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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Friday evening 17 August 1928

ROMANS 14 V 17

For the kingdom of God is not meat and
drink; but righteousness, and peace, and
joy in the Holy Ghost.

The first subject treated by the Holy Ghost in this chapter is christian liberty, the liberty wherewith Christ has made His people free - free from the observance of all that ritual that was imposed on Israel - and exhortations to people who were strong in faith to walk charitably toward those who were weak in faith in certain particulars. The ground of the exhortation is this, that God has received them both, the weak and the strong. One finds himself so instructed by the Spirit in the liberty of Christ, as that all days are alike to him and he can eat meat, that is to say, he has full liberty to eat now all the things that God has created because, the Jewish dispensation being ended, there is no meat unclean in itself. And so the well instructed child of God, a young man, say, who is strong because he knows his sins are forgiven him, says, well I can eat this; I am at liberty. Another, a little child, perhaps, in experience, perceives in the Scriptures certain meats are forbidden and he has not full liberty in his conscience to break away. He may be a Jew called by grace or a Gentile who is acquainted with Jewish ritual, and he says I must not eat this; God has forbidden it. He is not yet well instructed. God has received him, though he is weak in faith. Now, says the Holy Ghost to the strong brother, do not destroy this little child's comfort, standing. Do not distress his mind by partaking of that which, as he sees you eating it, will be a stumbling to him. Walk charitably. This may be a useful instruction to us if we are enabled carefully and prayerfully to look into God's Word as to the liberty Christians have, liberty, not to sin, but from all yokes of bondage, and yet that liberty may be curtailed by observing a brother or a sister in the Lord who has not the same knowledge, the same understanding, and the same strength. So the strong man must say, well, if meat offend my brother, I will eat no more meat while

the world stands. Walk charitably, dear brethren, walk charitably with each other in the things that are, in themselves, immaterial in respect of religion, in respect of acceptance with God. "All things are lawful but all things are not expedient". "All things are lawful" says Paul, "but I will not be brought under the power of any". Love shall rule, and if I see one who would be stumbled if I were to eat this, then I will refrain from eating it. If I see one who would be stumbled at my walk in a particular thing, though I have liberty before God in it, I won't walk in it. This is the leading of the first part of this very beautiful and spiritually interesting chapter, and out of this the Holy Ghost draws a great and wonderful inference that is to be an instruction to all the saints, strong and weak. "Calling", it is in the text; it is the text. For the kingdom of God which is in you, which came not to you with observation, that is, not in word but in power, the kingdom of grace that came to you, was set up in you when you were dead, and distant, blind and ignorant. This kingdom, being of grace, wrought by the Spirit, standing in the power of God, and only growing by that power in exercise, is not meat and drink. It does not stand in observation of things and does not stand when you do not observe things. It is neither strengthened nor weakened by observation or non observation. It stands in these particulars, righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. These are the particulars in which the kingdom of God, which is within you, stands. May the Lord make us believe it and give us to find that kingdom in our hearts. It was a great and wonderful instruction that Christ gave to His disciples with regard to prayer. "After this manner pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done". The kingdom of God; it means the destruction of the kingdom of self and the kingdom of the devil. It means that the stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands has fallen on your kingdom, my kingdom, the devil's kingdom - if indeed it has come to us - and broken these kingdoms and is destined to grind them to powder, and make them like the dust of the threshing floor, the wind to scatter them, and establish itself; to fill the whole soul, to fill eventually the whole earth. Now my brethren this is a very important thing. An external religion may easily be where this inward kingdom is not. Observances of religion may please where there is no grace. Naming the Name of God is not difficult even when there is no knowledge of God. This, if we believe it, will bring an

honest soul, your soul, my soul, again and again to this important question - have we in us, this kingdom? Who can answer the question? Only God. The beginning of it is, according to the Apostle James, by the quickening, begetting Word of God. He hath begotten us again by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked 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. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others", ruled by the god of this world, carried to some idols by violent impressions from the devil; things which are vain and vile, made to look like substance and purity itself. The ministers of the devil put on the appearance of the ministers of righteousness, preaching death. This whole kingdom in the soul is broken when the sinner is begotten again by the Word of truth, and from that moment to the end of life, more or less, the petition is "Thy kingdom come", because, though sin gets a deadly wound frequently, it must be healed. God will never let it reign again, at any rate in any child of His for long. Yet there is the healing of that deadly wound. So we need again and again the Holy Ghost to bring His own gracious life, light and influence, that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of grace, may be established and enlarged.

It consists in these things; first righteousness. "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not", but there are multitudes of sinners who are righteous and have in them the kingdom of grace and this is righteousness that is imputed. That is the bottom, the foundation and the building and the topstone and the glory; righteousness.

