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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday morning 12 June 1932

ROMANS 8 verses 3 and 4

"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"

The great, important, and blessed doctrine of justification, is abundantly proved in Holy Scripture; in the chapter which I read (3 Romans) it is most distinctly taught. In the beginning of this chapter it is set forth "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus". Condemnation is by the law; justification cannot be by the law, for the law is broken. Justification is not an act of divine sovereignty; it is an act of a Judge, God being the Judge. It is not an arbitrary act of God proceeding from His omnipotence and glorious power. Justification is a process; justification is a declaration that a person charged with some evil doing is acquitted and declared to be innocent of the charge, and very remarkable it is that any should be justified, seeing that they come under that word in the third chapter of this Epistle: "We have before charged" is the marginal reading "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin", under the law, broken law; all murderers, thieves, idolators, and every kind of sin in us, done by us. Evil doings, evil minds, feet swift to shed blood; all such things belong to you, to me, to every Jew, to every Gentile. That being the case, how can such people be justified? An exceedingly solemn question. How can you sinful people - how can I, a sinner, proved to be a sinner in the chapter which I have read - be justified? If we believe in God, if we believe in inspired Scripture, if we believe that we are condemned by God's holy law, the question will not be a trifling one with us; it will be a very solemn question. How can we, seeing that we are sinners, that we have sinned

against a law that is inexorable in its demands upon us, a law that will by no means clear the guilty, a law that is eternal, how can we, seeing we are in this case, have passed upon us the judgment of God that we are righteous? Do you see the point? Do you feel the weight of the truth of your sinfulness? If so, the Holy Ghost in the Scripture which I have ventured to read declares how that can be. It is a profound Scripture; it is an exceedingly wonderful Scripture. The law is, in one particular, impotent and inadequate in respect of one thing; it cannot do one thing; it can bless the righteous, it can curse the wicked, but it cannot justify. That Scripture is most solemnly true, dear friends, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them", and very penetrating is the word of the Holy Ghost by James: "He that is guilty in one point is guilty in all". If you have not committed murder, you have stolen, and being guilty in one point the whole of the law stands against you; the whole of its authority is against you; its penetration is against you; its inflexibility is against you. We stand - O, if we all felt it - we stand as a congregation of fallen men and women in a most solemn condition and position as being under the law. Now the great, solemn, and eternal question respecting righteousness, the righteousness which God will have in all who are to stand before Him and enjoy Him through eternity, is solved in this text. May it come to be solved in the consciences of those of you who, as yet, know not what it is to be either wrong or right. "For what the law could not do". This means the whole law of God. The original of it you have in Genesis when God took the man Adam and placed him in the garden He had prepared for him, and told him that of every tree in that garden he might eat save of one tree, and that in the day he ate of that tree he should surely die. Adam was our father, our representative, our head, and what he did in the garden of Eden is accounted and put to our account. It is accounted the sin, not of Adam only, but of all his children. That is how we stand; related to Adam in nature, in law, we became righteous in him in his creation; we became sinners in his fall. The law took a divine shape in the ten commandments, the ten words, given to the Jews originally but extending, as God's claim on man, to all men; different from the Ceremonial Law which belonged only to the Jews; but this law of God is written in the heart of Gentile as well as of Jew. Think of it; the great law, a good law, a holy law, and a spiritual law, reaching the

spirits of men, claiming them, heart and soul and mind and strength, for God. But, Paul says, we know that the law is good and spiritual and holy; we are carnal, sold under sin. What cannot this omnipotent law do? It could take notice of all the goodness of Adam and if you obey it, it has power to bless you, to take notice of every deed that is righteous that you do. Paul says that if you obey the law then the goodness of the law will come to you; you will live by the law. But, seeing you do not obey it, that no man can obey it, then what it threatens must come upon you. This makes our position as men and women very solemn; as sinners, very terrible, for while the law has power to prove and declare men to be just who are just; to be righteous who are righteous; to be obedient who are obedient; it has no power to step over that line and declare a sinner to be righteous. The law can no more do that than God. It's Author cannot lie; God cannot lie, neither can His law lie. Did we believe this it would make us very sober-minded respecting ourselves and respecting our death, for we must needs die. But the consideration of death in the light of God's truth and the teaching of the Spirit would bring this out of our hearts and mouths: Why must we die? The answer is, because we are sinners. Mortality was born of sin; mortality is the fruit of our transgression. Corruption comes from sin and the Apostle in this epistle says "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin", and the law cannot reverse that; it can only confirm it. The law must vindicate God, and vindicating God, it must condemn sinful man. This is what the law cannot do; it cannot help you. It cannot give you any power to obey it since you have lost the power. May the Lord make this great truth sink into our hearts. It was weak, impotent, in this one particular. The broad, pure, beautiful law - beautiful to a man innocent, as Adam was - that law has this weakness inherent in it. It is an inherent quality of the law that it cannot approve of sin and it has its consequence - an inherent inability to approve of a sinner. Then we stand condemned. Do you believe it? Do you feel it, that you really stand condemned? Suppose you are nearly broken to pieces by trouble; you deserve it and hell after it. Suppose you cannot take a step without pain and affliction; you deserve it and hell after it. I believe that; I have believed it for many years. And then, seeing that God is absolutely, eternally pure, an impure sinner can never, by the law, hope to be with Him. This is what the law cannot do. O, it would be good for our churches, good for you here, if this solemn

