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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday evening 5 June, 1921

ROMANS 5 v 8

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

The opening of this chapter is the consequence of what is preceded in the 4 chapter. Justification comes through Christ. "Who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification". "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". The state of the sinner is changed. His offences were removed from him by the death of Christ. He now stands justified and by faith he apprehends, receives, believes in, that justification, and the effect on him is manifold. First, it is peace with God, a sweet, solid peace in his conscience, because the atonement is brought to his conscience. Second that he now has access by faith into the grace of God wherein he stands. And third, he rejoices in hope of the glory of God. He has in himself the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Glory not seen yet an evidence of it he possesses. Peace is felt. Entrance, introduction into the presence of God is the effect of justification by the death of Christ, and more than that, so favoured were these Roman Christians, that they gloried in their tribulation, their troubles, and they had troubles. Yes, their religion cost them much. The grace of God was in them abundant, but their tribulations also very abundant. But they, through justification, through access, through the sense, the sweet sense of peace and the prospect of glory that was set before them, they rejoiced, they gloried in their tribulations, and they knew that their tribulation wrought patience in them. The opposite is the effect of trouble naturally. If we have trouble we get impatient, fretful, looking particularly for some way of escape, but here is the mercy, the rich grace of God, that the trouble that a soul experiences, the providential difficulties that come, work patience. Berridge expresses it well for us:-

But when our Master would bestow  
Much patience on His friends  
He loads their shoulders well with woe  
And thus obtains His ends

A patient waiting on God works experience of His goodness, His faithfulness, His power to support, His wisdom to direct, and His mercy to comfort. And this experience works hope, another effect of the death of Christ. Experience worketh hope. "Hope thou in God" says an afflicted soul to himself. "Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him." This trouble will end, it will yield me satisfaction, it will bring to me the peaceable fruits of righteousness. God will magnify His goodness in me by means of it and so this hope, this hope fixed in God, like an anchor cast into a good anchorage, maketh not ashamed. We are ashamed of sin if we are rightly taught, we grow more and more ashamed of that, but ashamed of Jesus, ashamed of grace, ashamed of justification, ashamed of the peace of God, ashamed of trouble that comes for His Name's sake; No. "Hope maketh not ashamed". We are not ashamed of waiting and there is a root to this and a mighty strengthening of it: "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This is a secret thing - distinctly known when God sends His love - but never to be adequately expressed. The sensation is wonderful, beautiful, softening, humbling, enlarging, melting, elevating, raising the heart to God and making His things the best things. You know it who have had it. Then the Apostle expands, enhances, lifts up, the grace of God. "For" he says "For when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly". "Died for the ungodly". You are troubled at being ungodly, and what a mercy that trouble is, but if you were not ungodly what would Christ be to you? Make a distinction if you can between being ungodly in life and ungodly in feeling. He who says he is not ungodly makes God a liar, who says that "there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not". "When we were without strength" means that we were dead, alienated, corrupt, far from God. Then Christ died for the ungodly. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die". A righteous man here means a man who is strictly just and whose justness may command respect but never excites love. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man" - a kind man, a man who

shows kindness - "some" would even make that sacrifice, they "would even dare to die". "But", says the Apostle in our text "God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God makes conspicuous His love, exhibits it, lifts it up, in a matchless manifestation of it, in that while the people whom He will take to heaven are sinners, His Son Jesus Christ died for those very persons. I must first of all, as enabled, speak a few things to this great word embracing a world of guilt, and pollution, death and hell. Sinners; may you never be sinners before me in your practice. Seek to be moral, set a high standard of morality before you for your conduct, young men, young people; set a very high moral standard up for your life. Let your yea be yea. Eschew lying, eschew all things that are evil. Be upright in all your conduct. But when you have done that - and I hope you will do it - then this word "sinner" will belong to you, for it is written, - and do attend to it when I quote it - it is written: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it." And that is your case, that is my case; nothing better. O sinner, what a solemn condition you are in. A sinner is, in Scripture language, one who is alienated from the life of God through ignorance and by wicked works. The life of God was the pure life given to Adam when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul, and God was the author of that life. A pure life, straight with the will of God, capable of doing the commandment of God. And to be alienated from that is to be wicked, to be fallen, to be doing things which God said we were not to do; omitting to do the things He commanded us to do. Ignorance there means ignorance of God, of His nature, His revealed will, His holy law, His strict commands, His just claims upon us. Wicked works there are works done in the flesh, done in unbelief. Alienated from the life of God through ignorance and wicked works. What a solemn place; and this was the condition of every one of us when we came into this world and it is the condition of each one not born again now. A sinner in Scripture language is again one whose mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. "The carnal mind is enmity against God". O what a condition, a worm fighting against omnipotence; a sinner daring the holy God; hating Him, guilty in his heart of Deicide every day, wishing - if he thinks of God - that God were other than He is. This is enmity. A sinner in Scripture language is a person without strength. Without strength to

