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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, by
Mr J.K. Popham on Wednesday Evening
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Text Romans 8 verse 5

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

The Apostle Paul in this Epistle, sets before the church of God, the great and awful fact, of the fall of man. He insists on that, by divine inspiration, how utterly estranged from God man is, that he does "not like to retain God in his knowledge" (Romans 1 verse 28). A solemn statement, borne out by the history of the world, ever since the Adam fall. Man makes to himself, strange gods. That is true of you, of me, and of all human beings, after the flesh, a very solemn and awful truth. There is not a person breathing, at this moment in the whole world, that is exempt from that dreadful condition of things, the awful universal fall of man.

Then the Apostle enters upon another theme, that theme is the redemption of the church. Here justification by the imputation to her of the righteousness of Christ, justification received into the soul by faith, so, as the Apostle says, in substance, we believe and are "justified by faith", justified by the blood of Christ, redeemed, entirely redeemed by Him. Then he follows on with this, that the believer has "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5 verse 1). That peace "passeth all understanding," (Philippians 4 verse 7) and it is in this way, access is had, to God the Father, through Jesus Christ. Through His redeeming work, and so good hope, sweet gospel hope, enters into a living experience, with tribulation, by the Holy Ghost, who is given. What an amazing religion this is. There is a distinction most absolute, between flesh and spirit, and if we carefully, prayerfully read this epistle, we shall see the distinction, is commenced and carried on, by the Holy Ghost. So "that no flesh should glory in His (God's) presence" (1 Corinthians 1 verse 29).

Coming to this chapter, a remarkable chapter, he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation" (to believers) "to them that are in Christ Jesus," (Romans 8 verse 1) it behoves you, it behoves me, as professing God to see whether this be true of us, in Christ Jesus, in Him by vital union. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." (John 15 verse 1) "I am the vine, ye are the branches:" (verse 5) "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away:" (verse 2) Are you in Him?

We sometimes sing:

Have I union
To the church's living head? (Gadsby's 698 verse 1).

The church is likened to a body, of which Christ is the head, and every member of the body is necessary, and every member in the body has necessarily, blessedly, and sooner or later experimentally, a sense of union with Christ. And the Apostle gives an evidence of this, being in Christ, and therefore having "No condemnation," "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," (verses 1 - 3) that is the fall has made it impossible. Think of it, impossible for the law to justify us. Whatever you do, you will never be justified by the law, for this reason, you start badly, you walk badly, the best that a moral man can do, is stained and dyed with sin. And therefore, under the law, that moral man, can only be condemned.

This draws, a distinct, wonderful line of separation, between the church and the world, between you and the world, you who are in Christ, and have the law of the Spirit of life in Him. "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", not sinful. He had no sin, He did no sin, but God imputed sin to Him. He took all the sin of the church, and laid it on His Son, and therefore, for that sin imputed, to Him, God "condemned sin in the flesh" of Christ, that is in the Person of Christ, in order that the righteousness of the law, the righteousness which the law demands of you, and me, that is perfection, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". (verse 4). "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

We have here then, first of all to consider, what we are to understand by the flesh. "They that are after the flesh." What is this? It is fallen human nature. It is the whole of a sinner, in sin, "dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2 verse 1). That is what is, to be understood by the word flesh. You can never improve it, you can never make it better. Christ Himself declared, this distinction and difference, between flesh and the Spirit of God. A sinner, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3 verse 6). And these are two entirely, absolutely, different things, you can no more make them one, than you can make fire and water, one element. This is quite true.

And it may be a comfort and an instruction to you, if you are enabled, in your conflict, when you find sin raging, lusting, working pride, vanity and all kinds of evil, in your hearts, to your great distress, if you can notice, while that is the case with you. There is also another principal, that opposes and hates, and longs to be delivered from, these very things that distress you. Do, as God helps you, take notice of the distinction, and of the two principals, which are working in you. Remember how the Holy Ghost, by the Apostle Paul says, "The flesh," that is a sinful person, a sinner, "lusteth against the Spirit". Lusteth is a good old English word, which means, desire and struggle, and labour. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." In the same person, in the same church. "These are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Both ways. The flesh cannot have its way entirely, and the Spirit in you, is greatly hurt and wounded, and hindered by the flesh. So here we have, just the whole of a sinful person without grace, they that are in the flesh, they make it manifest. The world is set in their hearts, and they want the world.