truth were more realised, if it were more preached and insisted on; that we are condemned by God's law; that religion, religious training, religious knowledge, religious acquirements, cannot help in this matter. We are just simply under a law, the holy, just, and good law of God and that law has this inability, impotence, inadequacy, in the matter of a sinner - it cannot justify him.

Now, having dwelt on that, let us turn, by the Spirit's grace, to the blessed truth that this verse contains. God. Think of Him. God, the Judge; God, the Holy One; God, who has given a law that cannot justify; God was adequate to the case, equal to show, I say, the difficulty, the impossibility. "God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh". O, the profound, the blessed, glorious gospel of Christ, is in this text. Sending Him. "Behold My Servant", said the Father by the prophet Isaiah. "Behold My Servant whom I uphold". I have sent Him. Listen to Jesus speaking by the same Spirit. And now, says He, the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent Me. Whom I have sent; sent into the world. In this was the love of God manifested toward us in that while we were yet sinners God sent His Only Begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. He sent Him to be born of the virgin Mary, to take our nature into union with His Own divine Person as the eternal Son of God. And the Son willingly, lovingly came. Lo, I come to do Thy will O God. Thy law is within My heart; I delight to do Thy will. So He came, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. This means that Jesus Christ, being under the law, could have, and did have, the sins of the church imputed to Him. If He had not been made under the law under which we are, He could not have redeemed us. The nature that sinned must be the nature that pays the penalty and that very nature must suffer, and Jesus Christ suffered. One of the most solemn and penetrating Scriptures that this Book contains is that in the Galatian Epistle. "Christ was made a curse for us". O, it is very solemn. Christ, the holy Son of God, Jesus, the Man who did no sin, in whose mouth there was no guile, who went about doing good, God being with Him, this very Person received the imputation of the sin of the Church. God made the iniquity of us all to meet in Him. He charged your sins, O people of God, on Jesus Christ. And that involves this, that He must suffer for those sins which were accounted His, though He

did them not, and that suffering is the curse of God, the curse of the law, the wrath of Almighty God, the hot displeasure, the anger of God poured like fire into His bones. Your transgressions were wreathed by the hand of God and put as a yoke upon His neck, thus you read in the Lamentations: The yoke of my transgression is wreathed and come up upon my neck. God, seeing His Son in that condition to which He was ordained. Holy, Holy, Holy, is God and yet He eternally determined the death of His Son incarnate in the place of sinners. Wicked men took Him, bound Him and crucified Him, but "the awful stroke that found Him was the stroke that justice gave". (Hymn 1116), and yet He voluntarily gave up His life saying, when all was accomplished, "It is finished", bowed His head and gave up the ghost. This was God condemning sin in the flesh of His Son. "God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"

Now the consequence of that is in the verse following: "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". The righteousness of the law is the right of the law; it is the very right of the law of God; what it demands. There are two points to speak about here. Briefly the right of the law is an abiding right. As long as a man lives that law is right in demanding of him perfection. Ah sinner, you may feel anger against God, and you may very much resent hearing about it, but the truth remains, God in His holy law commands you to be righteous, and if you are not righteous, the second thing to speak of the law is this, that you must be condemned. But the wonder is this, that that very righteousness which the law demands, claims and receives through Jesus Christ, is found in the people of God. God accounts what Christ did as theirs, as if they themselves did it. This is one of the wonders of eternal wisdom and grace that God can, and does, impute to sinful people who are born again, bought with blood, the very doing and the dying of Jesus Christ, as if they, themselves, did the deeds, and suffered the penalty. Well, this is called the glorious gospel of Christ, the gospel of the blessed God, the everlasting gospel, for it is good news concerning God for sinners; good news to men who know themselves to be sinners; good news to those who once turned their backs on it and hated it; but good news to them as mourning over their condition, that God imputed their sins to

the Lord Jesus and that the Lord Jesus did obey the law for them and suffered the penalty of the law for them and that all that He did and all that He suffered is put down to their account and they are accounted righteous therefore. They are accounted without sin, without transgression, and here let me say that this is the ground, the foundation and the formal cause of their boldness at the throne of grace. They may not always, perhaps not often, fully realise that, but the Spirit of grace gives boldness in prayer for this great truth and reason, that Christ Jesus did suffer for them, and what He suffered is put to their account, and therefore they are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, but that is by the way.

