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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 25 March 1934

PSALM 119 v 59

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet
unto Thy testimonies"

There are two great subjects, a sinner brought to self-reflection, then blessed with faith to turn from himself to God's Word. May we be enabled a little to look at these two subjects.

First, a sinner brought to self-reflection. Introspection is frequently very troublesome, bitter, shameful, distressing, depressing, for a sinner, as such, has nothing in himself but what, as viewed by faith in God's light, must condemn him. We are full of sin; that, according to the Scripture, is indisputable; we have hearts that are described thus in Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it". So, when the Holy Ghost grants that miraculous work, the new birth, gives the new eye, the new ear, the new heart, then begins this introspection; thinking on your ways, going back to your childhood, to your temper; going back to lying, to rebelling against God, growing up from time to time, looking on those days when pride and vanity ruled; when the Scriptures some of you heard read in your families by your fathers and you turned away from the holy, blessed Word of God; when the services of the chapel where you were brought up were tiresome and you could find nothing interesting in them; when, as you grew up, and were educated, then your pride swelled and you were like a green bay tree, spreading yourself. "I have seen", the Psalmist said, concerning the wicked: "I have seen him spreading himself like a green bay tree", proud, proud of his greenness. So, subjects for reflection, for self-condemnation, are not lacking. Though you may have been kept strictly moral in your external conduct, you are made to discover the most appalling immorality in your heart, and, as you think of these things, there is shame. The fear of God makes you say, O, how patient has God been with me to permit me to live such a life as I, in my heart, have lived. I thought on these things. In connection

with this is the great and awful subject, the God against whom you have sinned. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight". And, seeing Him, you have thought on some sins, sins in particular for which the Lord God allowed no repentance, no forgiveness, even among men. The thought of God's holiness made us think on our own impurity. Impurity is perhaps a very tame, mild word. Utter pollution, filth, that is a word God uses; utter pollution. When you think on these things, as in God's light, there is nothing that can afford you any comfort or be a ground on which you can stand before Him; only condemnation, self-reproach, and sighing. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips". The indulgence of self, of pride, of vanity; the indulgence of foolish prospects, that people ordinarily speak about as building castles in the air; the sin of independence - you will go there and dwell a year and continue for a year buying, selling, getting gain, with no thought of God. It would be impossible for any tongue, any human tongue to exaggerate the wickedness of man's heart. And when the Holy Ghost gives the seeing eye, then there is this which men call, and deprecate, introspection. I look back to my earliest days when I can remember trying often as a child to count eternity, and failing, would say, O I wish there were no God. Perhaps some of you understand it; you wish there was no God to judge you, no hell in which to punish you. Now thus to look back is very good, wholesome; very painful, very shameful, full of self-reproach, full of all manner of pain and sorrow which has death in it. And sometimes, in looking you are too ashamed even to gaze on what you have done; the enormity of sin, as you see and feel it. You can only say, well how can I bear it? In these, my last days, I get such sights of my sins - not open before men, but in my heart - that it is even difficult for me to plead the blood of Christ; the only refuge, the only possible hope. "I thought on my ways". Ah, a proud man is not proud when he is thinking, by God's grace, on his ways. He may be very proud by his natural disposition, but when rightly thinking on his ways he cannot get low enough into the dust. He can understand Asaph's feeling: "I was as a beast before Thee". He can understand Haggai feeling: "I have not the knowledge of the Holy". A poor, ignorant creature; not naturally ignorant perhaps, well educated, walking very morally, and yet, O, the wickedness of his heart. Did some of you ever wish there were no

God? Did ever some of you look at the cattle in a field and wish, like them, you had no soul? Did some of you ever feel, rising up in your heart, a hatred to God? Enmity, bitter enmity. Reading in the Scriptures the blessed religion that God gives to His people which kills the flesh, mortifies pride, did you ever wish there was no such religion? Who can express adequately the extreme wickedness that is in the heart of man? "I thought on my ways". Sometimes in your room you will sit down and begin to think about God. Then, O the sight, in His light, that you have had of yourself. A thought about eternity; then a solemn feeling that you are not fit for it. A thought of dying; then the solemn realisation that if you die as you now are, hell will be your place. "I thought on my ways". Bad ways, ways of unbelief, of infidel thought, ways of enmity, ways of internal wickedness, that no creature suspects that you ever could have. Well, my brethren, I think I could preach a long time about this because I am an old man and have a painful experience of this kind of reflection. O, some nights, you may say of yourself, some nights I can hardly sleep because of my reflections on my ways. "I thought on my ways", my conduct, my conversation, that is, how I have behaved myself, for the word "conversation" in the Scripture, sometimes means behaviour; not speech, but conduct, and you thought on those ways. Well, dear friends, what a business this is, and yet a good sense of it - Bunyan I think speaks about a good sense of sin - that is a wholesome thing. A good sense of sin that arises from the fear of God, that honours God, that says He is right, I am wrong; He is holy, I am polluted; He is righteous, I am unjust. "I thought on my ways". Sometimes this thinking on your ways takes place on your knees. Your life comes before you, a wicked heart, innumerable departures from the living God; rebellion against some circumstances; enmity against some people perhaps who have not done you justice, bitter hatred of them. Then reflection makes you say, I have committed murder. Sometimes this reflection comes by reading the Scripture that tells you of your sins, points out your pride in that which you have in Jeremiah. My people have committed two horrible things. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have hewn out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Have I got the case before me now? Is the man here who says in his heart, I thought, I am thinking now on my ways. I am now thinking of my objections and prejudice against God's religion, against God's Christ. I am

thinking now; O what a wretch I am; how patient is the God of heaven with me to permit me to live. Ah, and your reflection may bring you to this, the longer I live the more I am treasuring up wrath for myself against the day of wrath. Well, dear friends, I will leave that part. God cause you to stick to it if it is in you. Do not try to quench it; No, go before Him with it. Confess it to Him as much as you can, but do not try to quench it, for if you quench it, the next part of the text you will not understand.

"I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies" "Turned my feet" means that in his heart he turned to God, as God is revealed in Holy Scripture. Testimonies are in this Psalm generally taken with judgments and other words, commandments, and so on, to mean the Word of God. To turn your feet to them is to have faith; it is to have the fear of God; it is to want Him, to seek Him, to earnestly desire Him; to turn away from yourself. O, the sickening, sinking, distressing view you may have of yourself. Then you will say, under the Spirit's guidance, I turn to God; I am weary of myself; I am tired of sinning, yet I am always doing it. Now I would turn unto God. I will name to you, in brief, three testimonies.

First, the testimony that we have in the first Epistle of John, "God is love". "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins". That is a testimony, a great Word of God; the everlasting love of God manifested in the gift of His Son, His only begotten Son. The Lord thought kindly of sinners when, looking on them as such, He sent His only begotten Son to redeem them; when, seeing them in their blood, cast out at their birth to the loathing and dying of them, He passed by them, spread the skirt of His love over them, and said, live. When, seeing them breaking the covenant He made with their fathers, He said, I will make a new covenant with you; I will put My law into your minds and write it in your hearts; you shall be Mine; I will be yours; and you shall not need that any man should teach you, for I will teach you and I will be your God; you shall be My children; I will forgive your sins and remember your iniquities no more. O what a change when a sinner is enabled, by the Holy Ghost, to turn to that

testimony; see it fulfilled in the sending of the only begotten Son into the world. If ever, O poor sinner reflecting on yourself, a testimony comes into your mind that God is love, you will turn to it; you will turn to it. I will tell you this, you have got in your soul what the needle may describe, a restlessness that never lets you rest until some approach to the Almighty is made. Violent winds may deflect the needle and cause it to be out of its proper point for a time, but it never rests until it reaches its proper point. And if you are searching yourself, trying your ways, weighing yourself in the balances of divine truth, I say there is in you a principle that wont let you rest, that cannot in itself rest, until it reaches God; until it reaches God and has a testimony of His everlasting and free love. Free! No one can describe the freeness of it adequately. We speak of being as free as the air we breathe; O, but the air is governed by the law, the law of creation, but there is no law that comes here; nothing, but God's Own blessed nature, which is love. God is love and He has expressed it in that Scripture which I have quoted. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "I turned my feet". Did you ever pray that God would tell you that He has loved you with an everlasting love? Did you ever feel your heart go out to Him? O that I might have that sweet sensation I have heard Thy people speak of, of being loved of God; that melting, that swelling, that subduing, that contrition, that humility, that the love of God infallibly begets wherever it is. You say to me perhaps, mentally, if your description is right, I am without hope because I do not know these sensations. Ah, but you are not dead. Why, God may give it you before you go to bed tonight; who knows, there is no bounding of His power and goodness. It comes freely, sweetly, often quite unexpectedly. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib"; instantly. And though, at this moment, you may feel so lumpish, so heavy, so dull, were God to let a sense of this, His testimony, into your heart, you would say in a moment I was on the wing; in a moment I was after heaven and wanted Himself, and my arms of faith seemed to open and I was ready to embrace that blessed testimony of the love of God. That is the first testimony. Did you ever feel that you could turn to it? Did you ever say, O if I were but one of those whom God loves it would give me all

that I could wish. Well, go before Him as well as you can and ask Him to reveal to you that He has loved you with an everlasting love.

