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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 17 April 1921

ROMANS 7 v 25

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So
then with the mind I myself serve the law of
God; but with the flesh the law of sin"

It is a good thing to go thus unto the Lord. Praise is comely for the upright. There are two great reasons, including all other reasons that you may gather, for giving thanks to God. The first is - it is good indeed to believe it - that God is. It is matter for thankfulness that there is a God, a God of infinite perfection; the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, to whom is due honour and glory both now and for ever. It is good that there is, according to Scripture, a first cause, independent, giving being to whatever exists, receiving nothing from any creature - God, who subsists in Three Persons, each Person being God, yet not three Gods, but One God subsisting in Three Persons. Infinitely blessed in Himself is this God, and it becomes His creatures to thank Him that He is. I know that this does not appeal to a fallen mind; it cannot for it is a mystery. We can never comprehend God, never understand Him. If you begin to try to understand God you may find yourselves landed in infidelity, for reason fails here. There is nothing contrary to a pure reason in the Being of God, but to a corrupted reason everything in the Deity is wrong. To the pure all things are pure, but to the unbelieving nothing is pure. No, not the very Being of God. But I say, we cannot rise to this. I name it as a great truth that it is due from us to be thankful that there is a God, a God of infinite perfection who cannot do but what is right. God - independent, eternal, invisible, immortal. If, in any measure, we rightly apprehend this Being, we shall tremble at His majesty; we shall fear His glorious Name. It is a great mercy to be made a believer. I say to you again, if you attempt to comprehend God, to understand Him, either in His glorious Being or in any of His works, you may find yourselves leaning, falling into, infidelity.

The second reason for thankfulness is God in the manifestation of Himself to His people, and this simple word is capable of infinite enlargement. It embraces the whole of the scheme of redemption; therefore it embraces the Person and the work of Christ. It embraces the Father's eternal electing love; it embraces the Son's infinite willingness to be a suffering Surety. It embraces the work, the invincible grace of the eternal Spirit in each elect vessel, in each eternally loved and chosen child of God. And further it takes in, not the conflict only, that every child of God has within himself, but also his confidence as to the issue. There is an issue to the conflict and we have it in the text. The text brings a reflection, a question, presses a question on the mind. What is it for which particularly the Apostle gives thanks? This question leads back, carries us to the verses which precede the text. It leads us into a battlefield; it sets before us a great struggle. Two opposite principles, principles which, being by their nature opposed each to the other, must go on fighting; neither will give in; one must be killed. The Apostle entered into this, he describes it; he tells us what he himself is; he tells us what he himself would fain do; he tells us that he is hindered in that which he would fain do; he tells us what he would not do and then relates that he is driven to do it. He is torn to pieces as it were; he is two men, each different from the other. One has a heart in heaven, and the other a heart in hell. One loves holiness and the other delights in pollution. The one wants God, and the other rejects Him. The one would obey and the other revels in disobedience. The one would please God and the other delights in displeasing Him. Tis no plaything that the Apostle sets before us, no little matter. It is a solemn business with him, and if we have the new nature which he had, then we shall experience, in our measure, what he experienced, for certainly we all have the old nature which he had; we are like him in that particular, and we are all as murderous as Saul of Tarsus was; as full of murder for everything that is good, as he was. O if we have but his grace in any measure; if we have but his love to God and love to holiness in any measure; O if we have that desire for good which he had in any measure, what favoured creatures we are. It wont be long before the end of the conflict comes to every saint; it wont be long before this congregation is in eternity, and where - which of the two places in eternity, shall we be in? If we live here without conflict, die

without conflict, then our place will be hell. If we live in conflict, if we fight, if we wrestle against all principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places, heaven will be ours. Meanwhile, here is the trouble. Let us look at the conflict, for without that the text has no meaning to us. Much as it had to the Apostle, it has no meaning to us. He says - That which I do I allow not; that that I hate I do, and the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not that I do. Now here is a man with opposite principles working in him, the flesh lusting in him against the Spirit and the Spirit in him lusting against the flesh, and these he found to be contrary the one to the other, so that he could not do the things that he would. And that went both ways, yes it went both ways. If you seek to excuse yourself in sin by quoting such a Scripture, you are self-deceived, and devil-deceived; you are doubly deceived. Says the Apostle, these are contrary, the one to the other, so that I cannot do the things that I would. I cannot do the good that I would. Bless God, I cannot do the evil that I would. Do you say that? Do you understand that? He brings this conflict to a point and he gathers up this - I have a law, I find a law that when I would do good evil is present with me. Let us look at this law, a law to do good. A law is a rule, a commandment, that which is laid upon a person and in a person. In the Apostle there was this law; it was the law of the Spirit of life in Christ; it ran in his conscience, it ran in his understanding, it ran in his affections, it ran in his will. The King's writ runs, God's law in the heart runs, into every faculty of the soul as I have just named; a law to do good. What is good? What is good? When one, understanding not what he said perhaps, said to the Lord - "Good Master what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" - the Master said - "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but One, that is God" as if He should say, if you do not believe Me to be God, don't call Me good. God is good. What is good to us? To believe in Him, that is doing good. "What work shall we do?" said some. "This is the work of God that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent". That is easy, people tell us, quite easy. Believe in God, who does not? The question rather is, who does? Do you, do I, believe in God? To believe in Him is not to comprehend Him, but it is to apprehend Him. It is to have some apprehension of His majesty as He reveals Himself; of His justice as He expresses it in the law; of His holiness as that holiness reveals itself, forbidding the approach of a sinner to God.