Now the proof of this, the evidence to you, to myself, if we have it; that we "walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit". The "flesh" here means fallen human nature. It means what Paul speaks of to the Ephesians, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air and were by nature the children of wrath even as others. That is walking after the flesh, doing, what you call, as you like. Hating God, perhaps some of you; really actively rebelling now in your minds against the gospel of God. Not obeying the gospel you are condemned; hating the light, you are condemned. But it comes to this with every saint that he does not prevailingly, persistently, constantly, walk after human nature, that is the dictates of a fallen nature, the dictates of a perverted reason, the dictates of vile affections. Ah, if some of us can say to God that the evil we do we would not, that the failures that mark and mar us every day, we are sorry for, that the good we would we cannot do often, through the prevalence of sin, then it is a favour. What is it to walk after the Spirit? It is to be a believer, to believe the testimony that God has given, to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He came to save the lost. To believe that His infinite merit is put to the account of a sinner; that grace is more than sin; that the blood of Christ can remove all sin; that the righteousness of Christ can make a sinner perfect, make him acceptable to God as if he had never sinned. "Accepted in the beloved". It makes him a beautiful person in the sight of God. Almost unbelievable at moments, this truth, that one so deformed by sin can possibly be attractive to God. O, but says God, Jesus Christ, Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and comely

is thy countenance. To walk after the Spirit is to walk in the path of prayer, beginning with: "God be merciful to me a sinner", and coming to that: "Pardon mine iniquity O Lord, for it is great". "Wash me throughly from my sins, cleanse me from mine iniquity." To walk after the Spirit is to walk in humility and in love, and in obedience to the holy gospel. We read that many priests in the days after the resurrection of Christ were obedient to the faith and we read also, concerning the Gentiles at Corinth, that church there, they knew the weapons of warfare of the Apostles, that those spiritual weapons did really cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brought into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Do you know what that is? Proud thoughts, hard thoughts, rebellious thoughts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, into captivity to that Scripture: My son give Me thine heart, and you said Lord here is my heart; it is a poor heart, I have nothing but sin. Here is my heart, take it, seal it, let it be for ever closed to all but Thee. To walk after the Spirit is to cleave to the Lord Jesus; find and feel Him to be your only hope, your only refuge, your strength in weakness, your wisdom in foolishness, your God to worship, your end for enjoyment. It is to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. It is to keep the Passover, even while you are in the wilderness. It is to esteem yourself to be nothing, as the Apostle Paul said: "Though I be nothing". Ah, it is not a difficult thing to say you are nothing, but you must have the Holy Ghost in you to make you understand what it is to be nothing. "Who walk not after the flesh". "Therefore", says the Apostle, "there is no condemnation" What a word. Why you do nothing but condemn yourself every day when you are spiritually minded and reflect upon yourself. When I reflect upon my long time here, in certain states of mind, I have nothing but all but unbearable shame and condemnation of myself. And yet, when one is in Christ and God has made known in the conscience that the obedience and death of Christ are put down to one's account, and that, by God Himself, that is an amazement. It is brought into the heart by the Spirit that the righteousness of the law, all the perfection that the law demands, all the good deeds that the law would have in a man born under it, that that very perfection is in the sinner, through the accounting to Him what Christ did and is. You need the faith of God's operation to believe this respecting yourself and when one is in that

condition of experience, it wins the heart. The sinner says, the Lord has wooed and won me; I am His; to Him I belong. Ah, and you may say, "He wont be in heaven and leave me behind". What He would have you be He makes you and then where He is you wish to be, and the day will come when you will be with Him, for He cannot condemn a righteous person. O believer, God help you to believe this for yourself, the Lord cannot condemn a righteous person, and if He has prepared heaven for His people He must take them there, for He has made them righteous. If you do the commands of God in the gospel, then He will never say to you: "Depart from Me". May the Holy Ghost make out this blessed Scripture to you, to every child of His, and, if it please Him, quicken those of you who now dislike the gospel and give you to see what sinners you are that you may seek to have imputed to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ.