

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 18 July 1926

ROMANS 8 v 13

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall  
die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify  
the deeds of the body, ye shall live"

This verse is an important verse in an important chapter, an observable verse to be much observed by all who are under the teaching of the Holy Ghost. It divides, solemnly divides, the living from the dead by declaring their manner of life. The word "flesh" and the word "Spirit" in this verse and the verses preceding must be taken to mean first of all the corrupt nature of fallen man, and the Holy Spirit of God who, as "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" dwells in all the saints, and as the flesh is active, and its works are known, so the Spirit, where He dwells, and works, is also active, and is known by His works in their fruits. And if we have true life and light we shall at least be exceedingly anxious if we are not assured that we have the Spirit of God in us, a well of water. The Spirit of grace and supplications, whereby we shall look on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn for Him, and mourn over ourselves. The work of the Spirit is not indefinite. It is not always perceived by the subject of it to be His work, but it really is a very definite work according to the terms used concerning it in the Scriptures. If we look in the general way, first of all, at the work of the Holy Ghost as set out in the Word of God, we shall see that what Christ promised has been fulfilled and is being fulfilled, that the Spirit of God shall be in the people of God as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. The saints are cared for by the Spirit, are to be under the teaching of the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, to be sanctified by the Spirit. He is to them a Spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, a Sealer of all the saints unto the day of redemption. The Spirit of Adoption, whereby they cry Abba, Father. The Spirit of wisdom whereby they know how to walk, to walk in the light while having the light, that they may be the children of light. And this work is universal, that is to say, in all the saints. No

child of God is to be without the Holy Spirit. Said Christ to His disciples - and this promise is passed on to the church in inspired Scripture - He shall dwell with you. He shall be in you. "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine". And before that He is the Spirit of conviction, convincing of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. It is only as He teaches, it is only as He opens the mystery of iniquity in a person, that a person sees that mystery really. It is only as He prompts, and teaches how to pray, that a sinner does pray. It is only as He works faith in the heart, that faith is there, and only as He sheds abroad the love of God in the heart, is that love understood experimentally. It therefore will be a very serious enquiry by every person here who is born again, whether he has the Holy Ghost. He wont wish to put the question aside. He will be afraid of persuading himself into things. If you bear witness to yourself, your witness is not true. If men could be assured by bearing witness to themselves, of themselves, who would doubt? But it is not so, nor did the Lord intend it should be so; they are not to bear witness to themselves, that they are the people of God. How can they? Who knows that he belongs to the Lord? that he is a child of God? that Christ loved him, and gave himself for him? without a witness that is external to himself, until it comes within himself, even the witness of the Holy Ghost. Take the Scriptures as they set forth the Person and work of the Holy Ghost, and you will see that He, and that work, are as necessary for salvation as the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus. Christ redeemed from the curse, and the Spirit brings that blessing of redemption into the heart. His work is an application of what Christ did. He is a teacher of the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus. One may say, I see all that. Well, it depends on the light in which you see all that, whether you see it rightly or wrongly. There is a natural light of intellect in which a man, carefully reading the Scriptures, may attain to an external knowledge of the Scriptures, but that has no saving, no sanctifying influence upon him. There is the light of life which penetrates the soul, which humbles it, which brings a knowledge of sin, and if you do not possess that kind of knowledge of sin, then you will never confess sin, and never apply to Christ for forgiveness of sin. May we then be careful, remembering what the Lord said - "If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness". But if it be true light, making the eye single, then the whole body is full of light. And of

course, you know that it is not your feet that guide themselves when you walk, but it is the light of your eye. And if you have that inward light of the Spirit's teaching, then you will walk in that light, and you will be the children of that light.

The next general remark I would make is the very solemn, penetrating manifestation in this verse of that vile, foul, condemning thing - sin - that makes the sinner fuel for the fire of God's wrath. A gloomy thing, but necessary to be known. Ignorance of sin in you means ignorance of Christ. It means there is no going to Him. Ignorance of your needs, the needs of your nature, your needs in providence, and in all things, wherein God, being a supply, would be glorified, is a terrible ignorance. There is little or no inconvenience to any of us if we be ignorant of certain sciences, but it can never be a matter of indifference really to a person as to whether he knows his sinfulness, whether he knows the Redeemer. Sin entered Eden and we inherited it. Our father Adam in his pure state represented us before God, and he, being human nature in compendium, stood before God for all of us, and when he fell the same representation of us, the same, so to speak, standing of all of us, we had in him. Sin did not separate us from our father; sin did not cause a cessation of his headship; and so we sadly, but justly, inherited from him the sin into which he fell, and the guilt of it, and the awful consequences of it in our sinning, and the terrible consequences of it where there is no Redeemer. Now the Apostle declares in this chapter that "They that are in the flesh cannot please God". To be in the flesh in that word is to be just in, and only in, that fallen state in which we were born, but no change has come, no new heart has been given, no faith has been created, no conviction of sin has been pressed in upon the conscience, no conviction of Christ has been pressed in upon the conscience, but just "Dead in trespasses and sins". What a solemn position, what a terrible standing, what a fearful thing, to have that word belonging to us. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God". What, not if they cut off sins? They may cut off sinful practices externally, but they cannot cut out the root of sin in their nature, and therefore they remain sinners though they may not continue in the practice of evil. We are told that in this state "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God". Rebellion against the law of

God began in Eden, it continues today, and will, as long as the world lasts. But, says the Apostle, to these godly Romans, these Roman Christians - "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His". Pause for a moment, and look at this solemn statement. These verses, with the one just read to you, do not, in the first instance, intend different states of experience of the same person, but different peoples. They may be accommodated to changing states in the same person, but the intention of the Spirit in them is to describe two absolutely different peoples, the living, and the dead; the godly, and the ungodly; the believer and the unbeliever; the man who is in God, and can please God in that condition, and the man who is not in God, and who therefore cannot please God. Does it represent you as being in the last state? O sinner, think of it, out of Christ; what an inconvenience, what a solemn thing - out of Christ. Do you not consider at all that in your present state you are just liable at any moment to be cut off, and assigned to that pit where there is a fire never to be quenched, a thirst never to be assuaged, a worm never to die. "But ye are not in the flesh" says Paul. You Christians at Rome, Christians in Galeed now at this moment "Ye are not in the flesh", you are born again. That has taken place in you - After that the kindness of God appeared toward man, the washing of regeneration has come and the renewing of the Holy Ghost (see Titus 3 v 4) so "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit". The new heart has been given, sprinkling with clean water has been given to you, and is now your lot, and happy state. And in the verse which I have read, which is the continuance of the same divine teaching, the Apostle sets before us two solemn things first that - If we live after the flesh, we shall die. This is explained by that word in the Ephesians where we are told that the Ephesians who were then quickened did, before that quickening came to them, live according to the course of this world, according to the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, and to these he says, you shall die. You sow to the flesh, you shall of the flesh reap corruption. You sow to the wind, and of the wind you shall reap the whirlwind. When God blesses His children He deals with them more or less distinctly every day. He deals with their consciences, reproveth them for their sins. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" But when a man lives in sin, and there is no Holy Ghost in him, his sins

accumulate, he does not know them. He cannot say, As for my transgressions they are with me. He wipes his mouth and says, What have I done? It is nought, it is nought. And that goes on till the final reckoning comes, the first and the last reckoning that issues in the word, more awful than can be conceived in the eternity of it - "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels". Did you ever consider it? O worldly sinner, living in and after the flesh, indulging yourselves in sins, did you ever consider the future? It is coming, it is near perhaps, it is coming, when the awful summons will be issued: Bring forth those Mine enemies who would not that I should rule over them. Bind them hand and foot and cast them into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then the Apostle brings forth the other kind of people. The professor, covered with religion, lives after the flesh, but, says the Apostle, If you be true Christians, if you be the Lord's people, then through the Spirit you will mortify the deeds of the body and live. "But if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live". Here, the "flesh" and the "body", the "deeds of the body", would appear to be the same. The body of sin of which the Apostle speaks in the preceding chapter, and he mortified the deeds of his body, and of that he later speaks in the Galatians - "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." And that goes both ways. A professor may hide, or seek to hide, his sins behind that word, but he must be told this, that if he lives after the flesh there is no conflict, there is no Spirit in him telling him that that way is the way of death. But if the Holy Ghost is in a sinner, then He says - when the sin in him, the body of sin and death craves indulgence - But this would bring death, this would bring guilt, this would bring defilement, and so the Spirit works, and wars against the flesh, and the sinner, the child of God, cannot do the evil things that he would, while, on the other hand, at times, he finds himself unable to do the good that he would, as Paul speaks in the 7 chapter of this Epistle. To mortify, is to kill. When a person is afflicted in some ways, it is said that mortification has set in, a certain part of the body is already dead, it is mortified. To mortify then the deeds of the body is to be in