They hunger for the world, they go after the world, there is that in the world, that touches their nature, and they go after it. A man follows his heart, a man follows his will, a man follows his disposition. That is to say, what his heart is, what his will is, what his desire is, that he will manifests by his conduct. O this flesh! God describes it by Jeremiah, thus "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17 verse 9). No practice of any man, in a way of deceit, can fully express, the deceitfulness of his heart. The heart is deceitful above all occasions, above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? Who can fully explain it? You have not a line, long enough to fathom, the deep wickedness, the desperate wickedness, of your hearts. This is the flesh, sinful thoughts, loathsome desires. unspeakably wicked wishes and base conduct, that is why men are covetous, and will defraud one another. And that is why the courts of countries, are full of prisoners, because they followed the things of the flesh.

Can you understand, have you ever entered into the feelings of John Bradford? When in London, he saw a criminal, being taken to Tyburn to be hanged, and said, there goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God. Have you ever felt that? O a self-righteous man, who is in the flesh, may despise such a statement, but a child of God says, I know it is true, there is nothing too bad for me, but for the grace of God. "They that are in the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh."

It is to be a wayside hearer, a stony ground hearer, not understanding the word of God, nor the preaching of the word of God. As soon as he leaves the building, as soon as he closes the book, whatever he heard, whatever he read, he forgets. Fowls came, devils came, wickedness came, loose thoughts came, pride came, and he minded these things. Or like the thorny ground hearer, the cares of this world, deceitfulness, riches and other lusts, as it were, carry him away. That is minding the things of the flesh. What shall I eat, what shall I drink, how shall I get through this business, can I profit by it? Thus it is that men mind the things of the flesh.

May the Lord help everyone here, who is not after the flesh, who does not mind the things of the flesh, to thank and praise sovereign grace, that has redeemed, and set them apart, from the world. But they that are after the Spirit, and the things of the Spirit, they mind the things that are in accordance, with their spiritual nature. That is the beginning of vital religion. That is "The fear of the Lord" (God in them, which) "is the beginning of wisdom:" (Proverbs 9 verse 10) by which they "depart from the snares of death." (Proverbs 13 verse 14), and from hell beneath. To be after the Spirit is to be a spiritual person, you may hesitate, and say, well if that means a spiritual person, it cuts me off, because I am very carnal. You may be very carnal, and be very troubled about it, you will be if you fear God. If you are after the Spirit.

But that is not the whole truth, of you is it? Though you feel carnal, though you may be condemned as being carnal, as the Corinthians were, when Paul said, "For ye are yet carnal:" (1 Corinthians 3 verse 3) and therefore he "could not (preach) speak unto you." (verse 1). Paul meant that he was not able to do so, as their carnality hindered him from preaching, what he was otherwise, able to preach. That may be your case, but it was not the whole case, with the Corinthians, neither is it with you. For the Corinthians were given repentance, as also you have, have you not? The Corinthians were blessed, with the communion of the blood of Christ, have you not received this? Look into your soul, into your mind, look at what, if you are enabled to see it, is the movement of your soul. Can you honestly say, the prevailing desire of my soul is to be found in Christ, to be one of His members, to receive and eat His flesh, and drink His blood? If you can say that honestly, out of some experience, then this is true of you. "They that are after the Spirit," this spiritual nature, which God gives to every elect person, redeemed by Christ, will always work this way, - rising, desiring, praying, confessing, hoping, looking to the Lord Jesus, pleading to have the precious blood applied, purging the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

To be after the Spirit, is again and again, to be after His blessed word. Yea, to be after, hearing the voice of God. "Be not silent to me: lest if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." (Psalm 28 verse 1). Is that what you want to hear, that God speaks to you? Can you say with the Psalmist "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly."(Psalm 85 verse 8). A spiritual person wants to be near God. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."(Psalm 27 verse 4). Is that what you want, to be enquiring in His temple? Is that what you want to be enquiring of the Lord? "What wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9 verse 6). "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee."(Psalm 143 verse 8). Keep me in the fear of Thy Holy Name. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."(Psalm 17 verse 5). Is it so with you? Then God help you to take the comfort of this text - "They that are after the Spirit."

