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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all
thy ways be established

Proverbs 4 v 26

The book of Proverbs is a very solemn book, containing divine instruction, full of the utterances of the Lord Jesus Christ, exhortations and precepts which, if we had grace to attend to, would bring us into much trouble about our lack of attention, about our poor, uneven walk before God, would bring us to a good deal of self examination, and therefore of self condemnation. I can hardly bear the sight of myself when I read these Proverbs and other parts of Scripture. Put them as a standard to yourselves you gracious people and how will you stand? A plumbline. How will you look when that plumbline is put to your spirit, to your inward walk, to your speeches, to your consciences, to your manner of walking in secret as well as in public. This text bids us do a solemn thing, not conclude without consideration that we are right, right because we hold the form of sound words, but it bids us very carefully to look at the way we are walking, to ponder, look considerably, closely, carefully, prayerfully, at the way we are conducting ourselves, to look at the way we are in, whither it tends to, where we are going. If we are enabled honestly to follow the heavenly direction in this particular, then our ways will be established. To ponder is not to take a cursory glance at things, not to just cast our eye, run our eye over this and that particular, but to come very solemnly and seriously to consider where we are, and whither we are going, as to our present inward conduct, and it may be also our outward conduct in some particulars. There are ways in the Scripture which are called the ways of death. They look right but the end is death. Here is a path which we are in if we are blessed with the fear of God, but how are we moving in that path? This is the thing that we are told to consider, ponder over it. When you make up your accounts you do not just cursorily run your eye up the column of figures and then carelessly conclude all is right. You examine them carefully, reckon this and put that and the other together and see if your position is

what you thought it to be, and the Scripture I have read to you tells you to behave similarly with respect to your walk. Ponder the path of your feet. The path that God's people walk in is the path of the just and it is said that it shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. There is no doubt as to the final issue of the life of God's people. They are Christ's body and must be with Him. They are members in particular of His body and must be with Him. They are the purchase of His blood. He cannot want them, must have them. There is no doubt about the security of the church, but there is also no doubt about this, that a foolish walk will bring a chastening rod, that a careless walk may put many thorns into a dying pillow, and therefore it is that we are exhorted as gracious people to ponder the path of our feet. Which way is the face? Which way is your face? Christ set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He knew what it meant. He knew it meant death. If our face is toward God it means trouble, but is it that way? Let us see if, by the Lord's help, we can find out a little as to the direction in which we are moving. First of all, take desire, what is it? The desire of the righteous, Solomon tells us, is only good. Here what distinction must be made, what separation must be made. The desire of the righteous is only good, and if he had no flesh, then no searching would be needed, but there is so much flesh in us that we need to closely examine this great matter. After the desire a man's heart will run. If we desire the world then the world will be the object of our pursuit, even if we have grace. If we are covetous, or worldly, or walking in carnal reasoning, or walking after appearances, or judging things that are not good, then insofar, if we ponder the things I have just named, what will the judgment of conscience be? But if the desire be strong as well as good, it will overcome these things I have named and the language of the soul will be, hinder me not, my soul is pressing after God in Christ. My desires are to be united to Him, to be at His footstool, to hear His gracious voice, to see His well pleased face, to feel His powerful support, and to be under His gracious guidance. Ponder this. Sit down quietly, carefully, prayerfully, examine desire. It is only good in a good man when grace is prevalent. That means it is Godward, the face is toward the cross, the heart is bent that way. Ponder the path of your feet with respect to trouble. What does it do for you? If it be bodily affliction, if it be affliction in your family or anywhere, what does it do for you? Where do you go to in it? Does it bring you

