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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 29 April 1923

ROMANS 12 v 1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

If we believe that this Scripture, like all other Scriptures, is given by inspiration of God, we shall certainly also believe in the authority of this Scripture, of this verse. If we believe in the authority of this Scripture, that is to say, if we believe it came from God, we shall believe also that it is incumbent on us, who profess the fear of God, narrowly, punctually, prayerfully to regard it. No exhortation is superfluous; God speaks nothing in vain. Exhortations to children are not incongruous even though it should be objected that children are unable to obey exhortations. Being children, they are under the rule of their father, and it becomes him to give rules, to lay down laws for his children to observe and obey. This wonderful Epistle contains, first of all, doctrine; secondly practice; thirdly precept. It is a wonderful Epistle and if you were able to sit down at any time and read it through at a sitting, carefully, prayerfully, you might find a good deal of instruction and look with wonder upon God's goodness in inspiring such a word as this. It is good to read Epistles through and not detach a portion here and there, now and again. This exhortation has a ground, a foundation. The mercies of God are given as a reason for the exhortation to people, the people of God, to give themselves unto God, a living sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God". Mercies not dangled before them to admire simply, but mercies which had been experienced by them. And one might sum up the mercies to be noticed under three heads. First, the mercy of God in calling these Roman Christians to be saints. So all the people of God have that mercy. Second the mercy of justification in and by the death and resurrection of Christ. "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore, being justified by

faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". And third, marriage union. "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" You know the passage in the 7 chapter of this Epistle, how, says Paul, that an husband, as long as he lives, is a law to his wife and she is bound to him and would be an adulteress should she be married to another man. But if her husband be dead she is free from his law and is no adulteress though she be married to another man. Now, says Paul - You are dead; you godly Romans are dead to the law and the law dead to you, that you, thus freed, might be married to another, even to Jesus Christ. These three things appear, as to substance, to comprise the mercies of the Lord which this Epistle speaks of. Let us look at them so, to see, as God may help us, what a good, godly, enduring foundation we have for this exhortation.

First of all, the mercy of being called to be a saint. "Called to be saints". They were not saints; they were unbelievers, ungodly people, walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." But there came to them a day of power, as in the Psalms we read - "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth." (Psalm 110). And thus they were called, being born again, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God". What a call. Not a helpless exhortation, not a wooing that shall prove entirely vain, but a divine work, a gracious, an invincible call reaching the heart, an implantation in the soul of divine life; life that, coming from God, instantly begins to work to God, seeking to rise to its source. Life that, being divine, will work gracious feelings in the subject of it. Men born again feel according to that new birth, want that which is suitable to its nature; cannot find satisfaction now in the things which once were all-satisfying to them. This is a mercy. It is expressed by Paul to the Ephesians - "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." That is the religion that will outlive sin in all who are partakers of it; that blessed birth, that regeneration of the Spirit; being born again of the Spirit. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This divides at once between fleshly religion and

God's religion, and so, between the Church and the world, and no matter what efforts may be made by a man to bring the world and the Church together they will always be a failure. God's people are separated by the new birth. They are called holy brethren, saints. They are separated, truly separated. As you know the word "holy" means set apart, set apart from a common to a particular use. This is God's work; this is a mercy, an unsought mercy, and yet when it has come it begets such desires as that mercy is the one object, the one thing that is sought

Mercy, good Lord, mercy I crave  
This is the total sum

O the greatness of this work of God. In the Hebrews the saints are spoken to thus - "Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling". That calling, coming from God, produces the sweet effects of holiness in the feeling and in the life of all its subjects. That is the first mercy to be noticed. "Called to be saints" as the word is in the 1 Chapter of this so wonderful Epistle.

The second mercy is justification. Yes, justification, pronouncing a sinner just; therefore not liable to the sentence of a condemning law. This justification is by the death of Christ, that vicarious death that removed from the Church once and for ever, her sins. That justification which, spoken to the heart, brought by the Holy Ghost, brings purity of conscience. There is such a blessing as a pure conscience. It is mentioned in the Scripture. A deacon must be one who holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And every child of God, convinced of his sins, feeling his conscience burdened with a load of dead works, finds himself unable to rest until this wondrous mercy comes; the forgiveness of all his sins; the casting behind God's back of all his sins; spoken of in the Psalms thus - "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity" (Psalm 32) Justification brings the subject of it before God without sin. Plagued though he is by sin as long as he lives, yet as he stands in Christ he has no sin. This is his standing, this is his state, this is his fitness for life, his fitness for death, his title for heaven. Justified freely he is from all things from which he could