Bless His Holy Name, that the flesh in you cannot have its own way. Bless His Holy Name, that there is a desire in your soul, to be at the throne of His heavenly grace, praying, enquiring, confessing and waiting on Him. They "mind the things of the Spirit." A very beautiful, searching, blessed word. "To mind the things of the Spirit," means to be careful about them, to be concerned about them, to be searching into them, to be longing to possess them. Take this point, are you concerned about the things of the Spirit? What are they?

First, the scriptures. Do not make our conscience your guide. I have known people who have done that, I have known professors, who have been walking inconsistently, and said their consciences did not condemn them. I remember saying to a person once, who was walking inconsistently, who said, my conscience does not condemn me. Well, I said, that is because your conscience is hardened. Do not make your conscience your guide. Your conscience may be wrong. If you "mind the things of the Spirit," this will be one of them. Mind the Holy Scripture. The Apostle Paul said to his son Timothy, "you have known the scriptures from your youth" (1 Timothy 3 verse 15). While he would have him mind them, he said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God,"(verse 16).

Now the modernist would take the Bible from us, Hold fast to revelation my friends. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life."(John 6 verse 63). and they did not know it. If you are enabled to read carefully, and prayerfully, this blessed book, the Lord may kindly, occasionally, drop a word into your heart with power.

You say, perhaps I won't remember, and do not get it. If you get some hint of it, if you get a view of it, if you get a hope of it, as you are reading the word of God, ask Him for those mercies. Liberty will follow, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:"(Matthew 7 verse 7). I wish we were more careful, in respect to reading the holy word of God. That is one thing, another thing will be this, you will mind the cross of Christ. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."(Galations 6 verse 14). That was Paul's, minding, caring for that, looking for that, panting for that, holding to that, cleaving to it, following it, the blessed cross of Christ. From that cross radiates the blessed gospel, the full gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ, in the various branches of it. What a cross to Christ, that cross was shame, on it was death, it was a cursed death. To the believer, made a believer, by the Holy Ghost, that cross is life and peace. It is righteousness, it is holiness, it is strength, it is meat and drink, it is comfort, do you mind it? You will mind it, when you are right, in your own prayers, because it will be your plea. You will mind it in your desires, because that alone, can fulfil every desire that is gracious. You will mind it in your companions, for you will want the gospel, you will want it in your hearing, for you will want that, above all other things. You may say, O if I get the least touch, when I am listening, I am satisfied. I am sorry for you; you may be helpt by a touch, but you cannot rest there, if you are godly. You will want to get near this cross, you will want to understand what Toplady says:

Close to the ignominious tree,
Jesus, my humbled soul would cleave;
Despised and crucified with Thee (Gadsby's 1052 verse 3)

You will want your life from Him, and your hope in Him.

Life deriving from His death (Gadsby's 158 verse 3)

You will find this sometimes, when you are minding the cross, these three graces, which comprise all Christian experience. True Christian experience, as the Apostle Paul says, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;"(1 Corinthians 13 verse 13). Faith in the Lord Jesus, Hope of eternal life, Charity, first of all, to the Son of God, then to the people of God, the living church of God. And you will say, of her, bless Jerusalem. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:"(Psalm 122 verse 6). All these blessings are intimately connected with the cross. There is not a good thing, in the world, or in the church, that does not emanate from the cross of Christ. There is not a spark of life, not a grain of faith, not a gleam of hope, nor a feeling of love, apart from the cross of Christ.

