

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham

at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
on Sunday morning 10 July 1932

Text: Psalm 51 v 10

"Create in me a clean heart O God  
and renew a right spirit within me"

Every gracious person here knows what it is to have an unclean heart and therefore every gracious person knows what sorrow is. Nothing so sorrowful as a sense of uncleanness in your nature and nothing at times seems to be so great a barrier between God and the soul as that sense of uncleanness. Nothing is more difficult for prayer than that bar of uncleanness, accompanied as it is generally with unbelief, strengthened by unbelief. Unbelief always sets out God in wrong colours; depicts Him as one to whom approach is impossible where there is uncleanness and so there is a hindrance, but God takes that away from time to time. The Psalmist penned this solemn and sorrowful Psalm after his conviction of his two dreadful sins, adultery and murder; murder to cover his adultery. And he lived in those sins, lived under them for a time, without apparently any conviction of what he had done. God sent Nathan to him to pierce him with conviction and the conviction was effectual. He said "I have sinned". Unless you know in your own cases what conviction is you cannot imagine the depth of that expression "I have sinned". The Holy God against whom he had sinned was now before him. I have sinned. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned" Sin is the transgression of the law, therefore sin is done, first of all, against God, hence the meaning, the point of this word "Against Thee, Thee only" in Thy law, in Thy forbidding of these sins. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight". Now convinced of this he seeks cleansing, which is what every one under the same favour seeks. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin". You can never be happy really when guilt is on your conscience. Happiness comes from the washing. Therefore, as we sometimes

sing

Seek my soul no other healing  
But in Jesus' balmy blood

O sinner there is no healing for you and no true happiness but by the application of the atonement of Jesus Christ. "I acknowledge my transgressions". Can you say that; are they before you, your own transgressions. "My sin is ever before me". What a sight for a man walking about doing his business, lying on his bed, with that before him. Do you know what that means - "My sin is ever before me". Not my religion; not my goodness; not my steadiness; not my cleanness; my sin. It is a solemn thing to be looking on your sin, to have your transgressions set before you. It was this that gave point and edge to his conviction. "Wash me". My friends, we shall never be happy, truly happy, that is happy in God, unless we are forgiven. We shall never go to heaven if our sins are not washed away.

"Hide Thy face from my sins". When God looks at your sins you see them in His light. You see them and you feel you can say with the Psalmist in an earlier Psalm "My sins are more than the hairs of my head. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee". No reckoning of sin; sins innumerable, transgressions without number. And when they are understood, when they are at all felt, then this cry goes out of the heart to heaven "Hide Thy face from my sins". Do you know what it is to feel your sins are between you and God? Creatureship will always belong to us, and we shall never reach Deity, no not in heaven, but creatureship, without sin, is no bar to prayer, no bar to communion, but sin is a bar. And if the Lord keeps our sins before Him what a reckoning there will come to us one day. May this prayer be in our hearts and be answered - "Hide Thy face from my sins". The face of God means His presence, and the presence of God means Jesus Christ. The gospel is there; God shines in the gospel and makes known His goodness in the face or in the Person of Jesus Christ.

And blot out all mine iniquities. You know what iniquities

are said to be in the Scripture - pollution and a cloud. And transgressions are also called "a thick cloud". You cannot see God, gracious, merciful, loving, tender, kind, good, while the thick cloud of transgressions is between you. But when He blots out all your iniquities, blots out your thick cloud of transgressions, then His well pleased face in Jesus Christ is seen. O the loveliness of Christ enamours the soul. Seen by faith, there is none like Him. If you say you do not see Him, then I say what keeps the sight from you? Thick clouds - transgressions. But go on praying. If you are at this business, go on with it

Urge thy suit through all unfitness  
Sue it out, spurning doubt

The blessed Scripture gives every encouragement to this. Press the case, plead the atonement, urge on God's notice the righteousness of Christ, the mediation of Christ, and the day will come when, looking on your persistent faith, He will say "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt".

"Create in me a clean heart O God". Sin is like a death, a destruction in the soul, mars the image, brings confusion upon the spirit. Everything is out of order when sin prevails. The renewing in the Spirit as it is spoken of by Paul in one of his Epistles is the same as this "create". God must needs, if I might so put it, do the work over and over and over again. Once He imparts eternal life that never goes, cannot die, but the experience, the sweet order of the Spirit, the tenderness of the conscience, the purity of the mind, and the gracious desires of the soul, are all as it were just put out of order. And so, realising that, feeling it in his own case, the Psalmist said "Create in me"; Lord renew my spirit. A clean heart; we shall never be clean naturally but we shall be clean spiritually when the spirit of our mind is renewed, and the blood of Christ is again applied. A clean heart as I believe and judge is a heart that is put straight with God, straight with His perfections. When He appears beautiful and glorious; when His holiness is one of His chief beauties; when you are drawn to Him, would

have nothing altered that He is, that He has said, that He has judged. In all things He is right. That is clean, my friends. Underneath there will be corruption, but that is clean, when He is your delight, when you see Him to be gracious, when you enter into that word maybe - "How great is His beauty"; when you can say with the Church of old to Christ "Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into Thy lips." It is a clean heart that is made clean by the blood of Christ, when sin is purged from the conscience by the blood of Christ and when God smiles upon our spirit; when He does not find fault with you; when, though you put your sins before Him in humble confession, still He does not find fault with you; then the sinner is clean. And when this is so there is no bar between you and the Lord Jesus. You draw near to Him and as James says He draws near to you; when some parts of the Song of Songs become your own experience; when He tells you which way to go; when He shows you that the path is traced with blood and you see the way to God. It is a clean heart then. Not perfection in the flesh, but perfection by grace, perfection in Christ. "Ye are complete in Him", and there is some degree of experience of it, little indeed, the most is little compared with what is to be enjoyed in eternity, but a little is of infinite worth, as everyone knows who has it.

Create this in me. Is that what you want? Are two things present with you, first, your sins, your iniquities? Can you say "My sin is ever before me". You have nothing to boast of if that be the case. Secondly can you say this is what I desire - "Create in me a clean heart O God". Like a new creation, putting His hand to the work a second time, to purely purge away your dross and take away all your tin. Seeing you again, according to His promise in the gospel - "I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you". If these two things be present with us this morning, I would venture to say we are not in a bad place, though we may be far from happiness in our experience. He is not in a bad place who is under conviction of sin. His sins are bad but his conviction of them is good. He is not in a bad case who wants God to cleanse

him, who cannot leave off crying "wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin".

"And renew a right spirit within me". David knew what a wrong spirit was; he knew the lust of his eye and fell by that, that wicked spirit. He broke God's law; he sinned against God, and to hide that sin he committed murder. He had a wrong spirit. Sin is wrong, whatever form it takes in our minds, however it may give expression, whatever it may say; sin is wrong. The spirit of it is wrong. A wrong spirit is a devilish spirit, an unbelieving spirit, a proud spirit, a haughty spirit, a hypocritical spirit. Some know what it is to be wrong; I do; you do, who fear God. You know what it is to be wrong. You cannot lift your head up and say that I am better than so and so. You may have, as you judge, an enemy, and you may just be doing in your heart what David did actually when he composed and commanded indeed the murder of Uriah. You may hate a brother, and that is murder. I should say that every child of God here knows that he has committed murder. He has hated somebody, and that spirit would remove the object of hatred out of the sight. It is very solemn. I know God has taught me that. I know when He did and how He did it. A wrong spirit. A worldly spirit; a covetous spirit; anxious to be what God has not made you, or to possess what He has not given you; a spirit of the world of which Paul speaks to the Romans - "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world, but be renewed in the spirit of your mind". Bring your offering, an acceptable offering, what is called in another place in Holy Scripture - the offering up of the Gentiles. The offering up of the Gentiles is acceptable to God. Well, this wrong spirit, how is it to be removed? We are just helpless, but helplessness is no excuse for sin. Mind that. You will never, before God, make that a plea for sin, that you could not help it. Cain made an excuse for his murder of Abel, but no excuse stood before God. Whatever you do that is wrong you are responsible for and responsible, not to man, but to God. Renew a right spirit within me. First of all in this renewing is the renewing of

