

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 1 September 1929

Romans 5 v 8

"But God commendeth His love toward us,
in that, while we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us"

The doctrine of justification is taught in this chapter "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God". O seeker, if you could but remember this that "God justifieth the ungodly which believeth in Jesus", it would give you a hold in prayer to believe that sin can be forgiven, that a sinner may be saved. If that got hold of you, you would have a hold of God in prayer, but as long as you flounder in looking for good temper, holy feelings, a sound heart and something with which you unconsciously might strut about in religion, so long you will be held in bondage. O Sinai does hold sinner, legality holds sinners, and a tempting devil as an angel and minister of light tells such sinners that they have no right, that they are too wicked, too ignorant, too dark, and utterly unworthy. Therefore they may not expect a blessing. We little know the ways of the human heart and the ways of the devil in that heart, even where the life of God is.

Now in this chapter, the early parts of it, we have this great doctrine. And what follows? Even "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." People know what the power of the peace of God is when they get that peace. O it is very wonderful to get that divine peace in your soul. And then the Holy Ghost is brought in and He sheds the love of God abroad in the heart. That is an amazing experience. It is very very wonderful for a frozen heart to be melted, a contracted heart to be enlarged, a distant heart to be made nigh, an alien to know that he is a friend and adopted into the family of God. Then tribulation comes. Tribulation? Yes, the more grace, the more tribulation; the nearer to God, the harder the devil tries to pull away and sin more and more rebels. Then patience, then hope and glorying in tribulation and the beauty and the boldness of hope,

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without any shame; does not make ashamed. And the ground of all this is brought before us in the next verse. "For when we were yet without strength", that is when we were sinners, "in due time", the time appointed of the Father "Christ died for the ungodly". The Spirit is always bringing this in, that sinners may know that they are saved as sinners and not as good religious people. It is a difficult thing to be a ruined person and, as such, to come to God to be saved. But this is what has to be, and the Spirit brings it in continually, "ungodly". That is without any godliness, without any goodness. "For scarcely for a righteous man" - a just upright man, whom men must admire but not love - "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man", a beneficent man, tender, sympathetic, liberal, for such a man, if he were condemned, one might be found, perhaps, who would die for him. Then God commendeth His love toward sinners, commendeth His love "in that", for this manifestation of that love, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Commendeth", maketh conspicuous, illustrious, set it up above all reason, above all human goodness, above anything that can commend itself to the human mind and affection and understanding. "Conspicuous", sets it out above the whole of creation. "Commendeth His love". Because it is free, it is commended. Because it is great, it is commended. Because it is for certain persons, it is commended. For persons who do not deserve it, who do not want it. O how illustrious is the eternal, electing love of God, fixed by His own determination, settled on certain persons by His predestination of them, given to the worst of men. He commendeth it in that particular. The Lord knows the difficulty a sinner has in believing that salvation is free. He knows that some of us here are always being caught in the legal snare of our foolish, ignorant, blind, proud nature and how gladly we would bring Him into debt to us if we could. Some may think I am severe on old nature. I am not half severe enough. I have wished sometimes, when in this pulpit, I could stamp and grind to powder this wretched thing, self, this wicked thing, self, and you find it hard to believe, do you not, that God can love you? Wherein would be the conspicuousness of this love if it were given to men who deserve it or in some way are worthy of it? But He commends it in this, that the unworthiest get it. The Publican gets it, and the Pharisee goes home without it. Peter gets it, and Judas does not. Paul gets it. O how God does set out in a most conspicuous way this