To "mind the things of the Spirit," is this also, that you will mind the promises of the gospel, they are yea and amen in Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. "Having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4 verse 8). "Having promise of this life," what of his life?. What you are to eat, and what you are to drink, your comforts, your miseries, your trials and tribulations, your difficulties and adversities, things of this life, not merely comforts. We have many comforts for which we ought to be thankful, but the people of God are a groaning people, as in the chapter "the whole creation groaneth," (Romans 8 verse 22). Everyone who has the Spirit of Christ, groans in himself, and groans for the wickedness of his nature, groans under the burden that God lays on him. He groans under the deprivation this brings, and the removal of it. He groans because, sometimes God allows him to be afflicted by wickedness.

That scripture did not die, when violent persecution died in the nation, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." (Philippians 1 verse 29). Are you suffering in providence, and know something of tribulation, because you are gracious in dealing with it? "Rejoicing that they were counted worthy (by God's electing grace, and sovereign mercy to believe on His name, but also) to suffer shame for His (sake) name." (Acts 5 verse 41). You may be suffering, because God has blessed you with grace. Mind the promises have to do with this, as well as with the life to come. "I will guide thee with Mine eye"(Psalm 32 verse 8). Do not hurry if you are in a difficult path, do not hurry out of it. "I will guide thee with mine eye". If you run before God, you will go into darkness, I repeat it, do not hurry. Why, I must act, no you need not. God will show you when, and how He will work for you, if you can wait on Him.

Be of good courage, wait on His wisdom, wait on His power, wait on His intercession, wait on His goodness, wait on His fulness, wait on His promise. That is minding the things of the Spirit. When you kneel before Him, or when you are walking, or when you are irritated or hurt, almost ready to break, with irritation and anger, and revenge, wait upon God. I remember being in trouble, difficult trouble, with a man many years ago, long before I knew Brighton. I laboured, O I was determined to put things straight. I remember at the end of some months of that, God enabled me just to leave it, and I said, I will do no more Lord, I will leave it with Thee to work, and He did work, and that quickly. Wait on God. Nobody ever lost anything by waiting. Many a child of God, has lost a great deal, by hurrying."He that believeth shall not make haste".(Isaiah 28 verse 16).

"Minding the things of the Spirit," in the next place is, minding the precepts. The precepts of God's word are wonderful, and they are made precious to every living soul. If you love the Lord, you won't want to walk contrary to Him, will you? And if you know His mercy, you won't want to abuse it, will you? No. The precepts, say this among other things, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5 verse 22). They say this, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."(Psalm 37 verse 5). They also say, Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."(Romans 12 verse 20). They also say this, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another:"(Romans 13 verse 8). They also say, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." (Matthew 6 verses 15,16). You may get into a good deal of trouble, by a revengeful spirit, sometimes into prison.

Think of this my friends, any of you who are in trouble, or in danger for trouble, is often a great danger to a child of God. Think of this, "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desirest me:" (Matthew 18 verse 32). If God has forgiven you all that debt, is it much to you, to forgive a fellow servant a few pence? Mind the precepts, they are the things of the Spirit, they come from Him. When the writers of the epistles and prophets wrote on their parchments, these precepts, the Holy Ghost was there, He moved them, and gave them words to write, "Mind the things of the Spirit."

Lastly, for I must close. One of the things of the Spirit is this, ending well. You know one thing, you have got to get to the river that has no bridge. You must get there, that is you must die. One essential is a certificate, that when you get to the other side, you must show it. If you have no certificate, you will get what Bunyan, so solemnly speaks about, an experience of this appalling fact. That there is a way to hell from the gate of heaven. You will get across the river somehow, in a ferry boat or some other way. Then, when you want the certificate, you have not got it. One thing of the Spirit is this "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;" (Romans 8 verses 16 & 17). This is one of the things, and if you are born again, you are a minder of the things of the Spirit. His blessings, blessings that He is commissioned to bring, into the souls, of the people of God, blessings He is to show to the election of grace. Christ, His righteousness, His atonement, His priestly office, His intercession, His omnipotence, His care, His watchfulness, His fulness.

These are the things of the Spirit. Do you mind them, and do you mind your own things? How shall I get out of this? and something says, do not mind how, that is the flesh. When the fear of God is with you, in you, then it says, Lord help me to wait. Bring me honourably to my grave.

Amen.