conflict with them, and again and again to deal a death blow, and it may be well and truly said, has been indeed, that if the saint, if a professor, does not kill sin in its conflict, sin will kill him; one or the other. The work of the Spirit is here. Anybody undertaking to overcome sin in his own strength does nothing but a deadly thing. If any child of God here should at any moment in ignorance just say, Well this foul thing I will stand against, I will take care not to indulge it any more, he is even then, and in that saying, under the dominion of sin. But if, conscious of his weakness, and blessed with grace, making his heart aspire to God, he cries to Him, Help me against the mighty, for I have no power to go against myself, he is one who is mortifying the deeds of the body. This is a solemn thing, and I would desire in entering upon this particular part of the text, to do so in the light, and by the gracious assistance of the Holy Ghost. "Deeds". Not one deed only, but "deeds". "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds" - the workings and the doings - "of the body" - of sin and death - "ye shall live".

Now I will take, for the first deed of the old man; its perhaps strongest enemy; its deed - Unbelief. Unbelief nakedly is just Atheism, the opposite of faith, and it is that in every child of God, though subdued. Unbelief of what God is, of what He has done, of what He has promised, of the warnings He has given, of the precepts He has spoken of to His people, and laid down for them as their rule of life. Unbelief of His wisdom, and of His faithfulness, and of His goodness, and of His kindness in grace, and in providence. This unbelief; one may call it a root sin, a fearful sin. Now do you ever come into conflict with it? What will be that grace wrought by the Spirit that will be in direct conflict with this wicked thing, unbelief? Why, faith. Faith is that divine grace which the Holy Ghost works in the heart. It is called "the faith of the operation of God". "the faith of God's elect". In Mark it is called "the faith of God" because it flows from Him. He is the Author of it as well as the Finisher. Faith is a persuasion in the heart; it is a knowledge of God. It is an eye that looks to Him, a mouth that opens itself for blessings, a hand, empty indeed, but a good hand, that goes out to God for supplies of felt needs. And these two, dwelling in the same person, come into conflict, and one must overcome the other. Now if you have faith I will tell you in two or three particulars how it will go on mortifying

this wicked deed of the body, unbelief. First, it will look to, it will live on, it will be coming to, Jesus Christ as unto a living stone. "To whom coming" - not did come once, though that would be true to say, but - "To whom coming". A lively soul making applications to the Lord Jesus for daily pardon, daily strength, deliverances from evil, supplies of all needs and establishment. This faith, this blessed faith, often in the soul takes a short cut, and says - "Lord help me". Here is an enemy; my unbelief. Now take, as an instance of this, the case of David as he relates it himself. He says - "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God". He confesses that his soul is cast down within him. Then, having done that, he looks to his soul, and speaks to it, and says - "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God". There is more in God to help you than there is in sin to cast you down and destroy you. "Hope thou in God". That is going out to Christ, and it is the soul panting for Him, for His presence, for His help, for His righteousness. It is going with sin and all the things that are in the heart, in the nature, going with all of them and with all the wants that the soul is taught to realise, for supplies. This mortifies unbelief. This says

Begone unbelief, My Saviour is near

This says, though my wicked heart says, His hand is closed, I see it to be open. Though my wicked heart says, He will be gracious no more, I believe He is gracious. Though my unbelief says, He wont appear, I believe He will. Though a breaking ship, and raging sea will say, You must be destroyed, faith says, I rely on His promise, I rely on His faithfulness, I rely on His power, and this, this wicked deed is mortified through the Holy Spirit, for He strengthens faith mightily sometimes. You see this strengthening of faith in Abraham who believed in hope against hope, and did not reckon of another's life. Another's life, and another's death, so to speak, were both alike to him, for he looked to, and he lived on, his God, counting that God was able to do everything that He had promised. Everything, that was indeed everything that would be for the soul's salvation. Unbelief had plenty of objects in Abraham's case and naturally he might often have said, I have good reason to doubt, and to fear, and to give up.