not be justified by the law of Moses. Who is he that shall condemn you, asks the Apostle; who shall condemn the Lord's people. It is Christ that died, God that justifies; Christ that died, yea rather that is risen and is at the right hand of God. Being justified we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Being justified we walk after the Spirit; we mind the things of the Spirit. This is true spirituality of mind. People do not work themselves into justification but, being justified, they walk after Him who brings justification to them. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." See whether you know this. He who is ignorant of it, who dies without it, is ignorant of God, dies in sin, and sinks into perdition. No justification, no heaven; no justification, no peace with God, no goodness in your heart, no purity in your conscience, no acceptableness to God of anything you do. Happy the man who is justified freely. Now it is clear that justification is an act of God. A judge is the only one who can justify or condemn. Justification is God's act and it is passed on a person who is a sinner, and when that justification takes place, when it is passed upon a sinner, that sinner takes another denomination; he is a child of God; he rises up before God in the form of a justified person. Though he knows himself to be a sinner and feels sin, yet in God's sight, and by God's own sentence, he stands without sin. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth him from all sin. This is the second mercy by which the people of God are besought to bring themselves and offer themselves a living sacrifice to God. Look for this, you who feel sin, who are troubled by your sins, burdened with your sinfulness; look for this; wait on God for this. The day will come when your righteousness will shine as brightness and your salvation as a lamp that burneth in your heart and conscience; when God will say: "Thy sins are forgiven"; when He will have it preached in your heart - "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins." That day is coming - to some here it has come. It can never be undone though it may be much beclouded, very little evidence of it perceived; but as an act of God it can never be undone.

The third mercy is the marriage union; the union of a person with Jesus Christ in his own soul and experience. "Ye are dead to the law" A great word that, since everyone by nature, who in any way feels about religion, will seek to go about to establish his own righteousness. A great word too, that, to one who, being born again, and yet is under the law, is plagued every day and troubled because sin has prevalence here and there, and the law comes against him with some dreadful sentence. "Dead to the law". Why dead to the law and how dead to the law? Because it has come as a killing sentence, as Paul in the Corinthians teaches, that the ministration of death has come. As in this Epistle he says - "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Dead to the law also in another way, a wonderful way, namely by the body of Christ. Dead to the law by the body of Christ means interested in the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, by which death the law was magnified and made honourable and can have no claim against the people for whom Jesus Christ fulfilled it. A double death to the law. And a death in the soul's experience to the law when he falls down, says I can do nothing; I am justly condemned. God is honoured in my condemnation. My afflicted conscience ratifies the awful sentence. I am at His disposal who is the Judge of all the earth and cannot do but what is right. I am lost; I know it; I feel no hope in myself; I have no hope in the law. Now I am cut off. I pine away in my sins; I die. That sinner is much nearer heaven than he knows. He is much nearer to God than he can think. "That ye may be married to another," says the Spirit by Paul in this Epistle. That you may be honourably united to God, that no stigma of doing evil shall attach to you when you are united to Jesus Christ; that no former husband shall come and claim you as his. O honourable marriage, O beautiful union, productive of all glory to God, and the good and the peace and the holiness and the happiness of the sinner. Union with Christ. In experience it means that faith receives Christ. To use Christ's Own word, the sinner eats the flesh of the Son of Man and drinks His blood, and has life in him. It is a fearful exception Christ speaks there - "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood there is no life in you". Now when one - broken-hearted, exercised under the law, dead by the law's operations in his conscience, comes to that condition of utter ruin, and helplessness, and weakness - receives a manifestation by the Holy Ghost of Jesus Christ, his faith that has hitherto been exercised on

God in the law, now is exercised on Christ, and receives Christ crucified and therefore is delivered from the sentence and the power and the dominion and the curse and the death of the law, and enters into peace by Jesus Christ and enters into union with Jesus Christ. What a mercy that, that which a sinner desired not, which he could not do for himself, the dissolving of the union between him and the law, which was not in his power - and had he had power he would have had no right to do it - that that very union is dissolved and he is brought as a widowed one, a wife rejected, cast off, killed, to be married to this blessed One, Jesus Christ. How can he bless God enough for this. Perhaps some of you may be saying that that is the blessing you have sought for long and have not, as yet, attained to it. O but it will come. If Christ's word is true you will yet experience it. His word is this - "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you". One great mercy is - at this point I may say it - that the gospel does not tell people they must do this, because it is beyond them, infinitely beyond them. It promises that God shall do it for them; that they shall be delivered from the law and united to the Lord Jesus. Of all the words that the Lord uses with respect to union and the blessedness of it, this of the marriage union is the closest in the Scriptures, the sweetest; united with Christ in that blessed and indissoluble union that the Lord Himself has set forth and may we have an experience of it. The Apostle in this Epistle in the 6 Chapter exhorts the people of God to reckon themselves indeed to be dead unto sin and the ground of it is that Christ died unto sin once but now liveth unto God. They are to reckon themselves, count themselves, no more to be the servants of sin because God Himself, Jesus Christ that is, died unto sin once. Now He liveth unto God and they live unto God as they are united to Christ their Head. They are as Christ is - "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4 v 17) Holy as the Head; just as the Justifier; pure as He Himself, and fit for that state to which they are predestinated. These are the mercies of God which I have just named to you. Others there are which you may look at for yourselves. By these mercies, on the ground of them, is the exhortation - "I beseech you". He is not indifferent to their walk; he is not indifferent to their character as before God; how they act to God; so earnestly he says - "I beseech you, brethren" by these mercies, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your

