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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed
Chapel, Brighton, on Sunday morning 3rd May 1925

TEXT: Psalm 119 verse 144

"The righteousness of Thy testimonies is
everlasting, give me understanding and I
shall live."

In religion there is necessarily feeling. An unfeeling religion is no religion. There is feeling about God, His nature, His perfections, Eternity, the sentence of God on man, sentence arising, first of all, from His claims on man, and then on the meeting of those claims, or otherwise, by man. Law, terror, love, mercy, justification, sanctification, about all these things, there is feeling. In the parable of the Sower, of the four hearers, three clearly had feeling, feeling of joy, feeling of the cares of this world, and good feeling, resulting in good fruit. In the parable of the publican and of the pharisee, there is feeling. The pharisee felt he was religious; he felt. And the publican was religious, he had feeling. The one felt gladness and the other was sorry for his sins, and had not courage to lift his eyes up to heaven, so heavy was he in heart, because of his sins. We have feeling. You have, more or less. You feel; feel there is a God. I do. But then there is this remark to be made; feeling may be wrong - the right object may be, the wrong feeling about Him. That was so with the pharisee. He had God in his mind, but he had wrong conceptions, and wrong feelings about Him, and he was condemned. One of the hearers had very sudden joy. It was wrong and he withered away for lack of root and moisture. Another had feeling of care, and whatever he thought of God was swallowed up by this, that he must be careful about this world, he must enjoy the wealth he possessed. His feelings were not right and it is good for us to be searching ourselves, and saying - come let us search and try our way. Are the feelings we have right feelings?

Do we rightly feel that we are wounded, wounded by sin, wounded by God? Do we rightly feel about the remedy? Has it been applied to us, or have we conceived some hope on false grounds? Have we been under teaching that slightly heals the wound? Are we looking for that of which we have had no true intimation from God? Are we building on a foundation that has not been well laid for us? There is feeling in religion. In false religion, false feeling, false hopes, false joys, false confidence. In true religion, right feeling, good feeling, feeling of sin and sorrow for it; feeling of God and hope in Him. Right feeling about Christ, and rejoicing in the truth of His Person, the very Son of God incarnate. But then, how shall we know that the feelings we have in and about religion are right? Is there a test? Has there been given to us a test? Can we put them by the side of a standard that has been erected? Has God given us that, whereby we may test our feelings? Has He lifted up a standard by which we may, through His grace, stand and measure ourselves? Blessed be His Name, He has. He gives it to His people in two places. First, in the Scripture. Everything that is right must be tested, examined, weighed, and judged by the Word of God. This infallible book errs in nothing. Mind the scriptures, they are able to make us wise unto salvation. They are the revelation of God, of His Being, His perfections; of man, His creation, His purity of the law written in his heart; the claims of God upon him; of the fall, the revelation of Christ, the Son of God incarnate, and the gospel of Christ, the revelation of the Spirit, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, coming and the washing of regeneration by Him. Hope - this is to be tested. Everything that we profess is to be brought to this test. You will come to the light if you have faith, that your deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.

The second place is the understanding conscience. The Spirit bears witness with the children of God; bears

witness with their spirit that they are the children of God, and when they receive this, then they know and say with the Psalmist, each one "Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed." This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in my eyes. He has made me a living stone, and brought me to Christ, the living foundation and joined me to it.