How can I, in my condition, be the father of many nations? And unbelief in you may impinge on your weakness, and your emptiness, and your ignorance, and the strength of your enemies, and the natural impossibilities of the case, and say, There is no ground for hope, and that is quite reasonable in nature, quite true. And what is reasonable appeals to us as fallen creatures, but faith does not live here. Faith's Object, faith's ground, is God, God in Christ; a full Christ for an empty sinner, a mighty Christ for a weak sinner, a living Christ for an abominable creature, and faith sees more infinitely in Christ than can ever be found in a sinner of death and of evil. Now come then to our own cases. As the Scotch minister would say, Let us come to application. Here are two principles, and they are in every child of God. The law of sin in his members, and the Spirit of the law of life in Christ, also in him. Now it would be foolishness in me to suggest that a child of God has not this bitter thing in him. The question is, Is there a little faith at times overcoming? You say sometimes to Him, "Lord I believe, help Thou Mine unbelief". A real going out to Christ. "To whom coming" A looking to His precious blood for cleansing, for pardon; to the water of cleansing, the water of separation as the law called it. A believing in the blood of Christ, and the water of Christ, for blood, and water flowed from His wounded side. Blood to cleanse from sin, pardon it, and remove it. The water to sanctify the sinner. And this brought by the Holy Ghost is very wonderful in the efficacy of it, in the victory it gives. This is a great matter. Are we left to the power and dominion of unbelief? or do we find in the conflict, an occasional victory? Do we find that we can say, and do say, to our souls, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him". Unbelief drives, it confuses, it hardens, it binds. Faith is different; it enlarges, it softens, it speaks the truth in the sinner's heart. It speaks the truth about himself, and about his God, and says, Go to Him. It obeys the gracious invitation - "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need". It walks before the Lord in that way, and a blessed walking it is, when a man is enabled to walk by faith. The Apostle expresses the greatness of this grace, as strengthened by the Spirit, when he says - "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." And this, though it may be higher than some of us have attained to, is, notwithstanding,



the one object that faith has before it. One thing that the soul desires, and aims at, to say - "Who loved me and gave Himself for me." And unbelief may be like Apollyon straddling across the way that you are walking, saying, You will never get where you want to go. Nay, it may say, There is no such Person, and no such place, as Christ and heaven. But faith says, There is, there is a precious Christ, and a heaven, and I desire to reach Him and it. And this faith conflicts with unbelief, and so mortifies that dreadful deed of the body. Now you can come in here, doubtless, some of you, and can say, Begone unbelief, we do not want to live by that deadly rule, do not want to be under the influence of that deadly enemy of God and man, that Atheism that lives in our nature, but rather to say before the Lord, "Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." I believe that Thou art what Thou hast said Thou art. I believe that the Son of God gave Himself a ransom for many, and want to have that ransom in my soul. And I believe there is cleansing for a sinner, day by day, and I want to have that cleansing. I believe there is such a thing as communion with God, and I want to come to that communion and enjoy it. I believe in what is called the Benediction: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you" and faith says, That is what I want; to know, love, and enjoy and have communion with the Trinity. Look then - let me say in conclusion - at these two cases. Here is a man who lives after the flesh. He may be religious, he may surpass many a child of God in his knowledge of the Word of God, and go a great deal higher in confidence than the trembling child of God, but the end of all is death. And then there is another man, a poor believer. In the light of the Spirit he sees his emptiness; in the teaching of the Spirit he reads his needs; in the teaching of the Spirit he sees a full, and gracious Saviour, and faith in him, strengthened by the Spirit, says, I will go to the Saviour. If I perish, it shall be there. I will go to Him, I will go for what I need, I will go with my sins for I cannot get rid of them. I will go with my weakness, for it lives in me; with my wants, my poverty, my rags, and all; I will go to Him. Is that how you live? If it is, you shall live according to this promise - "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live". Now that is the only one I shall take up this morning, this wretched, wicked, foul spirit of unbelief that dishonours the Saviour, that binds the sinner, that injures him in every way, and that blessed faith that,

strengthened by its gracious Author, strengthened and fortified by some Scripture, by some view of the Saviour, that blessed faith that says, Unbelief, I wont listen to you. I would listen to, always be hearing, what the Saviour has to say. I would be living on His fullness, depending on His power, and looking to His faithfulness. May the Lord help us and bring us to a point here, for if we are at this point, we are right every way, more or less. May the Lord grant it may be so.

AMEN.