do the will of God, without strength to obey the law, without strength to overcome his vile propensities, without strength to will, to pray, to fear God, to walk before God. Without strength of every sort and kind that would be pleasing to God under the law. A sinner in Scripture language is again a man who is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and a solemn thing it is. A prayerless man is a man who is treasuring up wrath. An unbelieving man is a man who is condemned already. A proud man is a man who is abominable in the sight of God, and this is what ~~the~~ man; <sup>is</sup> here is a sinner; do you know him? In this sinner's heart are all manner of sins; blasphemy, idolatry, murder, hypocrisy, theft and every sort of sin in this sinner's heart live, a swarm of iniquities. What will God do with such a person? What can He do with such a person? A sinner himself is just helpless and he is mad; madness is in his heart. Though this is his condition, he thinks it not a bad condition he is in. Though he is so wicked, though he is full of enmity against God, yet he dares to judge God. And if God does not do what a sinner thinks God ought to do, he does not hesitate to say God is unjust. May you hear these solemn things out of God's Word, for they are not my words that I have spoken to you; I have quoted Scripture. May you be brought to consider your latter end. May you be born again, have eyes to see and hearts to feel what sin is, what it is to be a sinner. Now the Holy Spirit has put this Scripture so as to unutterably enhance the love of God: "But God commendeth" - makes it conspicuous, lifteth it up that His children shall see it, and extol it, wonder at it, melt under it - "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us".

In the next place then I would say a few simple words upon this conspicuous love of God. It stands above all else. The origin, fountain of salvation, everything that was necessary for salvation, this love provided. A new righteousness, a new way, a new ground, a new law, this love provided. A new nature this love provided. A new nature - God will not patch up the old nature; He has provided a new nature, called the divine nature, through which, all partakers of it, escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. And the manifestation of this great, this highly commended love, is in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost commendeth God's love toward us "in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" and

by His servant John in the Gospel: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son". That is the first and the last manifestation of the love of God, that is to say, everything that love could devise was manifested when Christ the Son of God appeared. It is a great thing to have eyes to see this love, hearts to feel it. A great thing to have the Holy Spirit given to shed it abroad in the heart. A great thing for God to condescend to commend it to us; to commend it, speak of it, in this wondrous way, in giving His only begotten Son. Whenever it is felt the sinner says, for substance,

On such love my soul still ponder  
Love so great, so rich, so free,  
Say whilst lost in holy wonder  
Why O Lord such love to me?

And now in the next place let us look at that which particularly commends the love of God in the text, namely the death of Christ for sinners; that Christ died for us. Forgiveness of all sins could only be on the ground of satisfaction afforded to the law, and to divine holiness, to divine justice. The death of Christ is relative. It relates to two parties. It relates first to God. It is a sweet savour of rest to God. To the people who had polluted His holy Name He says, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, "I will accept you with your sweet savour", that is the savour of rest. When the Lord God had destroyed the earth by a flood, He had not purged sin from it. He had not purged sin from the eight persons who were saved in the Ark and it was soon manifested. And the Lord said to Noah that He would no more destroy the earth. The wickedness of man was very great and He says I will no more destroy the earth. And when was that? When He smelled a savour of rest; when He smelled the sacrifice that Noah offered. When the Apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, would have them walk in love to one another, what does He base the exhortation upon? Why, upon this savour of rest; even as Christ offered Himself a sweet smelling savour unto God. The atonement looks Godward my friends. It related to God's nature, to God's claim on man, to God's holy law. Honour must be given to God's nature. His perfections must be magnified in the salvation of sinners. Honour must be given to the law. Jesus Christ magnified the law and made it honourable, and it would be well

