

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday morning 6 January 1924

Text: Romans VIII v 29 and 30

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the first born among many brethren; moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

This chapter is full of what God has decreed for, and given to, His people; full of heavenly instruction and comfort; full in His description of the saints of the Most High God. It tells us how that they are justified; that they are manifested to be justified by the Spirit working in them as the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; that a carnal man, a person, that is to say, who is always and only under the power of carnality, is dead. "To be carnally minded is death" That is the state, the real state, of one who is dead in trespasses and sins; his carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. It tells us of a person who is born again and who is therefore spiritually minded; he has in him a new nature, a spiritual nature; he is in Christ Jesus, a new creature and to him old things are passed away and behold all things are become new. He lives in another kingdom while yet he feels the old kingdom struggling to regain its dominion; lives in the kingdom of spiritual things, the kingdom of God which is not of this world. It tells us that in such a person the Spirit of Christ dwells, and solemnly says "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His". If any man, whatever his profession, or name, or position in religion may be, has not dwelling in him the Spirit of Christ, there is no union between Christ and him; that nothing comes to him from Christ; that he walks after the flesh, that is, minds the flesh, cares for its things, and nothing else, nothing better. This is very solemn and to you who are not possessed of the Spirit of God, it is an

exceedingly woeful word - "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" He is not openly manifested, just a child of wrath apparently as all others are; has no part in this wonderful kingdom of grace, the kingdom of God's dear Son. May the Lord make you believe this, make you feel it and make you cry. May the Holy Ghost bring that living cry into your heart, that it may go out to God "Lord save or I perish".

And the Apostle goes on, as you can see for yourselves, in a careful reading of this wonderful chapter, to tell us that the Spirit of God dwells in the people of God, and that, that being the case, He will quicken their mortal bodies by that Holy Spirit who dwells in them. That sets a prospect before the church of Christ, that though they are to die and corruption feed on their bodies, yet that Holy Spirit who dwells in them shall at the resurrection morn awaken them and bring them into the very image of Christ's body, that they may for ever be like Him and dwell with Him. This makes all, so blest, debtors. "Therefore brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh" We owe no obedience to sinful flesh, that is, to sin; we owe it nothing but hatred. May we hate sin, as sin; we are not debtors to it. When some sin, working in you, claims obedience, may grace enable you to say "I owe you nothing; I owe you no obedience, you are my enemy; I am your enemy. We are debtors, debtors to God; debtors to the Father; debtors to the Son; debtors to the Holy Spirit, and we owe allegiance to nothing else, to none else, that is to say, after the Spirit. What a wonderful mercy it is to believe that we are debtors to the sovereign grace of God; that whatever we have of hope in our hearts, of spirituality in our minds, of the knowledge of sin, of the knowledge of the blood of Christ, whatever we have of these things, and of a sense of God's wonderful wisdom and goodness about us, we owe to His sovereign electing love, and to the gift of His Spirit to us. O what praises we ought to give unto God; we owe ourselves to Him. That is true naturally and one may say doubly so after the Spirit. We owe Him all that we have; praises be to His blessed Name.

And then he sets forth the high privilege and position of

the saints of God, that they are children, and the Spirit bears witness to this truth. We are children, the children of God. And if children, then naturally it follows, heirs of God, and if heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, the elder brother, the head of the church, who has all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and love and grace in Himself. "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" and who, speaking of Himself in the eighth chapter of the Proverbs says "Riches and honour are with Me, yea, durable riches and righteousness". And beggars are joint heirs in all this; poor sinful worms, joint heirs with Jesus Christ in all this. O should the Spirit open this to any of us today, it would make it a good day to us, a great day. But then, before the full entrance into the possession of these riches, the full experience of the heir-ship and joint heir-ship here expressed, there is much trouble. The creation of God groans; the people of God in their new nature are subjected to vanity, not willingly, not after the will of the Spirit; No; they are subjected by Him who hath subjected them in hope, in hope of a final deliverance. They groan, they groan being burdened; they groan being assisted by the Spirit; they groan with groans unutterable in prayer, as the Spirit indites prayer in them. And in their groanings there is acceptableness to God, yea and in their groaning there is hope, because they look forward in hope to that which is to come. They do not see it fully; they just, at times, get glimpses of it; yea sometimes they get a little nourishment from it. As a swallow flying catches her food, so faith will, and does at times, catch nourishment from this great truth; the best is to come. The worldling's best is here; he has it for a moment and passes away. The child of God's best is to come; he gets a crumb now, just a glance again and again, a glimmer of hope, a touch of mercy, a sense of love, and the passing, if I may use the word, the passing presence of Christ. But O that blessed inheritance to which he is predestinated awaits him and because of this sweet hope he patiently waits. Hope that is seen, that is, the thing you possess, you do not, you cannot, hope for, but, not seeing it, you hope; therefore are saved by hope. We are saved from despair; we are saved from yielding to the enemy's suggestions that it is all wrong; we are saved by hope, this blessed hope of

a future inheritance, a kingdom preserved for us, for which we are also preserved. "Reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God". This is that which a groaning child of God at times has set before him; he looks for it, yea he is enabled to obey his Lord and Master who says to him - "Lift up your head for your redemption draweth nigh". Look to the Lord; the day is coming when you will not count your life by days and months and years; the day is coming when you will have done with time as we now have to do with it. That wondrous time is coming when it shall be said, proclaimed by the great angel, "Time shall be no more" and then the sweetest hopes will be fully realised; then the strongest faith will sweetly expire in an open vision, and then no more absence but an eternal presence. My brethren, God has set this before you. Some can say it has been set before them clearly in a good measure. Others may have had passing glimpses of it, glimpses which have fired their soul with warm desire, which have made them feel what Philpot says, that they are a bundle of desire. O to be right; O to be God's; O to belong to Christ! A bundle of spiritual desire. And then, O to get with the Lord; to have done with what causes us shame and pain here below; to have done with sin, never to have another abominable thought, never another feeling of discontent, never another wish to have the bitter that is in your cup taken out, for there will be no bitter in it at all; to be with the Lord and seeing Him as He is; to be transformed into His likeness. Well, these great words are in this chapter and I would recommend you carefully to read and as you read, may the Lord open it to you.

Then comes a great word which is preceding the text, namely, "That all things work together for good to them that love God" The Apostle says, we know it. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." If we reckon circumstances by halves; if we look at a case begun but not finished; if we regard a promise given us not entirely fulfilled to us and in us, and just look at this so and only so, thus we may say of a circumstance that is adverse - this is against me. This is working in a wrong direction; this brings the worst of my nature

to light; this provokes me, irritates me. O if we have faith given us to wait on God and commit the keeping of our souls to Him and commit the keeping and the fulfilment of His promises to Him, and commit the keeping of our judgment to Him, judgment in which we may often be broken, then we may find in us something of this that Paul says "We know that all things work together for good". My friends, it is when we take our own judgment into our own hands, it is when we reckon according to our method of reckoning, which is foolish and full of unbelief mostly, that we are confused. But if we are enabled to be as clay in the hands of the Potter, enabled to commit everything to Him, who says, He will keep His church night and day and every moment lest any hurt it, then we shall come to feel this word to be true.

And then the Spirit expresses the great, the fundamental, essential doctrine of salvation in the text. "For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren." I remember that I said last Lord's Day evening that the doctrine of election is the only merciful doctrine that exists; there is no other door open for hope but this, and never will be. Now I should like, in a few words, as the Lord may help me, to establish that statement before proceeding; to notice the doctrine of predestination in particular. Let me try to establish what I said, and I will do it as well as I can in this way. First of all, let us take a view of our state in Adam as fallen, remembering what God made us in him, upright; that He gave to us in him a good inheritance; that that inheritance was wilfully lost, and every good thing forfeited, and we became, and are all, enemies to God and goodness. If you take the third chapter of this solemn Epistle, you find the state of both Jew and Gentile there set forth. Feet swift to shed blood; throat an open sepulchre; none knowing good; none doing good, no not one; that the law says whatever it has to say to them who are under it. "What things soever the law saith it saith to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God." But now if we have in us such an entire indisposition, an intense untowardness, toward God and everything that is holy, that our heart says to God "Depart from