reasonable service."

First of all, people who are to present themselves to God must have, and know it, walk in it, a door of access to God. There must be for us, before ever we can present a sacrifice, a way of access to Him to whom the sacrifice is to be presented. What is this way? It is no other and no less than the very Person and death of the Lord Jesus and this is taught so definitely in the Scripture, as notably in the Hebrews, where the Apostle says - "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near . . . . ." Be particular about that; mind how you come into God's presence when you profess to pray and seek Him. Be careful of the door. Be particular about that. If you name any other Name but the Name of Christ; go by any other way than that which He Himself has opened through the rent veil of His sacred flesh, no acceptance will there be.

O Thou by whom we come to God.  
The Life, the Truth, the Way!  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;  
Lord, teach us how to pray. (1002)

It is a great thing to know the Way. We are too blind naturally to find out this Way. The Spirit opens, reveals it to faith, so as that when the people of God seek His face they find Him when they are in this Way. Then says the Apostle, now present your bodies, present yourselves, a living sacrifice. A sacrifice, something given, given up, abandoned; this is great, and, inasmuch as it is to be a living sacrifice, it is painful. The Apostle says in this Epistle - "We are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Romans 8 v 12/13) "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" he says in another place (Colossians 3 v 5). To come to God in self-denial first of all is no little matter. Self-denial, not denial of so many sovereigns, but denial of self; wicked self, religious self, self-will, self-wisdom, self-direction, self-strength, self-confidence;

just denial of self. To take up a cross, the cross of Christ, is to take up a cross that is often quite independent of circumstances. To take up that which is a stumblingblock to the Jew, an offence to the Greek; to take that up and stand before God as in that, and that alone justified, and accepted, and acceptable, this is a way in which you will be able, and only the way, to present yourselves a living sacrifice - "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy Name give glory for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Look narrowly at this point, whether you have also been brought in your hearts to submit yourselves unto the righteousness of God, so as to find that your righteousness is Christ; to say with good Bunyan - My righteousness is in heaven. Why, it is like offering a man alive to take off his own righteousness and wisdom and goodness. It is like barking a tree, killing a tree, to take away every pretention and all things that a man would fain have and hold and be in before God; that he should be just a person in himself utterly undone, and that he should be as one whom the Lord has entirely saved in Himself. Mind self-denial. Blessed with grace you may often, if you met with it and believed it, go with Rutherford in his exclamation, O that I had not a myself. And to crucify this myself is to come with this living sacrifice, this painful thing. Ah he sacrifices himself who says before God - "Not unto us O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." It does not seem much, looked at from the outside; it seems pretty easy for a man professing Christ to do that. There is no great difficulty, apparently, to say that. But when you come in the light and teaching of the Spirit, to understand somewhat of human nature, what it is in the sight of God, then you find that self-denial is no little thing. It is no plaything, it is no trifle. Probably some of us 40 years, 50 and more than 50 years ago found it much easier to use Toplady's words than we find it today

Nothing in my hand I bring

A glib profession it may be; if a living experience it is difficult. What, give up all things; go with Paul, abandon your privileges, turn away from your own righteousness, make nothing of your attainments. What, just esteem these very things that are so estimable to us naturally, esteem them to be dung, and dross, and loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. O well, he is a good