for us if we were more concerned for the honour of God's Name. We have polluted it - He tells us so - and Jesus Christ honoured it, and the Father smelled a savour of rest. He would go no further than the atonement; that gave Him satisfaction. With that He was infinitely well-pleased; with that He could now look upon sinners and bless them. The atonement is relative; it relates to God, my friends, and a great thing it is. I hope God will make Himself great to us. I think it is one mark of the absence of God from professors, that they are so light, so trifling; that there is little or no solemnity amongst people; apparently little or no sense of the awful greatness and majesty and glory of the Divine Being on the minds of men. Why, is it not as easy for some of you to talk about God - if ever you do talk about Him - as it is to talk of some neighbours, of some business? And why is it? Because you do not know Him; because there is not that sense of His mighty power and divine majesty and glory on your hearts which there would be if the Spirit of God dwelt in you. And professors, and people we would fain hope well of, show a sad lightness in speaking of God and His things. God is jealous of His own Name; He pities His own Name which we pollute. He says so: "I have pity for My holy Name which ye have polluted." It is a great thing and very attractive to the Lord God when a man trembles at the word of God; when the majesty of God is so present as to make a sinner tremble in himself. "Lord", said one "I have heard Thy word and I trembled." God deliver us from a trifling religion, a light-hearted religion, an easy going confidence. Well, the atonement then looks to God, and you have it in the Hebrews (8 v 2) where the Apostle says that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Priest, and He is a minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. He serves toward God. His face, in sacrificing, was to God. And in the next place the atonement is toward sinners, and for sinners, even for the election of grace. This was necessary. This Scripture makes the death of one necessary: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". Now that sentence can never go unfulfilled in any case; either in the Person of the Surety or in the person of the sinner, that word must be fulfilled. O trembling thought, sinner, it must be so. Either you must pay the debt, or one must pay it for you. Either you must die under that sentence, or Christ must take that death from you and experience it Himself. "While we were yet sinners" He had respect to His children. He loved them with an eternal love and therefore He

came to give His life for them. "I lay down My life for the sheep" This was what Christ did, died for sinners. May we keep the word before us "sinners". Not for good people, but for sinners. Not for people who have managed to overcome sin, but for sinners in their sins. He took their sins from them; He took their death on Himself; He took their debts and engaged to pay them; He took their guilt and engaged to atone; He took their law to Himself and engaged to obey it perfectly. To do this it was necessary that He should be perfect in His nature - God-Man; perfect in His life, obeying absolutely every precept of the holy law. And then that He should lay down His life a sacrifice. The law is life for life; an eye for an eye; tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot; that is the law. Jesus the Son of God met it, fully met it. Must you, O sinner, be pure in heart in order to see God? O behold the Surety whose heart was pure. Must you be straight with the law? Behold that One of whom it is said "He magnified the law and made it honourable". Must you be pleasing to God? See Him of whom it is said by God Himself: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased". Christ died for sinners. He yielded up His life, voluntarily gave it up; was no unwilling, mute sacrifice, but a willing, knowing sacrifice; knowing in Himself what He had to do, to bear, to suffer. He knew it all. I would like to say a few words upon how people come to know this. I do not wish to paint pictures for you to look at. I wish, if I may be so favoured, to speak words that you may hear, and that, if it please Him, God may apply and make useful to you. We may gaze on a picture with much admiration, but we see one thing among others in the picture, and that is death. Nothing animate, no mobility in the face, no living gaze in the eye, no voice. We want something - in true religion there is something - living, something that comes near people, into people. So let me, by the help of God, say a few words as to how this death of Christ becomes known, and where it becomes known. It becomes known by the mighty teaching of the Eternal Spirit. When a man is a sinner - I mean feels himself to be a sinner - when he is a sinner in his own sight, to quote Hart