to self-examination. Does it bring you to this "Lord show me wherefore Thou contendest with me?" Does it cause you to pray that you may sow to yourself in righteousness in the affliction, that you may reap in peace. Does it bring you to cry that you may have sincere submission to the holy will of God in your trouble? Does it bring to light some sins you have indulged? Does it open more and more the deep corruptions of your nature? Does it show you more and more clearly that you are just weakness itself, that if you are left for a minute you will stumble? And these discoveries, do they humble you? Do they bring to close, honest, diligent, fervent confession of sin? It is one thing to say you are vile, and so confess sin. It is another thing to see, to feel vileness in some particular matters, and so go with the chains about your neck, with shame on your face, with confusion in your mind to confess that you have behaved basely, that you have walked wickedly in the sight of God, however consistent you may have been among your fellows. Ponder this. We get through affliction somehow. We can say, and should say, shamefully, we get through it somehow, but that is not the way of truth. Ponder, look at your troubles, see your spirit in them, and whither are you tending in your afflictions. You may say O they will end one day. Well that is true, but how will they end? Can you say or are you praying that you may say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn Thy statutes" It is a solemn truth that we are very ignorant, I am very ignorant, of God. I know it, and I confess it to Him. O sometimes, many and many a time in the day I confess it to Him. Do afflictions bring you, bring me to the throne of grace, that God would teach us, teach us His will, and cause us to walk in His way? Ponder this. Look seriously and prayerfully at your inward behaviour in affliction. There is pride in us, mortified feelings will prove to be powerful in us. Self pity will be in us as a power sometimes. But O are we led by the Spirit of God to ponder the afflictions, not only in their piercings, not only in their weight, but as to the will of God with respect to them? He says "If ye endure chastening" not if you have trouble, but "if ye endure chastening". I remember when that word was made a wonderful support to me and a direction. If ye endure it. Not if you live through it somehow, but if on your knees, if in prayer and supplication, if desiring to know God's will in it and by it, if you feel now you would not, if you might, lessen it either in weight or in time but just fall as a poor weak child into His hands,

that will be good, and that is enduring affliction.

Ponder your faith. What does it do? There is one Scripture tries me sometimes not a little. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say to this mountain be thou removed and cast into the sea". And I look at this mountain and that mountain and I see that they are not removed, they are not removed. Well then where is my faith? Is there a grain of faith in my heart? Examine this, ponder this. Then to where or what does your faith tend? There are two particular objects in the Scripture for faith to gaze on. One is the Almighty God Jehovah in His revealed will in the law. If we have faith to look on Him in that respect we shall wither and die, but it will be a good death. When the law is dead to us by the body of Christ, faith will then say, it was a good death. And the second object is the same Jehovah in Jesus. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself not imputing their trespasses unto them". Ponder this. Is this the direction of your faith? Is this the object of your faith? You want liberty. It can only be had here. You want confirmation. It can only be had here. You want a peaceful conscience. It can only be had here. A broken heart, a contrite spirit, can only be had here. No acceptable sacrifice is offered to God by a sinner except through the Lord Jesus and His precious atonement. This is a subject we may well ponder. We profess faith some of us. What does it do for us? Where does it take us? What does it say of ourselves? Does it empty us? Does it preach against us? Listen to it. Never turn away your ear from the verdict of faith against yourselves. What does it say? There is a remedy in Christ, there is balm in Gilead, there is a good Physician there. There is in heaven the Saviour, the High Priest of our profession who ever lives to make intercession for all that come unto God by Him. Does faith approve of that? Does it say there is the Person I want to know? There is the intercession that will save me. There is the power that can raise me from the dust and the dunghill, and set me with princes, even with the princes of God's people. There is the deliverer, there is the captor of all captives. There is that blessed One who says, He that has led captive shall be led into captivity, and he that killeth with the sword shall be killed with the sword. The devil shall be led into captivity and the sword of justice will kill him. He killed many. Does faith speak so? And does it say put your trust in that Saviour? Cast yourself into His arms,