me for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways; that the law does really, absolutely, justly claim us, and because we resist its claim, it says we are cursed, that God, who loves holiness is just also and can by no means, under the terms of the law which we have broken, clear the guilty; this state of ruin, of guilt, of just condemnation, belongs to each one; there is no difference, either in the Jew or the Gentile. Everyone, no matter what his race, his position, may be, he is just under that law and condemned by it, because he has not obeyed it. And in this condemnation I would state distinctly that the Holy God is most just, absolutely and only just in it, and if we apprehend this, if we, as a congregation, believe this, what have we to say? Only this, that our condemnation is just. Then if that is the case, let me put a question to you. What does God owe you? Is He obliged to you in any way except the way of condemnation? Is He obliged to give you any mercy? Is He under obligation to continue your life another minute, your sin forfeited life? Is He under any obligation to give you bread to eat today, or allow you to breathe a breath without pain? God is under no obligation to us. I press this on your attention. If you quarrel with God, that is your sin, not His fault. There is nothing blameworthy in Him. "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Cannot I do what I will with Mine own?

Do your duty friends, do your whole duty, that is obey the law; love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength and your neighbour as yourself, and you will find what Paul says to be true - The man that doeth these things shall live in them, and live by them. Then the reward will be reckoned of works not of grace. Then it will be wages. God will pay you your wages if you do your work, but if you do it not, is He unjust to condemn you for your negligence? If you do not love Him, is He unjust to condemn you for your enmity? If you are not conformed to His will, is He unjust to condemn you for your want of conformity? Our state by nature is evil, and God owes us nothing. I will say again, the only obligation under which He is to us, as we are sinners, is to condemn us. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" How

then, if this is so, if God is pleased to choose one and leave another, is the one left injured. If the Lord chooses you and leaves your neighbour, does He injure your neighbour? No. Grace reigns; love reigns; mercy reigns. So when the Lord foreknew His people and predestinated them unto eternal life, He injured no-one. You do not quarrel with Him because He passed fallen angels, you take no notice of them, but gave His Son to be a man to die for men; and why do you quarrel with Him because He chooses some men and not others? Here may we bow in that profound reverence of spirit that becomes us when we speak of God in some of His most awful, mysterious, solemn, blessed acts. He knows that at this moment, so far as I know myself, I do not speak out of anything but reverence for His majesty, or of His majesty, for He is a great God. I am not worthy to speak of Him. And one petition, as I have thought of mentioning this matter to you this morning, has been that my heart might be right before Him in this, for it may easily be spoken of wrongly, and may He forbid that I should speak of it wrongly.

Dear friends, remember your fall, remember your enmity, remember your indifference. But one may say - I had nothing to do with the fall. Representation is one of God's great acts; that is to say, He fixed on two men and there are, in the scriptures, but two men as heads. Adam is the first man and the Man Christ Jesus is the second Man, the Lord from heaven. God put into these two heads everything that their respective bodies required. Into Adam He put everything that the human race, to proceed from him, could require of ability to obey the law and of goodness. And, moreover, though you can say personally you had nothing to do with the fall of Adam, I will say this to you, you do approve of that. You approve of it. Your ungodliness, your indifference to God, your way of living, the unbelief of your heart, all, all are so many acts of approval of your present state. And your misjudgment of God is an approval of your ignorance, and your justification of yourself is an approval of your enmity, and your condemned condition; and a very solemn position we are all in. I know that in myself I did, by my life, approve of Adam's conduct in falling. My nature says today the very same thing, but there is another nature that says "God is

right; Adam was wrong and I was wrong and I am wrong. May the Lord look upon those of you who may justify yourselves and condemn Him. May He look upon you and teach you what you are, what you deserve. Listen to me as I speak these things to you and may the Holy Spirit direct you; direct your eyes into yourself and into the word that tells you what you are, what you have done, what you deserve, and put a strong cry into your hearts for mercy. "Mercy good Lord, mercy I crave."