Though all are sinners in God's sight  
There are but few so in their own

when one is a sinner in His own sight - then he is lost. And O I can

speak a little as to what some of you may be experiencing and how you are stumbled by your experience when you perceive all manner of sin in your hearts. Thoughts you cannot quell, thoughts you cannot get rid of; horrible thoughts, hypocrisy, guile, malice, murder, enmity, envy. You are a sinner; poor creature, you are a sinner, and do not know what to do. How to live, you know not. How to die, you know not, dare not think of it sometimes and yet it is always present with you. One of the most amazing sights that you will ever get in this life will be the manifestation to you of the death of Christ, of which you may have heard hundreds of times, of which you have constantly read in the Scriptures. Yet now, when the Holy Ghost comes and sets it before your eyes, it is a new sight. You may be ready to say, I never saw this before. I never thought of it like this. Why, it is bigger than my sins; it is greater than my guilt. Ah, it is an amazing thing this, and when we get old it is just the same, only greater. The same great atonement, great love, great merit, great power sufficient to introduce into the presence of God without spot, one who is full of sin. And when you believe it, you may say I do really believe it, but I do not, I cannot, believe I am interested in it. Well, that will bring you to another stage. You will not only want to see, as you do at times see, the infinite sufficiency of Christ's death, but you will want to see it was for you He died. Want to believe it, to feel the power of the death of Christ in your conscience. And how shall you feel it? one says. Well, when it comes you will feel it. What will you feel? The removal of your guilt, the melting of the stony heart, the removal of the veil from your heart, the coming to you of God, the entrance into your heart of peace, the perfecting of your conscience in peace and the sweet sensation of being accepted in the beloved. When this death comes in, then your own death goes out. When this powerful blood comes in, then your guilt flies away, then your fears are dispersed, then your gloom is lifted, then all your guilt and all your trembling and all your fear of hell you will find taken away and you are before the Lord a poor, happy sinner, trembling notwithstanding at His majesty and blessed with a filial feeling. It will quiet your mind and hush into a calm all the storm you have been living in. It will teach you to understand the difference between flesh and spirit - "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" - and so you will say, now I perceive I am not to get better in myself, I am not to cast out any sin; that is not what I am told to do, for the Lord God



will do it all in me and for me. What is my case is this, I am a poor creature in myself, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." What God does is Spirit and it makes you spiritually minded. The death of Christ works spirituality of mind, conquers sin, casts down imaginations, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. The death of Christ is lifted up by the Holy Spirit in the gospel as the brazen serpent was lifted up by Moses, reared high, that all bitten Israelites might view it and, viewing it, be healed. Yes, sinner, you will see it in that light. "In Thy light shall we see light". It comes in, it makes its own way, and this is what the Apostle Paul speaks of when he says in the Corinthians, second epistle, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here is a piece of death and here is a living Saviour brought together. Here is one who says he deserves hell, and here is a Saviour who brings him heaven. A wretch undone is made happy in the Lord. Now he has a prospect of glory; he rejoices in hope of the glory of God. It is by the Spirit and the place is the conscience. The conscience; it is a great thing to have a quickened conscience, an instructed conscience; a conscience that says, I can never be satisfied with anything short of that that honours God. If the Lord is not honoured I cannot be saved, and something in the man says, I do not want to be saved at the expense of God's honour. Now when he sees that Jesus Christ has honoured God, when his conscience gets a sweet, powerful explanation and application of the atonement by the Spirit, then he says, I am content, I am satisfied. You have this set before you in the lack of it in the Hebrews where Paul, speaking of the continually repeated sacrifices under the old dispensation, says they could not make the conscience perfect; they could not give satisfaction as pertaining to the conscience. How could they? They did not satisfy God, then they cannot satisfy a sinner. What satisfied God is necessary to satisfy that conscience that is enlightened by God. If you realise this it will enhance the atonement unspeakably in your estimation. Jesus Christ died, died for the ungodly. Now by His precious death sinners are justified; justified by His blood; justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. O sinner, do not try to mend your case, for you will never succeed, but may you be enabled by

precious faith to cast yourself on the bottomless and illimitable ocean of the merits of Christ, and God will own it and one day say to you - Be it unto you even as you will. This is that then that God commends so highly, makes so conspicuous to a sinner's view, namely His love, by the death of Christ. "God commendeth", speaketh about, openeth up, and lifts high, and makes so sweetly conspicuous as that the believing heart looks at it and says, this is what I want. That is a very important Scripture in this epistle a little further on where the Holy Ghost says, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." God prepared for His dearly beloved Son a sinless body and in that He condemns sin, that in the sinful nature of His people He might magnify the law, make it honourable in them, fulfil it in them. Well may it please the Eternal Spirit to commend the love of God to you. O wounded soul, O afflicted sinner, O you who are afraid of yourselves, afraid of law, afraid of sin, afraid of sinning; who know your hearts to be full of evil, all manner of evil, may this blessed love of God be commended to you by a view given to you of the precious death of the Lord Jesus.

AMEN.