cast yourself before God a lost soul, a guilty sinner, a worm, a wretch, a vile thing. You cannot come too lost or too filthy or too weak, or too rebellious. All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven. O there are some things here that are wonderfully attractive to faith, the dear Redeemer, a precious atonement, a justifying righteousness, an almighty arm, an infinite fulness of grace, of mercy, of compassion, of wisdom, and faith says, I approve of all that. Ponder this. Are you in this path, stumbling often it may be, but are you in this path? A way God has cast up, a path He will have His people walk in, from which, through sin, they turn, but which again and again, they find to be the only way of peace. Ponder your faith. Then to walk in the path of prayer it may be, ponder that. What is your prayer? I believe that every soul that is brought seriously to consider the path of prayer, what prayer is, who can give prayer, and who must answer prayer, will be brought to find that it is a heavy thing to pray some prayers. I will tell you one prayer that is very heavy, very solemn for a sinful person, a child of God, to pray. "Thy kingdom come". Lightly uttered by many, perhaps by some of you. "Thy kingdom come". What does it mean? Ponder this. What does it mean? It means this, the stone cut out of the mountain without hands and predestinated to fill the whole earth must, if that kingdom comes into our hearts, destroy the kingdom of self. Ponder it. Now is there a willingness in this? Is there a real solemn willingness for this wretched kingdom, this wicked self, to be destroyed from time to time? You may pray sometimes for this kingdom to come and not much think about it but how different if you ponder as you walk before God in prayer, if you think what does it mean if God answers me, if you consider what does it mean if God puts that kingdom into my heart, and establishes it more and more. Did you ever consider what Paul says to the Romans - "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost and he that serveth Christ in these things is accepted of God and approved of man". This kingdom, righteousness casting out the filthy garments of old nature, peace, the peace of God destroying the peace with ourselves, joy in the Holy Ghost causing everything in this world to be matter of sorrow because of sin, and Christ and Christ alone, the matter of joy. Ponder your prayers. Do you pray for submission to the will of God? If He has taken something away that you would like to have kept, do you pray for submission, to say from the heart "Thy will be done"

Ponder your disposition toward God in respect of your profession and your hopes. Think of that Scripture "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure". Think of it. Salvation reaching heaven; work it out. That is the fear of God, the faith of God's operation, the desire to be right, leading you to kneel before God many a time in the day. When you are walking, when you are working, when you are on your bed, your heart and soul kneeling before Him- O give me power to fear Thee. O bless me with prayer, the prayer of faith that shall save a sick soul. O grant me grace to look to, to believe in, to cleave to, and follow after the Lord Jesus. This is working out the salvation with fear and trembling. Shall I miss, will the Lord hear me, or will He reject and turn away my prayer from Him? Then says Paul, He works in you. He works true faith, He gives real prayer, draws the soul after Christ. 'Tis God that worketh in you. Ponder this. Ponder your hopes. You walk in hope sometimes. We are saved by hope. Where does your hope lead you to? On what is your hope built? Who is the object of your hope? What is the end of your hope? Ponder it. Paul says, "Saved by hope". " But hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for". What he has in his hand he cannot hope for. He possesses it. " But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it". Faith is the substance of that. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. The things not seen are in God, in Christ, in the Spirit, in the covenant, in the promises, in the precepts. These are the things not seen. Now hope goes to them, hope goes after them, hope follows that it may reach them. It is a grace for the future, and a great grace it is. Ponder your hope. Does it lift you heavenward sometimes? Does it say these perishing things you will soon leave behind? Press after God the object of your hope. Does it say in your heart sometimes, these pains, these mortifications, these corruptions, these disappointments they will all end soon and one thing after which your hope may be going you will enter into. We wait by faith, grace and hope; we wait for the righteousness which is laid up in heaven. Ponder your love. You profess to walk in love. A great grace love is. In respect of duration it is greater than faith and hope. It is to outlive them. But what is love in us? What is it doing in us? Just ponder it in your own soul. You profess to love God. What does it do? Does it go after Him? Does it move you sincerely to say to Him "Whom