It is to apprehend that you have some relationship to God and that He has some claim on you; that His claim on you is right, that your relationship to Him is solemn and binding; that His claims on you are that you should be His, that you should fear His Name. And when this is realised, when faith goes out to this God, then it is doing good. And when you would believe on Christ, when you would look to His blood, when you would plead His righteousness before God, when you would depend on His grace, and His grace alone for salvation, that is good. When you would be humble before the Lord, submit yourself wholly to Christ, and to the revealed will of God in His Word, and in His providence respecting yourself, that is good. When you would worship and lie at the footstool of mercy, that is good. When you would be humble, humble in your spirit, humble to men, before men, humble according to the will of God, that is good. When you would live to Christ, forming the judgment that the Apostle Paul formed when, to the Corinthians he said - "The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that if One died for all then were all dead; that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again". When you judge that you should not live to yourself but to Christ, that is good. Ah, and when you would hate sin, when you would hate the garment spotted by the flesh, when you would leave evil alone, not touch it, not look at it, that is good; that pleases God. When I would do good, when I would be devoted to the fear of God, as the Psalmist said - "Remember Thy servant who is devoted to Thy fear" - that is good. There are many other things one might name, but those that I have named embrace really practically everything belonging to a child of God. When I would do it; there is a law in me. Look at this, look at it brethren. Do you know it? Can you sometimes appeal to God Himself that, as far as you know yourselves, this would be your life, to be the Lord's, to be His in spirit, to be purified in your affections by the Spirit of Christ, to be purged in your conscience from sin by the blood of Christ. Is that the bent of your mind? It is a great thing when men can say as much as this. It is a law, not something that spasmodically springs up and is there for an hour or more or less, and then suddenly goes down as if it had never been, but a law that is present, that works, that moves, not always prevailing, but present, living, trying to be active, aiming after God, hankering after Him, panting for Him, looking for Him. A law; what a mercy to have it.

That is what the Apostle had. Was this all? No; it will be all one day; yes, it will be all one day. When the saints get home this will be the law, the only law, the only life, the only exercise, the only one way. O what a day it will be, when the saint is freed from sin; when, looking into his heart, he will find no sin; when, being with Christ and seeing Him, he will be like Him entirely. What a day that will be. Did you ever pant for it? O what a mercy to love holiness. "Ye that love the Lord hate evil". "Give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness". What a mercy it is, I repeat. But this was not all the Apostle had. Alas, he said, no, I am a wretched man. What could make one, so heavenly minded, wretched? Why, the opposition and the working of another law. I see another law - though I delight in the law of God after the inward man - I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. This law of sin in the members is, in another place, called the body, "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts". It is sin. Sin has a law, a law giving out its commandments, a law insisting on obedience, and here is the child of God with this. He said "evil is present with me". "When I would do good evil is present with me". What is evil? There is but one thing that can strictly be called evil in all creation. In earth and in hell there is only one evil thing. Not punishment; that we may think evil. No, not punishment. Punishment in hell is not evil. Rutherford, speaking of the suffering of Christ, calls them an innocent hell. It was God's infliction of punishment on His Son. Punishment in hell is not evil. Sin is evil. Your afflictions, O people of God, are not evil. They may seem to you to be, but they are not. There is no evil where there is no curse, and there is no curse in the people of God; no punishment, penal punishment. It is Fatherly chastisement, Fatherly correction. Here then that which was so painful to the Apostle was sin in his members. He was infected, infested. Warp and woof of himself, so to speak, had sin and this worked. What is evil? Why, unbelief, that bitter spirit, that daring spirit that says God has not said. "Hath God said?" This is evil. Do you know it? When you would believe does this dreadful thing come up and say, there is nothing to believe? When you would rely on God this comes and says, there is nothing to rely on. Or, if it does not go as far as that always, it says, it is not for you. Whoever it is for, it is not for you. Do you know that? What is evil?