The prayer of the Psalmist is for understanding. The righteousness of Thy testimonies is everlasting. The word of God, this righteous word, is for ever and ever, established in the heavens; the righteousness of Christ which is everlasting, testified in the scriptures, the testimony being the very manifestation, revelation of God, as in the Hebrews it is said - "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." What a wonderful testimony is this, the testimony of God's righteousness. It is everlasting, and he who receives it, in the power of the Holy Spirit, receives that which is in Him - everlasting life. This testimony is without fault, a righteous testimony. God's word is without fault as everyone knows, who receives it in the Spirit's teaching. Though the word finds fault with you when it comes in power, you will never find fault with it. You will never say it is too strict, its rules are too stringent, its standard is too high, its requirements are not just. You will never speak so. Left to carnal reason, men may easily, and do easily, and confidently contradict the scriptures, but men receiving them in the power of the Holy Spirit, never can do. What the scriptures say of God, we believe. What they say of us, we believe, we feel. We have not only some proper feeling, but we have an understanding which guides that feeling, indeed which begets it. We understand by the testimony of God that Christ, the very Son of God, became the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. We feel our own unrighteousness. We believe that our righteousnesses are as filthy rags as the scripture speaks. We believe that, then, when we see that righteousness which He wrought

out, and which is called the everlasting righteousness. Then that, received in our heart and understanding, begets our feelings respecting justification. We shall one day be face to face with God. If we are born again, we come to that again and again here, face to face with Him, that we may not be our own judges, but receive His judgment. Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence. That we may believe in Him, and receive what He says concerning Himself and concerning ourselves.

Are we in Him? Have we received the testimony of His righteousness for justification? Look at the petition - Give me understanding, and I shall live. Understanding is receiving, apprehending, knowing in some measure the things which make for peace, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. Not a general idea that we may be right or may not be, but an instruction in the heart, whereby the sinner is made wise, and he understands, apprehends, receives. Does not adequately, wholly understand, but in measure he understands the things which the blessed Holy Spirit brings to his heart. This is an understanding that every child of God covets. It regulates his feelings. It orders his mind. It shapes his thoughts. It brings him face to face with truth. His feelings are not sufficient testimony for him. He says I may be wrong; I may have wrongly felt that and the other. But, when he has understanding, he finds that he is regulated by that; his thoughts are regulated. Let us then look at this "Give me understanding". You must have a subject. An understanding in it will make you know it, make you know it in some measure. If God is that subject, the great object of faith, you will have some measure of knowledge of Him - who and what He is; what His character is; what His Name is; what His claims on you are; what His judgment of you is, as you are a sinner, or as you are a saint. An understanding of Him in some degree will bring you to tremble at His majesty, to realise that you are infinitely beneath Him by creation, and, what is worse, infinitely removed from Him by sin. To understand this, is to come down in your experience to be a lost sinner. Give me understanding

in the nature and breadth of the law. The law is exceeding broad. Wide as your thought is, the law will reach. Deep as your guilt is, the law will sink. High as your transgressions are, the law will rise. Give me understanding in this. We shall never be free from the law by being ignorant of it. Think of it. We shall never get deliverance from our sinfulness by ignorance of that sinfulness, and any teaching that slurs this truth over and prescribes remedies, is like a physician making a false diagnosis and giving remedies that are poison to the person. O it is good to know, not simply to think about, but to know what the law is - exceeding broad, pure, spiritual, good, whereby we know that we are carnal, sold under sin. "Give me understanding." Good people, that is godly people, are not unthinking people. They are knowing people. They are taught of God. They shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. They know.

Give me some understanding respecting eternity. The immortality of my being is terrible as I am a sinner. Give me understanding in this, that my cry may be to be prepared to meet a holy God, that I may stand perfect and complete in all His will, being found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ. Understanding these things, by the Spirit's teaching, will make us sensible, deeply so, of our perilous condition in the fall, and in the eye of the law, perilous in the extreme. A sinner unable to alter his condition, or to improve his nature, under the law that is strict, strictly just. O there is no injustice in the law of God, a law, that, though it claims perfection, does so most justly, and though it pronounces its sentence, does so with absolute justice. This brings a person down. Now he says publican-like, "God be merciful to me a sinner" I come to that which is the chief point in my mind this morning

Give me understanding in the nature of the atonement of Christ, the death of Christ. When Christ told