The second testimony to name is the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, His magnifying of the law and making it honourable, and His vicarious death. The death of Christ, the life of the Church; the death of Christ, the death of sin; the death of Christ, the greatest possible expression of the glory of divine justice, divine holiness, divine mercy. Yes, though a man's sins might be, in his view and feeling, deeper than hell, higher than heaven, broader than the earth, yet if he, by faith, turned to the Lord Jesus on the cross, he would see there more to save him in that blessed death than he could possibly see in his sins to damn him. I know what I am saying because I know what it is to be an uncommon sinner - not openly, but in my heart - and I know - blessed be God I can say it - I know what a faith's view given to such a sinner will do. It will say in his heart, you cannot sin enough to make the death of Christ of no effect to you. It is above all sin, beyond all guilt; infinite. You say, so are my sins. I am glad it is so; I am never sorry to hear anyone say that his sins are infinite though, as a matter of truth, they cannot be infinite as actions, because a finite creature cannot do what is infinite. In respect of their guilt, in respect of the God they aimed at, and were done against, they may be said to have an infiniteness; but naturally, gloriously, the death of Jesus is infinite in its value. Ask the Lord to show you His glory in this. Turn to Him, poor guilty creature, poor sinning creature, poor creature disposed every day and every minute to do this and that that is sinful, turn to that great death, that glorious death. We speak of the ignominy of the cross; there was an ignominy attached to it; there cannot be other than ignominy where sin is. No, Jesus bore all that, but covering it all His precious, free, His voluntary death. None can ever know fully the glory of that Scripture - "It is finished" I should like to live by it every day of my life. "It is finished". Nothing remains to be done by a sinner. "I turned my feet unto Thy testimonies". O, it is wonderful to have this. Reflecting on his double sin the Psalmist said: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering". If God had desired, that is, if He had ordained them, David would gladly have given them, but David knew that his sin, his adultery and murder, had,

in the law, the ceremonial law, no ordained sacrifice. He knew that literally he was liable to be stoned; the law commanded it. Now he said, Thou desirest not that. How then could he pray, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin". The blood of Christ, by precious faith, he saw. He saw the burnt offering; the precious burnt offering on the day of atonement taught that vicarious death of Christ. Now he says, Lord, wash me from my sin; cleanse me from mine iniquity. He turned his feet to the testimony of the atonement. Is it so sinner? Are you hopeless? Do you see no sacrifice ordained for your sins in the law? Well now, may faith be called into a blessed exercise so that you will say, Lord, I have no offering to bring, I have no sacrifice to offer, but what Jesus did I plead before Thee. "I turned my feet unto Thy testimonies".

The third testimony is concerning the Person and work of the Holy Ghost. He is given, sent by the Lord Jesus, to His Disciples. "I will send you another Comforter". I go away and my going is to your advantage, for if I go away I will send you another Comforter, and the Father also will send Him. This meets the helplessness, the unbelief, the inability of a poor, convinced sinner to turn himself. I would but cannot believe, is the living, but sad, complaint of the people of God at times. Now there is sent to them the Holy Spirit. He comes sometimes suddenly; sometimes a sudden light shines into the heart; a suggestion comes. A mere, as it would be to you if you expressed it, a mere suggestion comes, but it has an effect on you like this; try to pray, call on God in your trouble, and there is an obedience in your heart instantly; you begin to pray. To your own surprise you begin to pray; that is turning to God. That is turning to God, going with your trouble, with your sins and with all that is afflicting you. This Holy Spirit is sent for this very purpose. That frequently quoted passage will never lose its glory by being quoted: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." He is a Friend who comes alongside of an afflicted person, of one engaged in self-inspection, and self-condemnation, and he turns the eyes of that person to another Object, even to the Lord Jesus who said, and still says, "I am the Way". And the Spirit enables this poor, tried person, to believe that. O, he sees, perhaps with great surprise, Christ, the way to God; Christ's death, the way to pray; Christ's death, the way for my sins to be

covered, my transgressions to be forgiven, and that moves him, beyond what he could express, to pray. We shall never be able to thank God, the Holy Ghost, properly for His condescending love in coming to our sustenance. He comes alongside of a sinner. Rutherford says, Christ takes the heaviest end of the cross, and I will say the Holy Ghost comes, and in His kind arms, He not only takes a part of the sinner, but the whole of Him, as it were, and wafts him to the throne of grace by a gracious influence. Thus prayer is not a human, natural effort, but the sweet movement of the Spirit, enabling the sinner to confess his sins and seek earnestly to have the blood of sprinkling on his conscience.

These three testimonies, as far as I at the present moment think, include the whole of God's blessed salvation in a sinner. He needs nothing else. The love of God, the death of Christ, the operations of the Holy Ghost, and if we are troubled by our sins, if introspection pains us, grieves us, sinks us into shame and helplessness and hopelessness in self, it is not bad, but it will certainly issue in this; the Spirit of Christ will bring the testimonies of the gospel into the soul and there will be a living hope, the clean fear of God and a waiting on God at His heavenly throne.

Now my brethren I leave it here. May the Holy Ghost make some use of these observations if it can please Him to stoop so low, and bless your souls.

AMEN.