have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" Does it put the whole world into a kind of nothingness and cleave to Him of whom it is said "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death" even the Lord who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Is He the object? Is He the forerunner? Is He the One you desire above all other things? Ponder the action of love in your soul. An inward, a true action of love, will always be with the face toward God. He is the Object of it. Ponder your humility. Humility is a wonderful grace, not half as common in us as we may think it is. Ah it is one thing for me to say I am a beast, I am vile. It is another thing for me in secret to groan out that confession, and be willing to be a sinner, not in conduct, a sinner to be saved by the Lord Jesus, and also to be willing to receive the things that God may see fit to send to us, to humble us and bring us into the dust. I know a little of humility, just a little, just enough to tell you that it is a beautiful grace. It is a self denying grace, it will put you down into the dust and keep you there as long as it is in exercise. It will make you really nothing, and you will find it is not as easy to be there as a general profession may make you think it to be. Ponder this. We are not half as humble as we should be. An old deacon of Gower Street who used to hear William Gadsby preach told me that once he heard William Gadsby say in Gower Street pulpit, we do not half know how sinful we are and this poor man was drenched in sin at that time and thought it a hard saying but he lived to prove the truth of it and I think we may say we do not half know how proud we are. We do not half know how big we are in ourselves. I speak out of my own experience, and I have lived to value humility. I have lived to feel it to be a great grace, to be a great blessing, to be willing to lie down in the dust. The Lord speaks about this by Isaiah, when speaking to His church He said that He would take the cup of trembling out of her hand and put it into the hand of them that had oppressed her. He said you have laid your body as the ground and as the street to them that walk over. Did you ever lay your body like that? Did you ever have humility in that measure? Thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that walk over. To ponder these things is a great thing. Ponder your walk, speaking generally, your walk in two places, in the Church and in the world. It is a great thing to walk before God in His church. I did not think so much of that many years ago as I do now. When you look

back perhaps you will come to say, if I had had a little humility in that trouble it would have been better for me. You may live to say if I had had a grain of heavenly wisdom in that perplexity, it would have been better with me. I have lived to say it, to feel it. I know it. Ponder. O my dear friends, beloved members of the church and congregation who fear God. We are living here, we have met here this evening, we are professors of God's Name, we walk in religion. Do we ponder how we walk? Are we careful how we walk? The Lord give us grace to obey Him in this Scripture, in all the particulars I have named, and there are many more I might name. I might name our knowledge. We all know something of the Scriptures. I have read them now for a great number of years. We know something of them. Probably, I should believe none of you ever reached the height of pride that I reached many years ago when I was in a bad backsliding state in my heart. The Bible was a wearisome Book to me, and the horrible pride of my heart made me say inwardly, I know what the Bible is, as if I should say I need not read it any more. What do you know of the Bible? And in that question I mean this, not what you know of the letter, but what you know of the power of it. What has it said to you? Has it reprov'd you? Can you lay your hand on some Scriptures and say, I thank God He humbled me by them? He showed me my sinfulness by them, He brought me to see I was walking in a wrong way by such and such a Scripture. May you say also I would bless Him that He ever gave me to see the Lord Jesus, in the word of truth, in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. May He graciously help us. I have felt something about it today. Yea in the night, last night I had a good deal of feeling about this Word of God and this part of the Scripture, and this text today, "Ponder the path of thy feet". Do not be careless. May the Lord give us grace to be careful. "Go to the ant thou sluggard." Look at your garden you sluggard says the Word of God, a garden overrun with weeds, an ant to teach you diligence, and says this Scripture "Keep thy heart with all diligence". Pretty legal some professors would say. Well if I have preached legality, I hope the Lord will help me to preach it more and more. I know this, it brings liberty. I know this, it brings the soul before God in humility, in sincerity. I know it will do that for you if the Lord gives you grace to obey Him in this word. Ponder the path of your feet. Ponder the path of your feet, how you are walking, how you are walking before Him and it will bring you to this, grant me to walk with Thee as Enoch did. Enoch walked with God. Now may the Lord

graciously forgive what has been amiss. I know I have not said much but what I have said is worth your attention I believe and may He give you hearts to attend to what I have said, and give me a heart also to be with you in pondering the path of my own feet. What an awful thing it is to be walking in the ways of death. What a blessed thing it is to be walking in the path of life and doing this the ways are established. God's testimony will come. Ah and He may let you know that He is pleased with you in Jesus Christ, that He has removed your difficulties, and all your ignorance, and all your waywardness, and that He is pleased with you in Christ. We are defective believers, we are defective in our knowledge, we are defective in everything we profess, but there is a Saviour's precious blood, a Saviour's blessed righteousness. There is the Spirit's gracious power, and may the Lord God grant that we may find our ways established, that we may say in the Lord will I make my boast.

AMEN.