free love. You cannot bind Him. As His Being is beyond all reckoning and comprehension, so is His love. "God is love". Its being, its flowing, its bestowal, its lighting on certain persons just because God would have it light on them, this is beyond all our reckoning. If I had words to commend it to you, I would use them, but God Himself does it. "God commendeth His love toward us", and because Paul says "toward us" bringing himself in, we must conclude that he means the worst of sinners. He said of himself, he was an injurious person, a murderer in his heart, yea, and to his utmost, by his conduct, for he hailed to prison all whom he found, on whom he could lay his hand, who professed the Name of the Lord Jesus. And "yet" he said "I obtained mercy". And for a moment, let me turn aside and bring Paul's case before you because it is given for a particular purpose. Writing to his son, Timothy, Paul says of himself that he obtained mercy that in him the Lord might show a pattern to all them that believe. A pattern of what? Of His love that is commended. The love that arrested him, that blessed him, that distinguished him, by making him, a sinner a saint. That in him He might show forth all longsuffering, and a pattern. Do not compete with Paul when he says that he, himself, is the chief of sinners. You may contend with anybody less holy, but I do not want to destroy the pattern. Here is a pattern, here is a wicked man, a man who thought it was his duty to persecute the church of God and waste it. A man who offered to one after another liberty if they would only curse the Name of Christ. This man Jesus arrests, to him Jesus speaks. To him forgiveness is bestowed, given freely. Now, says Paul, I am a pattern and O, my believing friends, who may be in bondage, who may be condemning yourselves now, and saying you have got no evidence on which you can rely. Do not rely on any evidences at any time. But now you may be saying you have got none, therefore you must be wrong. That is the conclusion you arrive at. Says Paul, I am a pattern; God has set me up as a pattern. As much as to say, you sinful men and women, who cut yourselves off, behold this man, My servant Paul, once Saul of Tarsus. Behold him. I gave him grace, I gave him life, I gave him a place in Christ. Seek to get the same mercy for yourselves. This is the commendation of the love of God and may it attract us.

And the apostle proceeds in this great matter of commending, setting forth what God commends - the love of God - in

this way - "while we were yet sinners", could not boast of being righteous, could not take beneficent conduct in our hand and plead it before God; but sinners. O you will know where the emphasis lies in your own consciences - sinners. I wish some of you young people who are concerned might get this evening what I, a young man, now considerably more than 60 years ago got one day, in hearing a minister of truth, when he quoted that word

Sinners are high in His esteem
And sinners highly value Him

And I got a manifestation of how God could save me. O sinner, it is a free gift.

Bring no money, price or aught

No good tempers, no pleasing frames, empty, empty, empty of all good; full, full of all ill. Sinners, sinners, high in the esteem of Christ, so high that He left His royal state, came down to earth. A Man was made to make poor men the sons of God, and pay the debt His brethren owed. That is love, that is love. Men who spat in His face, men in this church and congregation who despised Him and said they would not have Him, did not want Him. I did. And for such men He came and does come, blessed be His Name.

This coming of Christ means the incarnation of the Son of God, and I believe Dr Owen is absolutely correct when he says that the constitution of the Person of Christ is the highest expression of the wisdom and love and power of God. That God can do nothing, give nothing, effect nothing, greater or so great as this, that He has done and effected in constituting the Person of Christ. God's Son, always His Son, always retaining His divine personality in the Trinity, God's Son became what He was not, a man, and remains what He is, a man united to God eternally. O dear friends, I wish we all knew Him, and loved Him. We are sure to love Him if we know Him. And this Person, Christ, came to save the lost. What an important word that is in Matthew's gospel - "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many". What is the death of Christ? "Christ died for us". What is this death? It is unique.

There is no other death ever to be like it. All men have died of a physical necessity. Every man has died because he was a sinner. This one death stands alone. It is spoken of as an atonement. An atonement is a covering. In the Old Testament, under the Levitical dispensation, the atonement made was a covering - different from the covering the thin covering that Abel's blood had when Cain covered it - a covering, sin removed by God. The God of justice, when He came to deal with Cain for having murdered his brother. When God comes to one for whom Christ died, He never will uncover the sin that that precious death covered. "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered". That is the atonement. That eye of God will never see the sins of a purchased, redeemed sinner, because the death of Christ covered, removed from him, all his sins and that is a reason that sinners go to heaven, who are bought by the blood of Christ. As well as you can, hang about this death, this all covering death. "Christ died for the ungodly", died for sinners. If He did not die for us, our sins will rise up against us in judgment. If any of you die in your sins, your sins will never be covered. God's eye will see them. They are written in the books, one of the books, and when the books are opened, those sins in which you lived and in which you died will rise up in judgment. They will be read out, so to speak, and O how your ears will tingle, and how your nature will shake and how your very being will wither under the frown and awful sentence of God. But if the death of Jesus covered your sins then God will make His Word good. "I will remember their sins no more". They are cast behind His back into the depths of the sea. That is what the death of Christ is. See, my friends, what Christ did when He said "It is finished". The sins you committed, He bore; the guilt you contracted, He suffered; the death you deserved, He endured. The curse that you had brought on yourself He took from you and took it to Himself. The frown, the chastisement, the stripes, the brusing that you deserved, He suffered and so He covered sin, and so He covered sin. And when that precious death is applied then the sinner is brought to understand the Words of the Holy Ghost by Peter "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God that raised