His disciples, as they were going to Jerusalem, this would befall Him, that He should be betrayed, that He should suffer death, that He should rise again the third day, these things were hid from them, neither did they understand them, and that is just so with all men who read that doctrine in Holy Scripture, without the Spirit's teaching. Therefore we may cry - Give me understanding in the nature of the atonement. Now the nature of the atonement arises first of all from the nature of God. It arises secondly from the nature of Him who made it, and this includes everything that can be required by a child of the Most High. God's nature is just. Righteous is He and can by no means clear the guilty in the terms of the law that has been broken by men, and the nature of the atonement meets this precisely. It just meets every claim of God on a sinner, every claim of the law on a transgressor. It just meets this. Could heaven be heaven but for this? No. And the nature of the atonement arises from the nature of Him who made it, Jesus Christ the righteous. Jesus Christ, who took the dying traitor's place and suffered in his stead. Took the place of the sinner and said to justice inflict on me what he deserves, punish Me, that he may escape, deal with Me, that he, as a guilty one, may become innocent and just. This is the nature of the atonement. Now, if you have an understanding in sin, if you have an understanding in your own case as a sinner, you will see, by divine teaching, that this understanding in the atonement is necessary for your real comfort.

Unless God be satisfied, how can you be happy? Unless Christ had made the atonement, which is perfect, how can you have peace with God? Not at all. Whatever feelings you may have, if you have no understanding in this, you may talk to the end of your days about the atonement, and never have liberty in it, never have peace by it. But, if, realising a little of what God is, and a little of what Christ is, and of how,

He, being perfect, effected a perfect atonement, then by the Holy Spirit, you will find your soul well grounded, and your conscience well purged and divine peace taking place in you, controlling you, peace that passeth all understanding keeping your heart and mind by Jesus Christ.

The atonement, the blessed atonement of Jesus, is that removal of sin that leaves the person for whom Christ made the atonement, without sin in the sight of God, and the application of the atonement just brings that into the soul's experience, so that the satisfaction of God, and the satisfaction of the sinners are of the same nature, and the peace of God therefore passeth all human understanding. There is a sacred adequate, somewhat adequate feeling of it, and it passeth all the understanding. You can, you do, apprehend it, but comprehend it you cannot. Why God should bless you, why He should deal so graciously with you, why He should bring you into peace with Himself, and into union with Himself in Christ, is more than you can understand, but you realise it in some degree.

And now look at this living, at this point - "and I shall live." When one is born again, he lives to God, lives before God, as a child of God, yet in his conscience he may be a dead person; he may just realise that the law slays him, that its sentence is against him, that it cannot be commuted, that it is a sentence that must either be entirely realised in a surety, or in the sinner himself. Now when this blessed atonement is brought into the conscience, the sinner finds that death removed. It is really removed and he lives in this atonement. He lives before God. It is a pure life he lives, a just life he lives, a holy life he lives, in the atonement, and he finds more or less distinctly, in his experience, two things united, which are united in the scripture, namely justification and sanctification. Christ is made righteousness and sanctification, and when the understanding receives this in the applying power of the

Holy Ghost, then the sinner is both just and holy in his experience. He can say "I am clean" He can say "I am just". Christ says "There is no spot in thee", and the sinner realises that blessed purity. He understands. He has some measure of understanding in this, and this is what everyone born of the Spirit and under His teaching, pants to know. "Give me understanding" Let my soul live in the knowledge of Christ's death, in the realisation of an interest in it. Let me feel that I am His; that He purchased me with His own blood. Let me realise this. "Give me understanding and I shall live." This living is wonderful. This living, not under the frown, but under the smile of God, Living in some realisation at times of the favour of God, which is better than life. Living near, now and again the Person and work of Christ taught, revealed, brought home by the Spirit. It is living as a branch in the vine. Blessed living, this. The cares of this life, they are cast on the Lord. The burdens and sorrows that come, these are also cast on the Lord. "Cast thy burden on the Lord," for He is your friend, and He says so - I call you friends. Abraham was the friend of God, and this sinner is the friend of God. Christ is His friend, and his elder brother. He lives. He lives in trouble. He casts it on the Lord, and lives by faith in a sweet hope of deliverance. He lives when he is full of care. He comes to the Lord with it, and lives in a sweet expectation of good by it. He lives in temptation, believing at times that the Lord will bruise Satan shortly under his feet. O it is good living when you live in the atonement. It gives you liberty that no man can really conceive until he comes into a knowledge of it, a liberty from that condemnation that is death, from that bondage to sin, from which you cannot be free other than by the gospel. O it is good liberty, blessed liberty, and to understand this is to enter into that which, in the mind of God, was fixed upon in eternity. The atonement is that that gives such perfect satisfaction to the conscience, that there