Now if then I have in any measure established this truth, that God is under no obligation to us to do us good; that our being, as it is, our immunity from pain and suffering and anguish, we owe to His forbearance and to His winking at our sins, as the scripture speaks of His winking at times at ignorance, then I say let us look at this word. "Whom He did foreknow" Foreknowledge in God is, in the first place, essential and universal. He would not be God if He did not foreknow everything. The foreknowledge of God is built upon His decree. He saw a thing, foresaw it because He decreed it should be. Things are not because of anything save this, according to this mysterious eternal decree of God, and being decreed He foresaw. The foreknowledge of God is connected with His love. He foresaw His people, having fixed His love eternally upon them as objects of love, and this foreknowledge is connected with this predestinating act of God. "Whom He did foreknow them He also did predestinate". To predestinate is to fix the state and condition of a person, that is what it really means. To predestinate is just to fix the condition and the state of a person or of persons. Says Paul - God did foreknow you of whom I have already spoken, of whom I have said, you are called to be saints; of whom I have said Christ was delivered for your offences, but raised again for your justification; of whom also it is true that through Christ you have access into the grace of God wherein you stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He predestinated you to all this blessedness and the whole of it is expressed thus - "To be conformed to the image of His Son". We stand, so to speak, in the presence of a tremendous truth. We are on one side or the other of it; inside or outside as to manifestation. It is a secret work in God, which is manifested in

time. I am not to speak of that secret. He knows who are His; it is written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. But, says he, "Let everyone that nameth the Name of Christ " (let everyone who, in his day, makes a profession of Christ) "depart from iniquity". That will manifest him to be a child of God, known of God, and built on this great foundation.

Now let us look at this. I say, we stand before a great truth, the awful, the profound, blessed work of God in Eternity. What do our hearts say about it? Is it thus with us - Lord make me know that I am Thine. Are we in that state of mind respecting it, O do tell me that I am Thine; that the Lord Jesus loved me and gave Himself for me; that when I have done with this time state, when the afflictions and changes and troubles to which I am subject here have finished, and my mortal race is run, it will be well with me through eternity. Do tell me this. Is that the state of our hearts towards this doctrine, towards this great God? If so, may we be encouraged by the scripture - "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved." Go on, poor praying soul, the day will come when an answer will come down from heaven. With all the imperfection that a praying person feels attaching to his prayer, it does ascend to heaven and there it is put into the golden censer that the High Priest has, which censer is full of incense, and it ascends to God with a sweet smell. You may condemn your own prayers, but that wont make them unacceptable to God; the much incense is the thing. The golden censer holds these prayers. O what a mercy it is to be praying to God, to be praying that you may be found on the right side, found on the side of Christ, found praying to and cleaving to Him, following after a saving knowledge of Him. He predestinated this foreknown people to be conformed to the image of His Son. The image of Christ is holiness, justice, goodness. If you believe that then you may say - how can I be conformed to this image? This way - "He was delivered for our offences" - took them all away - "and was raised again for our justification". That is the way of being conformed to His image; that is the essence of it. The working of it into the experience is regeneration, conviction of sin, confession of it, falling

flat in your worst condition before the throne of grace, making known your requests by prayer and supplication unto God; looking to the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse you from all sin and seeking to have the Holy Spirit of grace in you to sanctify you. But even then you say - how can I be holy? By the sanctifying grace of Christ. But how can I be just? By the righteousness of Christ. How can I be good? By the Spirit of Christ filling you with goodness. That, in a very short word, and a poor word, is being conformed to His image. "If any man be in Christ" by union, by redemption, by regeneration, "he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." And that comes to pass then that is in this chapter "We are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh". We mind the things of the Spirit. The things of the Spirit are the gospel, the righteousness of Christ, the blood of Christ, the Priesthood of Christ. These are the things of the Spirit, that is, He was commissioned and sent to reveal and preach in the heart and the mind these things. It is to have them before the eye of your faith and in the affections of your heart; it is for your prayers at times to go up to heaven, if I may so speak, laden with these things, full of these things. "Lord I want righteousness; I want redemption; I want the blood of Christ: I want the grace of Christ; I want to have the image of Christ impressed upon my heart. Well if prayer goes to heaven thus laden, what must come down? A sweet answer. And what will the answer be to you, and enable you to do? Why this "Surely", you will say "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength".