Righteousness within thee rooted
May appear to take thy part
But let righteousness imputed
Be the breastplate of thy heart

Nothing else will stand. This is the Lord Jesus. "This is the Name

wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness". Therefore this kingdom has in it for its foundation and for its building up and for its good finish, the Lord Jesus Himself. True religion has Christ for its soul, its strength, its beauty, and its acceptance with God. Faith receives this righteousness, and every one sooner or later comes to say "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". Now sinner, you will never be beautiful in the sight of God, never be accepted by Him, never stand well before the judgment seat of Christ, if you have not this righteousness. This is the kingdom of God. Sin makes us unrighteous; Christ makes us righteous. The vastness of that Scripture in the Corinthians is, in its vastness, inconceivable to us, but in its blessed meaning and fruitfulness, it is known to every saint sooner or later. That in the Corinthians - "For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." These two run together; they are commensurate, they are equal. That is to say, if God made His Son to be sin for you, your sin has gone. If He, Jesus, is to be made the righteousness of God to you, and that righteousness is known by you, then the kingdom of God is in you. What an amazing thing. The older I get the bigger sinner I am, not before men, blessed be God, but in my experience. Well, that shameful case makes Christ's righteousness the more beautiful and wonderful and desirable to me. I have often quoted to you what I greatly admire

Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought
Lacking nought
Fearless of rejection

Where will you find righteousness to full perfection? Only in Him whose Name is "The Lord our righteousness".

Then this kingdom which is in righteousness, which is righteousness, begets obedience in every one in whom it is. Now the Apostle in this Epistle speaks of the Jews and he says they went about seeking to establish their own righteousness and have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. But the Gentiles, who did not seek it, and were not instructed to seek it as the Jews were, for they were left to their ignorance and wickedness, the Gentiles who

sought it not, have attained to it, and have been brought to submit themselves to the righteousness of God and this is the way in which poor sinners serve God and serve Christ when this divine kingdom is set up in their souls. Justification, justification, justification, will be written, if I may so express it, across every petition of one who feels himself to be unjust by nature, and full of sin. Pardon mine iniquity O Lord. Be Thou my righteousness that I may stand before Thee perfect and complete. Now that is the first thing in this important text. The kingdom of God is righteousness. No external observations of any religious nature can add to this nor detract from it. In itself it is complete. In itself it makes a sinner complete. In itself it makes a sinner acceptable to God. In itself, without any addition of observances, external observances. It is good for us to meet from time to time, good for us to read Holy Scripture in private, good for us to seek the Lord - and one of the things that always accompanies salvation - but the kingdom itself, the perfection itself, this is given, this is imparted. This comes not with observation. This is within you. O what a blessed thing it would be to die in this righteousness. The kingdom of grace will make you, the worst of sinners, so beautiful, that God Himself says to him "There is no spot in thee", no unrighteousness in thee, nothing that I can blame in thee, nothing I can find fault with in thee, because this righteousness justifies and gives a title to glory. It is not much experience that we have of this. We may be very poor in our experience of it. If, by faith, we see it as being the very kingdom of God, it will set our hearts alive and burning again and again with desire to have this kingdom within us.

The second wonderful thing in respect of this kingdom is that it is peace. Ah some say, we do not get much peace here. Providence troubles us, the devil troubles us, indwelling sin troubles us. It is not much peace we have here. But then suppose you get an hour now and again, a realisation that you stand accepted in the Beloved, that you are clothed in beauty, not your own, that you believe and feel God is your God, Jesus your righteousness, the Spirit your teacher; that thus the Trinity unites in saving you and your conscience is so satisfied that you have not a doubt for the moment, I say, suppose this comes to you thus occasionally, what have you? Peace, peace. This peace is said to rule the heart and mind, to keep the heart and

mind. It is called the peace of God which passeth all understanding. And of all the things that may nonpluss the understanding of a child of God is this. How is it that I, such a wretch, should have this peace that I cannot understand? How He can smile on me, how He can bless a murderer of the Lord Jesus with heaven, how He can come down and bring heavenly comfort, why, says the sinner, I cannot understand it. How can the Lord do it? O the patience, and the kindness and the wisdom and the love of God so to bless a worm, a sinner, a polluted wretch. The kingdom of God is here.

There are three things that will trouble you at times. The first is indwelling sin, that spreading, that powerful thing, that moving thing, that seems even to ooze from your pores. Indwelling sin making you say, "the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do". "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The second thing is providence that may trouble you. God may put thorns into your pillow, pains into your strong bones, misery in your flesh, so that you can almost feel, if not quite, what Job felt - O that God would loose His hand and kill me outright. You may be so troubled in providence that in your family, nothing but distress. In your business, nothing but confusion and threatened destruction. In the church much to trouble you, to distress and pain you. And the third thing is the wicked temptations of that foul spirit, the devil, called a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he may devour. Now take these three things; if they meet at one time in a child of God, how pitiable is his case, yet there may be moments when that troubled person may say - these things do not disturb my peace. God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The mountains are moving, the earth is shaking, the sea is roaring, but there is a river whose sweet streams flow to my soul and give me peace; peace I do not understand, but I feel it. It is powerful in me; it makes my pains bearable; it makes providence bearable even in the solemn breakings that I have in it, and it makes temptations bearable for I shall get through them. The peace of God. The God of peace gives His peace. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you". Peace in trouble, peace in a sinner, peace against the god of this world. What a wonderful kingdom this is. Here the stone is; here it is increasing, and here it is grinding to powder the kingdom of sin, the kingdom of Satan. My brethren a little of this