is nothing left to be desired at the moment. It so removes guilt, it so brings a sinner before God as that there is nothing to be required or desired at the moment. I am happy says the sinner, all is well.

Give me understanding in the next place - give me understanding in the nature of faith. Now faith is that cardinal grace, created by the Spirit in the soul, that looks to, follows after, and lives on, God, as He reveals Himself

Faith in the bleeding Lamb

O what a gift is this

The nature of faith is this - it is knowledge, it is credence, it is living on God. It is a spirit that cannot be content without God, a spirit that would every day apprehend and lay hold of Him in a comfortable experience.

Look at faith. See how it acted in people whose experience is given to us in the scripture. See how it acted in Abraham. He had understanding in God. When told that he must offer up Isaac, his only son, the son whom he loved, his faith went out in an act of obedience, and what was the ground of it. He counted that God was able to raise him up again. He had received him as from the dead in a figure, and now his faith said - Though I have to offer him up, God can bring him again from the dead, and the son in whom all the promises are shall live.

Faith does not live on circumstances. It is affected by them, but they are not its life, they are not its ground, they are not its end, they are not its reason for acting. The only reason for faith is found in God. "I believe God" said Paul in a solemn trial. "I believe God". If you live on circumstances you will never be settled for a day. If you live on what you see, you will never form a right judgment of God, but if you have faith in exercise then your faith will go out to God. It lives above the earth, above circumstances, above men, above devils, above all contradictions. It is a wonderful grace. It has its origin in the work of the Spirit. Therefore, it is a heavenly grace, and heavenly

things alone can sustain it. Give me understanding in this. And when you have understanding in the grace of faith, you will see the difference between living, as often you do, on your circumstances, being guided by your own feelings, and being lifted up at times to live on a gracious God. I live sometimes by what I see, then I die. I live by what I fear, then I die. I live by the voice of unbelief, then I die. Unbelief tells me I shall never get through. Circumstances tell me I am entangled in the wilderness. You may understand this, many of you. Now when faith says in your heart - God is true - and the Spirit brings something to your memory that He has said to you, perhaps long since, you say in faith, that is true, that remains, then you live in God, live in His word. Then you realise something of the difference between living on what you see and living in Him, who is unseen, and you endure in exactly the same way as Moses endured. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible. This is the difference there is between living upon yourself, if I may so put it, and living on God. "Give me understanding that I may live"

Then again, take prayer. Give me understanding respecting prayer, that I may live. Take prayer as it is revealed to us in the scripture, the work of the Spirit. Praying in the Holy Ghost. Now this kind of praying will bring you very near to God at times. Trials of themselves drive us away from God. Prayer in the Holy Ghost will just bring you very near to Him. It is called opening the mouth wide. It is called calling upon God in the day of trouble. Pouring out the heart before Him. It is spoken of as praying in the Holy Ghost. Praying without ceasing. While trouble lasts, your prayer will last about it. When temptation oppresses you, then prayer will be squeezed out of you. Now this kind of praying, has this singular feature in it, and we need grace to understand it, that it is more or less a distinct and a powerful dealing with God. Whatever the matter is it is a dealing with God, with some distinctness,