How beautiful to the Almighty is a sinner who has the image of Christ upon Him. God loves holiness; Christ is holy. God is just; Christ is just in all His work. God is good; Christ is full of goodness. Now then, if we be united to Christ, we have holiness; we have justice; we have goodness. It is being in the very character of the Lord Jesus; it is being indwelt by His Spirit; it is having His own, pure, blessed, energetic life in our souls, raising us up above the life of sin and death, making sin bitter. People are not rid of sin here, except as to its dominion. They groan under sin. Every child of God is a part of this creation that "groaneth and travaileth in pain together"; part of it, and he waits in hope. His soul goes out in hope to

Him who is the object of his hope and the worker of his hope. He looks forward sometimes to that redemption, to wit, the redemption of his body, when he, a perfect person, redeemed, wholly redeemed, shall be with the Lord. This is the end of predestination, to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. Some of you may say - O but our own wicked, guilty image of death is before us. What a mercy you believe it! O what a mercy it is to believe in the fall; to believe it with a faith that makes it hateful; to believe it with a faith that makes you confess it to God; to believe with a faith that makes you cry "Lord deliver me from this dreadful image, this image of wrath, this image of death and corruption and grant me to wear the image of Thy dear Son. O this work of grace is very great for His people, and that makes them, as they receive that work into their hearts by faith, conformed to His blessed image. So, when a sinner is presenting himself in prayer to the Almighty, the eye of God looks upon another image than his own natural, his own depraved, image. "Behold O God our shield, and look upon the face of Thine anointed". The Apostle, speaking of this blessed people, rising in his faith, and by inspiration writing of the things that await all the people of God, says "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" "Who shall separate us?" Who shall deface this new, beautiful image of Christ imprinted deeply upon the soul? Who shall remove it? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" For, as it is written, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Every day we are slain in a way. But says the Apostle "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is the new creature preserved, preserved for God, God holding heaven for him. This is what is to come for him. O then, you who have this wondrous this beautiful, this glorious image of God's dear Son wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, you who have had God given views of it conveyed to you, have been sweetly informed of it by the Spirit and by the scriptures, what a prospect is set before you; what a kingdom awaits you, a kingdom of immense delight; a kingdom of glory.

Whom He did predestinate, He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren. What! Is not the Lord Jesus ashamed to call a poor, wavering, fickle child of His, a brother? No. Look at that word He sent to His disciples after His resurrection. "Go, tell My disciples, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, to My God and your God", proclaiming in that way, the unalterable, the everlasting relationship subsisting between Himself and His disciples. Are you a disciple? Am I a disciple? What is a disciple? He is a learner. What school is he in? The school of the Lord Jesus. Who is his teacher? The Holy Spirit. What does He teach him? His awful state. He teaches him a new state in Christ. And this disciple has this said to him "I, your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, am ascending into heaven. I am going to My Father and your Father; I am going to My God and to your God." First born among the brethren; the first born from the dead; the first born of every creature; the Head of creation; more intimately, the Head of the church, which is His body, is here before us.

See then, the end of God's predestination - conformity to Christ's image. He is the first born among many brethren and when He has all these many brethren with Him, He will lead them to His Father, as it were, and introduce them to Him, saying "Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me." May the Lord make this out to us. It is a wondrous truth, but I have just feebly spoken to you. May the Spirit bring it in its beauty, in its life, and strength, into your souls and into mine, for it will establish us; it will do us good; put strength into our faith, light into our head and warmth into our affections. May it please the Holy Spirit to make use of this scripture for our instruction and edification.

AMEN.