indolence; every evil in my nature moving, wriggling, working, striving to get the mastery, and there is a long time in my case - longer than most of you, a long time. O the years that I look back upon; all the years I have been here, and the years before I came here. Well that, sometimes, that back look weakens me exceedingly. Perhaps many a night, when you are all asleep, I am awake, and a good deal of my work lies in this when I am awake in the night season; going back. All I can do sometimes is groan out, wonder if God can go on bearing with such a creature. It wont do you harm, my friends, if you look back. It does not do me harm. God give us grace to keep our eyes upon, and fixed on, what we have reason to be ashamed of. The other feeling is this, what a good God I have had, what a full God, what a mighty God, what a patient God, what a faithful God. And this is a pleasing view, a back look that is most beautiful, and pleasing, and heightened by the recollection of the badness in self, heightened by a sense of the exceeding wickedness of one's own nature, and ways. Acknowledge God my friends. Acknowledge Him, not only in the past, but in the future; that you need Him to subdue your sins, and to give you rest in His dearly beloved Son. We do need it. When shall we cease to need Him? When shall a minister cease to need Him, as a minister? When he ceases to be a minister. When will a church cease

to need Him? When it is not a church. When will deacons cease to need Him? When they are no longer deacons. When will individual members of the church cease to need Him? When they leave a church state here below. O my brethren, as a church, may the Lord look upon us, and keep us, keep us close to the truth; keep us close to the truth. Close to the gospel, the everlasting gospel; to election, predestination, particular redemption, the operations of the Holy Ghost; to the promises, and to the precepts; keep us close to them, put them into our hearts with power. Acknowledge that if He does this He will bless you. Acknowledge Him in all that is to come. "In all thy ways". Ways of tribulation, ways of peace and comfort. Tribulation He has ordained. Peace and comfort, He bestows. Acknowledge Him the giver of all, the doer of all, and remember that everything that is, His holy, inscrutable will enters into all. Everything that is, His will has something to do with. He works all things after the counsel of His Own will. Acknowledge therefore His Divine will. Acknowledge His sovereignty. "He puteth down one and setteth up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup it is full of mixture." God grant we may never drink the dregs of it. The wicked shall drink the dregs thereof. Acknowledge His wisdom - "God only wise" - that whatever seems to be difficult, perplexed, crooked, and beyond our understanding, He guides, orders, and the issue shall prove to be for the good of the saint, and the glory of His great Name. And acknowledge His power - "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Acknowledge that He holds the winds in His fist, and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is "God only wise". Acknowledge all these things. The Lord is in them. Well, these thoughts I just lay before you, hoping it may please God to make at least one of them, or as many as it may be for our good, to sink into our hearts, that we may endeavour, by His grace, to walk in this word- "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct they paths."

Now this is a promise, this is a gracious promise. Now one remark I would make here, this, namely, if you cannot see your own way, God keep you from saying that He is not guiding you, directing you. Hart was a wise, and blessed hymnwriter. He says

That traveller treads the surest here
That seldom sees his way

The way is so squeezed, so pressed, that there seems no way at all, but He leads. He led them through the wilderness, as a horse is led through the deep that it should not stumble. The Spirit is the Guide.

He all the motion gives
By springs of fear and love

"He shall direct thy paths." "Thy paths" What are they? There is a path of faith. Faith treads a safe path. "We walk by faith not by sight". And who directs in this? The Holy Spirit. And where does this lead? To the cross of Christ. That was Paul's blessed end. He said - "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Mark this dear friends, when troubles are with you, when difficulties perplex you, when weakness distresses you, when you seem to be going backward instead of forward, mark this, where is your eye fixed? On whom is your desire? If you can say, from time to time, fixed on the Son of God; if you can say

Fix there my hope, and for the rest
Under Thy forming hands my God
Give me that frame which Thou lik'st best

He is directing your faith. The path of believing, difficult because opposed by sense and reason, but safe because under the guidance of the Eternal Spirit.

He shall direct thy path in prayer. Do you know what to pray for as you ought? No. And if you are a Christian you should believe the Apostle's testimony. "We know not what to pray for as we ought" Who then can direct us? A prayer book wont. Your fellow Christian cannot. Who can? The Holy Ghost. "Praying in the Holy Ghost". He can do it. This is wonderful, and I have often mentioned it in your hearing, how that that Divine Spirit, when He is leading a sinner in prayer, makes intercession in that sinner according to the will of God. That, though the sinner says, I am only chattering, though he condemns his own prayers, though he is ashamed of them, though, if he prays before his friends sometimes, he says, O I wish I had not been asked to pray before them; though all that may be, yet, as he prays in the Holy Ghost, there is intercession made in his heart according to

the eternal will, purpose, and love of God. What a Director the Holy Ghost is.

Another path is reading the Scriptures. Who can lead in this? Who can direct in this? The same Spirit. He who made holy men of old His penmen, His Own mouth, so that they spake as they were moved by Him, He is able to take of this very word and open it. It is beautiful sometimes to you doubtless when some Scripture falls on your heart, and you see in it what nobody ever could have taught you.

He calls the fool and makes him know
The mysteries of His grace (74)

Well, the path of humility, the way of dependence on God - "Casting all your care upon Him" - acknowledge Him in all this. Then the difficult ways of providence; when adversity comes, when affliction is laid on your loins, and you do not know how to stand, are not able to stand up; when things go against you, when what appeared to be solid is made to flow away from you like water; when all these things befall you, and when sometimes it is different, even when there is a smile, when there is the removal of some affliction, when there is mitigating of some trouble; then in all these ways, acknowledge Him. We cannot make things straight. He can. He can and He does make crooked things straight, rough places plain; fills valleys, levels mountains, scatters enemies, and brings His poor people to depend on Himself constantly.

Well, some such thoughts as these have been in my mind. Early in the hours of the night I was begging God to grant me a good word with which to start the year, and that I might have a word to you. I have brought what I have had, what is in my mind, and may the Lord help us to regard this great word. Remember Him in all things, and when this friend is laid low, when that friend is removed by death, when afflictions come, when there may be a scattering, acknowledge God. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" When there is good, acknowledge Him. Can there be good, and God not do it? Dependent we are; may we be enabled to depend. Depend on Him, on Him alone. Look to the blood of the Lord Jesus. Depend on His blessed intercession. Lean on His arm. Hang about His promise and pray that

He would kindly make good these things which He has revealed in the Scriptures, and in some of our hearts.

Now it has not been a Prayer Meeting, but I think perhaps you wont be displeased with what I have done, with a different course entirely in our first meeting of the year, and may the Lord help us to pray for one another, and acknowledge Him in our union; acknowledge Him as the Head of the Church; acknowledge Him in the ministry, acknowledge Him in the deacons, acknowledge Him in every member of the church, and every godly person belonging to us, and acknowledge Him as the quickener of the dead, and ask that He would mercifully quicken dead sinners that His Name may be made very great among us.

AMEN.