and with some power in your soul, and this lifts up true praying above all our reasoning. You may pray against the death that you feel, and because you feel it; against hardness of heart which you feel; against distance that you realise as being between you and God, and unless you have some gracious instruction in this matter from the Holy Spirit, you may form a wrong judgment of your prayers. You may say you only chatter like a crane or a swallow. You may say sometimes you pray as against a wall. There is no hearing. Give me understanding. What? In this particular. True prayer goes out of the heart, that it is not to be judged, altogether, by how you feel with respect to it, but to be judged by this - what Name you use as a plea. What arguments you use before God; why He should hear you, and if you are enabled to follow the teaching of the Spirit in this, you may soon find that you really have prayed according to the will of God by the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle speaks in the Romans - He helpeth our infirmities. He helps against all discouragements, when every feeling of your heart would be a discouraging feeling. He helps you go against all that, with all the hardness that you feel in your soul to discourage you. He helps you still to pray. When the distance that you feel is likely to grow in your own judgment, He helps you to pray that you may be made nigh by the blood of Christ. We need understanding in this. Give me understanding and I shall live.

And again - Give me understanding in the ways of God, and I shall live in them. You say, who does not know the ways of God? Well, take this - His way is in the sea and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known. Take that poor sinner. Is that God's way with you at times? Then if you judge by what you see, by what your judgment tells you, you will do just what Jacob did. He said "My way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed over from my God" That was because the dealings of God with him were above his reason and above appearances, and if you judge of God just by your

reason, and by appearances, then you will most likely say your way is hid from the Lord. But then this is the thing to judge by. His way. What is His way. The way of judgment. And can you say in the way of His judgments you have waited for Him. Is His way a way of disappointment to you in some particular thing? That is a way of God in the sea. A path that is in the mighty waters in which you cannot find out His footsteps. What then "I will wait for the Lord, who hideth Himself from the House of Israel" I will wait for Him. He giveth no account of any of His matters. He wont come down to our false reasoning and our poor judgment of things, but He will have His people wait on Him.

Take Him in His word. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee" Now you say - I have been without Him for months. I have not felt His presence with me for months. I have not had that soft, warm feeling, that gracious repentance, that humbling of mind that I desire, for months, yet He says - "For a small moment". Now compare a small moment with everlasting kindness, and what have you. Give me understanding that I may live. Give me to understand these things in my soul. May I perceive the difference between flesh and spirit; between that which is of God and that which is of myself.

And then, lastly, give me understanding with respect to the end and I shall live in hope of it. Now to Israel in captivity God said by Jeremiah - Build houses here, beget sons and daughters; Pray for the peace of the city, for in the peace thereof you shall have peace. That looked as if they were to be settled there. Seventy years could not be the end, could not be the end. You say - I seem to be fixed in this. Wait for the end. Says God, by the same prophet, in the same place - I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. An end and an expectation though you are to build houses here, for you are to be here seventy years. Though you are to do this and that, still I know what I intend about you and that is to restore you to your own land.

Now you may be fixed in a circumstance, fixed in some painful trial, some bitter disappointment. Before you came into it perhaps the Lord said something to you, told you that He would bless you, never leave you, never forsake you, and now you say He has forsaken me. My way is hid from Him. He takes no notice of me. I cry and shout, but He shuts out my prayer. You need understanding. In what? In this - that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. And then you will say I will wait for the Lord who hideth Himself. And under all this there will be one particular thing, you will be pressing after Him. His Holy Spirit will help you to press after Him and seek the knowledge of His will, the sweetness of His love, the efficacy of the atonement, and the power of the Holy Spirit in you.

May the Lord help us to cry for understanding; not always to judge and only judge by what we see about us and by what we feel, but remember that He is above all and that He has an end, and that that end shall be accomplished by Him in His own time.