Prayerlessness. What profit is there if we should pray unto Him? Who is the Lord that we should obey Him? This is evil. It speaks in some of us. It lusts and works in some of us, and the Lord only knows how it hinders prayer, hinders a child of God in seeking the face of the Most High. What is evil? Why, ingratitude. That is a mark of the reprobate according to Paul. "Neither were they thankful", it is in the Psalms said. "Unthankful, unholy" are united by Paul when speaking of the wicked. Unthankful? Do you know that? A soul full of mercies, a life bounded, surrounded, protected and blessed by mercies and no gratitude. Receiving good, without thankfulness. Not bearing pain for a minute without murmuring. Do you know that? Evil is present, present with me. Hurt feeling, unbelief, bitterness, rebellion, hardness of heart, quarrelling with God, arraignment Him at the bar of fallen reason; this is evil. A wishing to get rid of conflict, to cast away all care; this is evil. Disobedience to the Lord in His revealed will, both in the Scriptures and as we have it before us in His providential dealings with us. O the evil that we have got. One could enlarge here much. One could say more about the evil than about the good as it seems now. Well, dear friends, do you know the Apostle Paul in this character? You may admire him in his boldness, you may admire him in his declarations in the Scripture of the truth of God, you may admire him in his disinterestedness as he serves the Lord and His people, but do you know him in this conflict which he describes as knowing, as being engaged in himself? Now, with this, he says - exclaiming out of his heart's pain - "O wretched man that I am". But do not forget he had been caught up to the third heavens; remember that he had seen the Lord. "Have not I seen the Lord". Remember that he could say - "Are they Apostles? So am I", that he could say that he laboured more abundantly than all the other Apostles. Yet here, this great man of God said - "O wretched man that I am". One would say is this a Christian? Some big professors have got quite away from the 7th chapter of the Romans and they live in the 8th. I would not like to live with them. I would not like to leave the 7th and live in the 8th according to such teaching. I would rather cleave close to the end of the 7th for I know that that which follows is followed indeed. When one can say "I thank God" then he can say, and does, in his heart, - "There is therefore now no condemnation", but he is not out of the conflict; he will live in that as long as sin lives in him. But it is a wretchedness indeed, is it

not, to be, so to speak, driven from your inheritance, as David speaks - They have driven me away from mine inheritance, from the Lord's presence. To be driven from your humility and your simplicity, and your brokenness; to be driven from your believing and your praying and your worshipping; to be driven away from your submission to the will of God, this makes wretchedness. Ah, many a heart-ache; when the face is washed there is a good deal of fasting, true fasting that is not apparent to men. When thou fastest wash thy face that thou appear not unto men to fast, that thy Father which seeth in secret may reward thee openly and make thy face to shine. "Who", is the question that this wretched man asks, "shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Chained to a living man sometimes, as a punishment, was a dead body, and what a foul thing, corruption chained to you, tied on your back, and you cannot get rid of it. Sin cleaving to you, chained to you, part of you. Who shall deliver me from this, this sickening, weakening, distressing, distracting thing, this body of sin and death that holds me down, holds me from my best beloved? Who shall deliver me from it? Tis a great question. If one say he has managed to deliver himself from all these things, may we not envy him for a moment for he is more the slave of sin than he suspects. Now the Apostle answers his own question, rather God answers it for and in him, and he gives us the answer - "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". The victory is of two sorts. It is one only, but it is of two sorts. First it is by the blood of Christ - "These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". Ah that will give you victory; nothing else will. Your conscience will be purged from guilt when the blood of Christ is applied to it. Nothing else will do it. O child of God, that is the victory

I asked them whence their victory came
They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death

What a mercy to know the blood of Christ; what a mercy to be free from the law by the blood of Christ; to be dead to the law by the death of Christ. Happy soul, struggling though he is, and fighting and often defeated to his feelings, happy soul whose conscience is purged from

sin by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. One writes and we sometimes sing it

My treasure is Thy precious blood;
Fix there my heart, and for the rest,
Under Thy forming hands, my God,
Give me that frame that Thou lik'st best

There is the treasure, there is the hope, there is the victory, there is the song - "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin". Death has lost its sting there; the grave has lost its victory there. Everything that is evil is washed away in that, and the child of God is free in God's account. Often not in his own, but in God's account he is quite free. There is a victory through the most mighty working of the eternal Spirit in the heart whereby faith overcomes everything, as says the Apostle John - "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith". The world in your heart, the unbelief of your heart, overcome by the faith of the operation of God. This is the victory. Sometimes a child of God who has had conflict and been overthrown, as to the triumphs of his faith, can rise and does rise and say