Him from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." This is the gospel, the gospel that God will have preached. This is the fountain of blood, of infinite merit for the washing of sinners, the fountain of life for the living who are to live for ever and ever, the covering that will cover the souls with a divine robe of righteousness, the new and living way into the holiest of all. And men, blessed thus, get access. They get grace and they go with their troubles and God listens to their complaints and receives their confessions and answers their prayers, and all of it comes from this - "Christ died for us" And when a man overcomes, he overcomes by the death of Christ. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb".

The death of Christ also in Holy Scripture is set forth as a ransom. Christ is a ransom for all to be testified in due time. A ransom says there are captives, there are slaves. Captives held by the law which they have broken, and which they cannot mend, sinners under the law of God have neither right nor power to deliver themselves. O sinner, the law of God holds you and will hold you eternally unless a ransom was paid for you. Man has no right to absolve himself from the law. We, as English people, cannot absolve ourselves from the law or laws under which we live. So long as we retain our nationality, so long are we subject to the laws of the realm. Much more are we bound by that law that God gave and wrote in the heart of Adam in Eden. And what is to be done? These subjects of God's law, not being able to deliver themselves, must endure its curse unless there be found one who can pay a ransom price. Do not be surprised if ever you meet with Arminians if they fight against the doctrine of Christ's death as being a ransom paid for they know perfectly well that if that is allowed, universal redemption is dead. A ransom paid for captives. And this ransom means that Christ paid, as it is written, by one hymnwriter, paid the mighty debt we owed. Ah, it was a mighty debt. Adam's sin imputed, personal transgressions committed, sin in our members indulged. O the captivity of sinners and they are the servants of sin. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves to obey his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness" God accepted and was pleased with the ransom price the Saviour paid. And now, as it was in the case of Lazarus literally when he came forth from the grave bound hand and foot in the grave clothes, so sinners born again and being

raised out of the grave of death, but bound hand and foot with legal bondage, must hear the word, the divine commandment - "Loose him and let him go". Let him go from his captivity to the law. Let him come to Me as a freed man, as Christ's freed man, and let him come to the throne of grace in the new and living way opened for him. Let him come to My righteousness, let him come to My fountain, let him come to My grace, let him come and live and let him come and sit at table and eat My flesh and drink My blood. O the blessedness of Christ's death, who can express it. If you get, by the Holy Ghost, a glimpse of the infinite value of Christ's death it will put your feet on good ground and you will learn that confession goes well with God, whereas you have legally been trying to find some excuses. Nothing kills the Adamic spirit in us so effectually as a sight of the freeness of Christ's love and the efficacy of His death. No man goes on saying, "The woman Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me and I did eat", when he sees the death of Christ. O it sets the spirit free. It opens the mouth, it brings out confession, it works self-aborrence, it is real liberty. Free among the dead are people who are made free by the death of Christ. This ransom is acknowledged by God's justice. Hart sings very truly and very beautifully

Behold a change indeed
Justice is now for me

I wish some of you could break out into that. You will, when the Lord blesses you with the gospel. May He be pleased to do it. Now justice, from which we are fleeing, justice that claims our forfeited lives, justice that forbids our escape, this, this perfection of deity stands on the side of the ransomed sinner, and the whole nature of God that forbids the approach of anything that defiles, that stands now on the side of a sinner and says "Come". O, says the convinced sinner, I am too unholy. O, but says God, I have found a ransom. Deliver him from going to the pit; I have found a ransom. The sinner's Friend, God; the sinner's Friend, Jesus, the rich Saviour who paid freely out of His eternal treasure of grace and love and power, the whole debt, brings the sinner to Himself and sets him free. Ah it is freedom and this freedom is felt in the faculties of the redeemed person. Let me name one or two things here. First of all this blessed death. The blood of Jesus purges the conscience from

dead works to serve the living God. Do some of your consciences accuse you? Are you accused by your consciences of wrong doing, wicked thoughts, infidelity, pride, blasphemy and all manner of sin and uncleanness? Do not begin to excuse yourselves; listen to conscience. Huntington says - let conscience do her office. Listen to it. O, but it is painful, shameful. Yes it is so; I know it, but listen to it. When the blood of Christ is applied, that wonderful faculty in a man his conscience, changes its voice. It has not an objection because it is purged, cleansed, purified from all uncleanness and dead works, and the sinner is happy. O, of all the blessedness you can ever have, one of the greatest is a purified conscience. When you cannot look back on a good life, a well spent life, but you can look and say, well, but this conscience that was loaded with dead works has had taken from it that entire load, and I am free. And this precious blood of Christ, this death of Christ, affects the heart. It melts the heart of stone. It makes a impenitent sinner penitent and fills him with grief for having sinned. He can say "My sin is ever before me" but the precious blood of Christ has removed that and my heart is broken, and the sweetest contrition is felt, grateful contrition is felt, and the heart understands a little, O but very little, of this eternal love expressed by Christ in giving Himself freely for the sinner to redeem him, to ransom him from death. And the will is affected. I am glad the Lord does not deprive His people of will. A man without a will is not a man, but God affects the will. "My people", redeemed, "shall be willing in the day of My power". O, and nobody can understand but the people who feel it, that wonderful suppling of the will and putting it straight and in unison with the will of God manifested in Christ. I believe Mary's will went wonderfully well with her heart when she made choice of heart to sit at His feet and He kindly confirmed her in that. And the understanding goes with the whole; an understanding. What a beautiful Scripture is that in the epistle of John "And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and life eternal." And let us connect the last word with that - "Little children keep yourselves from idols". A man spoken of by the Lord in Isaiah takes a tree. He makes a fire with part of it, with part of it he roasts his meat, and with part of it he creates a god and says, this is thy god. He is

without understanding. The Apostle Paul was inspired to say - "The understanding is darkened and alienated from the life of God". Now when the glorious gospel of Christ shines in the heart and understanding, then it is another thing. The true God is seen. This is the true God, the true grace of God, and faith, and will, and conscience, and heart, and affections and understanding unite to say "This God is our God for ever and ever and will be our guide even unto death". Dear friends, heaven is by the blood of Christ. Jesus died that His people might live. Jesus exhausted the whole of punishment due to them that they might enter the heaven of happiness. Jesus groaned that they might sing, yielded His life that they might live by that death for ever and ever.

"But God commendeth His love" - His electing love, His free love, in giving His Son; His powerful love and wisdom and goodness in constituting the Person of Christ. His love, the love of the Son in freely coming and giving Himself a ransom to be testified in due time, and the love of the Holy Ghost - O may we never leave Him out - the love of the Holy Ghost in quickening into eternal life the purchase of Christ's precious blood, and being in these people, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. Ah, you would be wonderful people, and I should be a wonderful man with you, if you were thoroughly gosselled. Legality and the gospel are opposed, but the gospel has power and will exercise it in the spirit in due time to penetrate and permeate every soul, so that there will be a real gospel people. O, what a blessed heaven awaits the saints of God, when there will be no legality, and no bondage, and no corruption; no sin, no death, no pain, no night. And God commendeth His love toward us in that while we wretches, we were sinners, Christ died for us. May the Spirit make this out to every child of God here and may the dear people of God who ^{sit} (are to be) at the table receive that, that Jesus Christ gave to His disciples - "Take eat, this is My body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of Me." Give His cup and say "Drink ye all of it". All of you drink it, for "this cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." And if we get that favour we shall sing the praises of Him who gave His Son to die, laid a commandment upon Him to die; sing the praises of Him who died; sing the praises of Him who applied that death to us, and thus unite the Trinity in our praises.

Amen