peace is very wonderful. I know it; so do some of you. And some of you may be saying O if we did but know it. Well, if you have got the righteousness of the Lord Jesus on your side, even without knowing it at the moment, the day will come when you will say, why I am full of peace. How is it this trouble does not trouble me, this pain does not pain me, the temptations of the devil do not harass and confuse me as they frequently have done. The peace, the kingdom, is here. It rules; it keeps the heart and mind; it keeps the heart fixed on God; it keeps the mind stayed on Him as in Isaiah, the Spirit says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusteth in Thee." Well I can preach a good religion, a good gospel. The peace of God comes by Jesus Christ. It flows through His death. It is breathed by His Spirit into the conscience. Conscience? Ah conscience can be the greatest comfort to you; it can be the greatest torment. If guilt is on it it will torment you. If the peace of God through the blood of Christ is on it, it will be a great comfort to you.

And the third thing in this kingdom is joy. I, as far as my observation goes of others, find there is not much of this joy had today by the Lord's people and if I speak of myself, I have to say the same thing. Yet Christ's Word is this "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy might be full". Now there are several ingredients in this. The first is this that you have some persuasion that the Lord loved you and gave Himself for you. A sight of Christ crucified for you will make your heart leap for joy and you will go forth in the dances of them that make merry. The beauties of religion, the beauties of holiness, the beauties of worship none can understand till they get some view of Christ crucified in their room and stead and when they get that then their hearts rejoice. A sweet necessity is on them. It is the joy of heaven; it is the joy of Christ. "My joy". A second ingredient in this is the sweet witness of the Holy Ghost. He brings the purging blood of Christ and sprinkles it on the conscience. He bears His witness to the sonship of the sinner, and says the sinner or rather the Holy Ghost says - if a child, then an heir, an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Ah if you rise to this in the Spirit's power you will understand this joy. And a third ingredient in it is the prospect, the future. The joy prepared for suffering saints is set

before them at times. They say in a right way - I would not live
always; the life to come is better than this, and it a little explains
to faith the word of God "Better is the day of one's death than the day
of one's birth" It is not a common experience but it is an occasional
one. Perhaps it is given more to fathers than to young men and
children. Young men have great warfare and children are looking
forth and seeking after being dandled upon the knees, but when
fathers come of age and they see set before them an eternity of
bliss, time is receding, desire fails, and many things, many things
which have appeared attractive lose their attraction. Heaven, well
now and again it is so wonderful and so beautiful in the view of faith
that a man of God says, I would like to be there. There are several
attractions in heaven to the saint. One is perfect holiness; no sin
to trouble him. And the other is the bliss-giving and bliss-
maintaining presence of the Trinity.

These three things have this great thing said of them, they are
the kingdom of God. A kingdom has a King. His subjects are loyal;
they wish to serve Him. He that in these things, righteousness, peace
and joy, serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.
They want to serve Him and they have to serve Him in a charitable walk
with their brethren. They have to serve Him according to the
Scripture in the ordinances which He has left them to obey Him. He
has left many precepts. One is this. "Go ye therefore and teach all
nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and
of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I
have commanded you." (Matthew 28 verses 19/20) And, says a justified
sinner, a peaceful conscience, a joyful mind, O let me walk in the
ways of God. When Thou shall enlarge my heart I will run in the way of
Thy commandments. And the next thing is the ordinance of the Lord's
Supper. "This do in remembrance of Me". He says to His people "This
is My body which was broken for you" Do it, as often as you do take
this ordinance, in remembrance of Me. Why, say these peaceful,
justified, joyful persons, O let us sit at His table to receive the
blessed meat, to drink the invigorating drink. Let us sit at His
table. And sometimes He comes very near and is their Host bringing
with Him their provision, saying "Eat O friends and drink; yea drink
abundantly O beloved." And these subjects of the kingdom have also
holy precepts, what the Apostle calls the commandments of the Lord

and of us the Apostles of the Lord. One is "Be not conformed to this world" and if ever it was needed it is now. The wicked fashions of the world, the abominations that prevail in the world, but the fashion coming into the professing church; we see everywhere the conformity of professors, yea, and I know to my sorrow, in some churches that are called the churches of truth; members of churches walking according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air. May the Lord help us to walk in that precept "Be not conformed to this world", and in that commandment A new commandment I give you; this is My commandment that ye love one another. This is to be a distinguishing feature in all the saints to love one another. Brethren, says John, "If God so loved us we ought also to love one another." The kingdom of God consists in these things, not in word. Now may you be enabled, may I with you be enabled to obey Him who is our righteousness, and our peace, and our joy, and will be throughout an endless, blessed heaven, the residence of God. He will be the Host of His church through eternity so that he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God in his worship and approved of good men when they see it. Says the Psalmist, all who fear Thee will be glad when they see me. When they see the fruits of righteousness and of peace and of joy and of obedience to the gospel they will be glad to see me. So may it be with us. May the Lord give us to enter into the mystery and the mercy of this divine kingdom, for if we never have it - listen my friends - if we never have this kingdom in our souls where God is we shall never be. Hell, dreadful, dark, endless hell, will be our portion.