scholar and has made some progress in the school of Christ who is able to say, I do this, and present myself before God a living sacrifice. As a dead creature to be quickened; as a guilty sinner to be justified; and as one who now is wholly devoted to the fear of God, to walk humbly with His God in peace and equity. And I think I should not be far from the truth of the matter if I were to say here, the whole of this presenting of the body as a living sacrifice is embraced in that, my last, observation. What can be hard to you when you have denied yourself? What can be difficult? What circumstance can be difficult, what roughness can irritate you, when before God in your conscience and affections you really have been brought to this utter denial of self, this universal abandonment of yourself? When you are as a lost person just before God in prostration of soul, in exercise of faith, in esteeming the will of God to be good and acceptable and perfect to your heart, to your affections, to your understanding, and to your will. But take one point here more, take your understanding. Man has an understanding but, alas, it is darkened, and it is darkness itself - according to the Scripture term - through sin. "Ye were sometimes darkness". But, woe unto us, this darkened understanding has a good deal of imagined light and finds a good many things. We have our own ideas of God, of what He ought to be, what He should do, and what would not be just in Him to do. We have our own ideas of salvation, how it should be given. We have our own ideas of divine sovereignty and all that kind of thing, but, according to the Scripture, that which is esteemed among men is abomination to God. Can you give up all that you think is right? Can you abandon your ideas of God? Can you say - I have uttered that I understood not. I will lay my hand on my mouth, I will say no more. Can you pray - "That which I see not teach Thou me". "O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." O, it is a great thing to be as clay in the hands of the Potter. Abraham came to a good place when he said - "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Things may be very contrary to this in our judgement. I have, alas for my own peace and comfort, often judged God and walked according to my natural understanding of what ought to be, what God ought to be and what He ought to do, but faith says, this is wrong. And when you can present your understanding to God and give all its ideas and judgements and thoughts and conclusions up and just be as He would have you, a poor creature, taught to submit yourself wholly to Him, this is good, but

it is not easy; it is not easy. A proud man is not easily giving up himself as to his understanding of things; No, he will say before God sometimes in his daring, this is not right; this does not comport with human justice. But faith in his heart will bring him to give it all up and say - I have uttered what I did not understand, I will say no more. Take your will, My Lord Will be Will, that faculty of our nature which, when right, is so good; when properly exercised, so beautiful in its strength and straightness. Take that, perverted as it is, utterly perverted. One does not deny the possession of the faculty of the will, but one must affirm, according to Scripture, that it is utterly perverted and in bondage. Good Luther was right when he wrote on the bondage of the will - how came it to be free? Of course it is free, man will contend; of course it is free. Cannot I do as I like? Was not I able to come to Chapel here this morning or refrain from coming? That does not touch the matter at all. May I not chose what is good, depends very much on what you understand as good. What is good? If God only is good, and Christ said so - "None is good but One, that is God" - if He, in the manifestation of Himself is good and only good; if He, in His word and His declarations and decisions is good and only good; if He, in the Person of Christ as He manifests Himself there, in Christ's incarnation and obedience and death and burial and resurrection and ascension into heaven, is good and only good, and if all beside I have mentioned and whatever the Scripture reveals be good and only good, then how about your will? Is it straight with all this? When that will - I wish it to be so and so; I will have it so and so, or not at all - if grace comes what will you do? Give it up. You say - "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. Take it in some circumstance that afflicts you, some circumstance which, if you could rule matters and manage things for yourself you certainly would soon be rid of. Take it in a circumstance that God binds upon you; it is contrary to your inclination, to your comfort, and apparently to your good. You say, I cannot submit to it and, if a gracious person, you may sometimes in your simplicity say to the Lord, how is it that when I would live uprightly, when I would have my heart always toward Thyself and occupied with Thee, I am so turned about and provoked and irritated by this circumstance that I cannot walk as I would walk; how is this. Trouble will bring the worst of you out as well as the best. Rutherford says, a saint is a saint in the fire but also that same person may be a saint in the fire and, while a saint, he may prove

and feel himself to be a devil. Then you may say, I cannot submit to it, till a touch comes, a view of God, of goodness divine, a view of the will and wisdom and good issue; that the Lord may bring great good to you by this evil, make a straight path for your feet by this most crooked, painful circumstance. O then you will say, "Not as I will but as Thou wilt."

And present yourselves a living sacrifice. You, a sinner, self-willed in yourself, now submit heartily, without reservation, to that divine sovereignty which God has exercised toward you in willing that you should walk in a path of trouble. And is this acceptable? Yes, wholly, apart from your sinful self, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Yes. One says, I am so conscious of imperfection in my best that I cannot think the Lord will accept it; nor would He but for Christ. But in Christ everything that a saint does under the Spirit's guidance, though it may be surrounded by imperfection, is acceptable, and it is a reasonable service. According to Christian reason, according to the teaching of Christ and the grace of the Spirit, all this is most reasonable, and the issue of it is the peaceable fruit of righteousness to all who are exercised in it. Here I must leave it.

AMEN.