Begone unbelief, my Saviour is near
And for my relief will surely appear

O how good it is when you can believe against your unbelief, hope against hope and find the bottom good for your feet and the anchorage good to hold your soul, when the anchor of hope is cast therein. How good it is to get this victory of faith. "Who is he that overcometh the world?" This is the victory - "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" - this is the victory. You will venture your soul on Christ crucified. Sink or swim, accepted or rejected, you will cast your never dying soul, with all its interests, upon the blessed Person and finished work of the dear Redeemer as manifested to you. "Who shall deliver me?" Why, Christ; God in Christ. "I thank God through Jesus Christ". He wont let a sheep of His be plucked out of His hand. He wont let a soldier of His be beaten down and killed by the enemy. He wont let a pilgrim be robbed and slain and left in the wilderness. No - "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory

through our Lord Jesus Christ". If you have true faith you will never give in really. You will be beaten down, but you will rise again. Christ will come as rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth, to revive faith and make you grow, even grow as the cedar of Lebanon, as the lily, and cast forth your roots by the river of water of life. This is the victory by the mighty power of the Spirit. And we see its mighty power as the Apostle teaches in the Ephesians, where he says to them who believe that they believe by the faith that is in them, by the power which brought Christ from the dead. That is the power that gives the victory to faith. Faith is a creature, created in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and this creature is maintained and nourished. Truth nourishes it; manifestations of Christ nourish it. "I thank God through Jesus Christ". Then all the graces flourish. Hope and love and worship and the fear of God and submission to the will of God, these all flourish when faith has got a victory. Everything is right when faith is strong. Everything - I mean as you understand everything - is right to faith, right to the will. God is right and, says the soul, He cannot be wrong, He cannot do wrong. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Shall not the Shepherd take care of the sheep? Shall not the Father look after the children? Shall not the Prince of Peace see that His children have peace? Faith and every grace will flourish when this blessed victory is given.

"So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God". I, the Apostle, myself, I am His servant. All God's people are His servants. They serve Him in the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They serve Him when they worship Him. "Let My people go" was the Lord's word to Pharaoh, "that they may serve Me in the wilderness". Let My people go that they may sacrifice unto Me. This is serving. They serve God best who worship the most. A militant Protestantism may land people in presumption and hell. An external religion may consist with death in sin. But when you can serve God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in the gospel of His Son, in secret pouring out your heart before Him, submit yourself to Him, and saying with regard to your afflictions - the will of the Lord be done - then you serve Him with the law of your mind. "I myself". All the contradictions of the enemy, all the desperate feelings that his contradictions may sometimes work in you, the Lord does not notice here. Is this My son?

Is this My son? And the Lord receives him and walks with him and blesses him. "I myself". The whole of the soul, every faculty and power and passion of the soul drawn out into divine worship. This is serving God. "But with the flesh" - "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" - "the law of sin". There is that in a child of God that loves to wallow in sin. I wish I could not say it out of my own experience. Alas for me, I do say it out of my own experience. If I am a child of God - I know what I say is true - what a solemn thing it is; one heaven-bound with a nature hell-bound. One cleaving to Christ possessed of a nature that despises Christ. God's people love Christ and yet sometimes there is a grievous feeling, not to be expressed in detail, of enmity to Christ. I have loved Him many a time, but I would be thankful that I have never had to express in this pulpit the inexpressible thoughts that have darted into my mind when I have been standing here against that blessed Person I have tried to preach to you. "With the flesh the law of sin"; and serving it too with the flesh, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Why, Paul was this man, this man in conflict, the Apostle, my friends, the great Apostle, who describes his case in another way in the Philippians when, under the power of the Holy Spirit's grace, he was enabled entirely to abandon himself, lose himself, disesteem himself, and all that he had to count nothing better than dung and dross. This is the same man who says - "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" And now that good man is in heaven and you who are with him in his conflict are going to be with him and His Lord through eternity. O the deliverance that is coming. Now we get inklings; now we get experience of liberty sometimes, walk at large with the breathings of the Holy Ghost in us, and the sweet assurances of the love of God, but what, O what awaits us? Blessed be God for a good hope. Well, here now I must leave it. We have then these things - a man who was as if two men, possessing two principles that were exactly the opposite each to the other; a good man who sinned not wilfully but being driven to it, and a good man kept from the good he would do; he would do it. There is plenty of talk about free will. I believe in free will. I believe the Apostle had a free will. He was free in his spirit. Free, O how free he was; made so by divine grace. There is a willing nature that is in bondage to sin, but there is a will in a new born man that is the slave of Christ; free there. "I would"; it is my

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will to do good. It is not the will of I, myself, the Apostle. Renewed with the image of Him that created him in true holiness and righteousness - I would do good. Well, may the Lord make this out to us. Watch what goes on within you, and if you find evil working see if you like it, love it, and willingly follow it. If there are motions heaven-ward, see if they come from a springing well in you and may God own each child of His in the conflict and speak peaceably for His great Name's sake.

AMEN.