faith. Faith is, as it has been called, a cardinal grace, and when God renews that then He is before the soul and O, as faith gets a sight of the lovely Person of Jesus, then a right spirit and right motions, right feelings, right desires, right hopes, and right prayers move the soul. Ah it is a good spirit if there is faith; it gives you good hope, good feelings, feelings toward God, repentance for all your sins, faith toward the Lord Jesus, pleading His precious blood. Faith is a good grace, a right spirit. While faith is in exercise in any sinner, that sinner walks uprightly, walks before God. He answers to the Scripture, God's word to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect or upright." Faith, that great grace, that strong grace, that pleading grace, that grace that was in the Syrophencian woman to such a degree that she argued with the Lord and would take no denial; nothing would put her off - nothing will. The man here who has it, even if it be in a small measure, has a right spirit. See if you have this, a right spirit.

And the next thing in a right spirit connected with faith is humble fervent pleading. Faith gets hold of God. Said the Lord, by Isaiah, to one "Let him take hold of My strength and make peace with Me and he shall make peace with Me." The Lord will never put off a believing soul and the nearer the approach of that soul to God the more God encourages it. Let him come; let him come; let him come. Let him take hold of My strength; let him plead My blood; let him name My Name; let him put all his petitions before My Father in My Name. Prayer, in the form of it, is not difficult, but the prayer of faith is not easy, yet it is never overcome. It overcomes Jehovah in the way in which He has ordered it to do so. Command ye Me, said God by Isaiah, to praying people; command ye Me. O the condescension of God to praying people. "Ask what you will. Come with your death and your unbelief and your hardness and your bitterness, and your pride, and your vanity, and your covetousness; come with them all, and command ye Me. The blood of the everlasting covenant gives the sinner a hold of God. I will not let Thee go, said Jacob, because he had faith and faith gave him fervency and his

case gives urgency. Therefore he said "I will not let Thee go". That was a right spirit. God approved of it. You know when you have got a right spirit sooner or later for God will approve of it and give you the answer for which you go to Him.

Another thing about which I have spoken to you a good deal lately is true humility. If you are proud you are like the axe that lifteth up itself against him that useth it. Pride is one of the greatest abominations that God looks on in fallen man. Pride puts us upside down; pride is self-justifying; pride quarrels with God and with men if men stand in our way. What is there wicked that it wont do? O the beauty, the loveliness, I have seen in that garment of which Peter speaks "Be clothed with humility" and that is a right spirit. You will gladly take the lowest place; you will gladly rejoice in any honour that God puts on a friend; you rejoice in God's goodness to sinners. "Create in me". We need it every day. Pride seems to have no end to its existence and working, a subtle spirit; do what we will it haunts us still and keeps us from the Lord. Against it preach, it prompts the speech, be silent, still 'tis there. It is a horrible sin and there is no reason for it, for there is nothing in us to be proud of. O, our best is stained and died with sin, our all is nothing worth.

Lately, I was going to say hundreds of times lately, it has been one of my petitions before God - give me humility. There is no reason to be proud. No, everybody, whatever we have that is good is from God, even in providence, especially if we have grace. If He has humbled Himself to behold us and to bless us and speak comfortably and friendly to us, all the more need for humility and gratitude. Create in me a right spirit.

Create in me submission to Thy holy will. God's will is good, acceptable, perfect, but the wicked will of man, fallen and in bondage, quarrels with this when in providence God does not please us. We want something, and the Lord says it would not be good for you to have it, therefore I wont give it to you. Then we quarrel. Something in providence may stand in our way and we

quarrel with it. O the blessedness of submission to the holy will of God. "After this manner pray ye" said the Lord Jesus "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We may pray that very thoughtlessly, but if we pray it in faith then we pray a heavy prayer because the will of God may just mean to us some crushing affliction, some mortifying affliction, something that crosses our pride or our schemes, and our ambitions. Poor sinful creatures we are, no reason in us for pride, every reason for humility. Be clothed with it, God resisteth the proud. You will find that true. If you walk in pride in any particular thing God will come across you and O woe be to that person against whom God comes in some dispensation of His providence.

Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me; that is, renew love in me. Love, Christian love, has two objects, first the Holy, pure, eternal God. Ah, it is a great thing to love God. You must know Him to love Him. If you know Him you must love Him. But to see Jehovah - one God in three persons, three persons, one God, and this God revealed in Jesus Christ, in the perfections of His nature, in the beauties of His character, in the glories of His majesty, in the loveliness of His Son, in the grace and work of the Spirit, so to see this God will put a right spirit in you. O the emptiness of this world, the shadows that we run after. We see them to be shadows and our running after them to be vanity; then we love Him. We love the cross, the ignominious cross.

Then the second object is the Church of God. If you love the Lord, you love all whom He loves as you know them. You love David, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Apostles and Prophets of the Lord. I am sure some of you have felt love to the characters in the Scriptures, these godly men, and you have said let me be like them in some measure. You may have known some precious saints and many a time in secret have said - Lord wilt Thou give me as much grace as Thou hast given to them. I often have prayed that. Many many times I have left some gracious friends or they have left my house and I have said Lord give me as much grace as they

have. You love the Lord, you love His image, you love His grace, you love His truth, as you see these things in His people. He that loveth Him that begat loveth also him that is begotten of Him. And you love the servants of the Most High God and thank Him for giving His servants. A right spirit is a spiritual mind. To be spiritually minded is to have a right spirit. To be spiritually minded is to mind the things of the Spirit, to love the things of the Spirit, to walk after the Spirit, to be truly feeling after God and going on as the Scriptures put it, to perfection, to maturity, till you have come to the perfect stature of a man in Christ. Renew this; some of us have lost it. And if anyone should say how came you to lose that spirit, we should say sin did it; sin we indulged; worldliness that we loved and indulged; pride that we indulged; anger that we indulged; and we know that Scripture to be true, I do, "Anger resteth in the bosom of a fool" and you have said, some of us have often had to say, Lord I am that fool. A right spirit is a different spirit, a spirit of love, of tenderness, not love to anything or anybody, but love to the truth and love to the saints of the Most High God. Create this in me, renew this in me. O it would be good for some of us who are old and greyheaded to be renewed and carried back to the days of our youth, when the candle of God shined upon us and we walked before Him and He poured out His mercies into our souls.

There is a prayer in the Psalms further on where the Church is in a desolate condition, hedges broken down, vine trampled under foot of boar and beast, and God forsaking the poor vineyard but she has faith, and her faith goes out to Christ, and looking on Him she prays thus to God - "Let Thy hand be upon the Man of Thy right hand, on the Son of Man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." What then? "So will not we go back from Thee. Quicken us and we will call upon Thy Name" "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." He had had the presence of God, had enjoyed the presence of God, had had miracles wrought for him of deliverance by his God. He had been brought to great prosperity, to great name by his God, and then

he forgot it and on one terrible night when he was lazy he rose from his bed and he fell, he lost that favour. The favour did not leave him but he lost the enjoyment of it. He lost the sense of God's sweet presence. Then he became conscious of that loss, hence the prayer "Cast me not away from Thy presence". He deserved it and he knew he deserved it. You deserve it do you not? I do. We know it, we confess it, we humbly confess it. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". What would become of us if He did? We should be infidels; we should die; perhaps die like Francis Spira or some dreadful characters of whom we have read. We should die like one of the reprobates. But will He be silent? O how dreadful the thought of God's silence to the soul, is. "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". Ah has not it made you tremble, has not it brought tears from your spirit if you have had dry eyes. Has not it made you shake to the very centre of your being to fear God would leave you, the Spirit would leave you, leave you without faith, without prayer, without hope, without love, without light or life; what a dreadful thing. O poor praying people God give you prayer give me prayer with you that we may never let Him alone. Renew a right spirit within me. Make me a Christian. Do you feel like one? How often I feel unlike one. I do not use the word Christian as it is ordinarily used, but in a spiritual sense. The Lord give us grace then to pray the prayer of the text and never let Him alone. "Create in me a clean heart". Make me a gracious person, a true Christian, a living child of God that I may live in the Lord and die in the Lord. O the beauty of that word, the attraction of that word, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

AMEN.